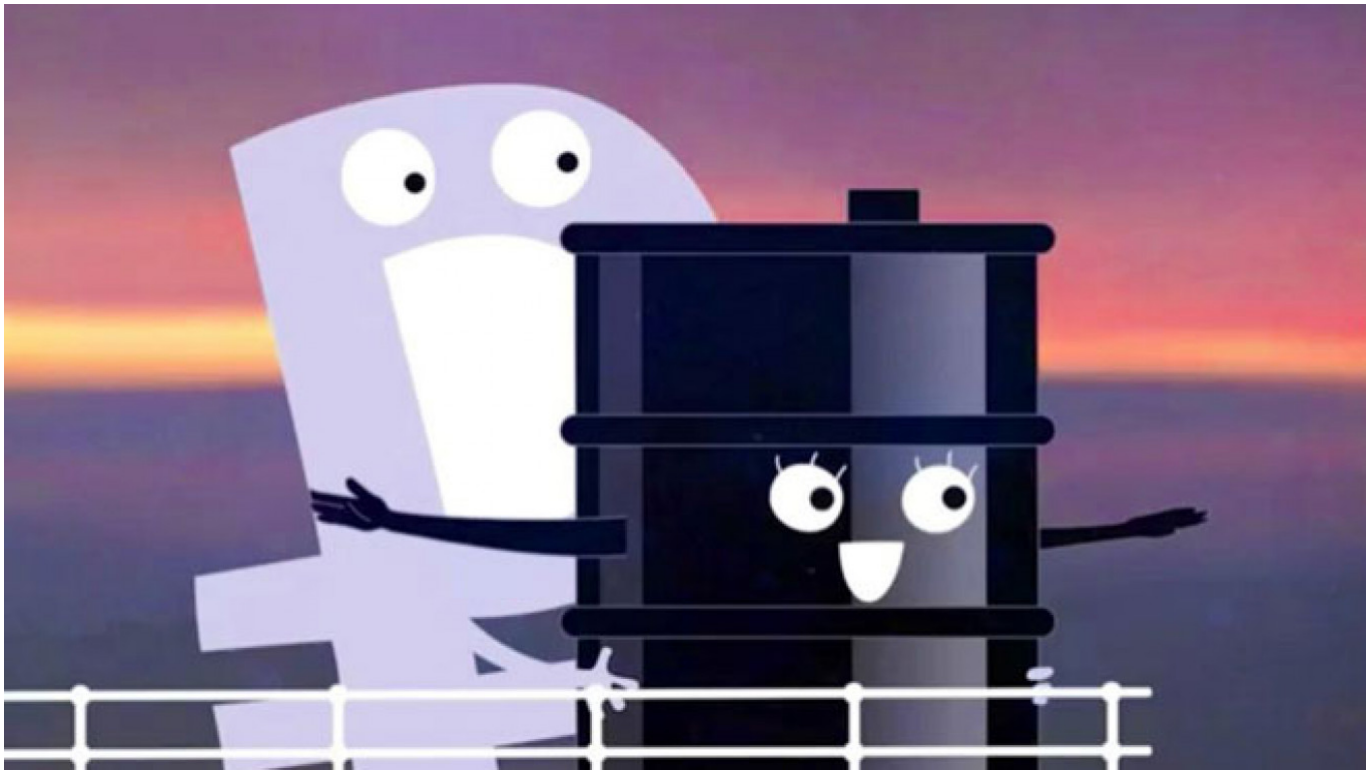
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Russian Social Media Reacts to Ruble Crisis With 'Arctic Fox Day'

By Alexey Eremenko

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In one take on the crisis, the ruble embraces an oil barrel, a la “Titanic.”

A leading Russian economist likened the public reaction to the falling ruble to the "calm of someone facing suicide." But on the Internet, it looked more like the "Day of Dark Humor."

Or make that "Arctic Fox Day": The Russian name ("pesets") for the cuddly canid sounds almost like an unutterably rude word for "f-ck up."

Arctic foxes thus became the illustration of choice for social media posts on "Black Tuesday," including by popular bloggers Ilya "Zyalt" Varlamov, and the satyrical Twitter account KermlinRussia.

"Arctic fox is to blame!" tweeted ex-tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in a reference to the Central Bank hiking its key interest rate to 17 percent early Tuesday morning in an unsuccessful bid to stop the ruble from falling — by making loans for businesses harder

to come by.

The Twitter account @life_in_russia was steadily gathering popularity. The account, created in 2013, has a sole Tweet in Russian, reposted daily: "Things are much worse than yesterday."

The ruble's journey was also charted — literally — by programmer Benjamin Tambourine, who applied the currency's travel against the world map using the U.S. dollar rate for latitude and euro rate for longitude.

Since starting off a year ago near Baghdad, the intrepid monetary traveler has crossed Iran and Kazakhstan, reaching the shores of Ob River in western Siberia. It was still 6 rubles south of the Arctic Circle as of this writing.

Other, sadder journeys were also charted: Popular designer Yegor Zhgun reimagined the love affair between the ruble and the oil barrel as the story of "Titanic," with the barrel depicting Kate Winslet and the cartoonish ruble playing both the ill-fated Leonardo DiCaprio and the sinking ship.

The YouTube video ends with The Beatles' lyrics, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me when I'm 64?" — a play on the ruble's rate, which surged from 32 in January to 70-plus on Tuesday.

Conspiracy theories — predictably — ran rife. Among the haze of the usual CIA and mason plots, the intriguing "banana theory" emerged, calling attention to the fact that the ruble price for bananas has not changed — not during the crisis, not over the past decade.

"The ruble rate may be pegged to the banana," surmised Twitter user @leprasorium, which promulgated the theory.

While some scouted for scapegoats, others negotiated with supernatural powers: Philosopher Maxim Goryunov — an occasional columnist for The Moscow Times — posted a satyrical account of rural Russians punishing a Christian icon in a bid to force the supposedly sacral item to affect the ruble rate.

Some commentators actually asked Goryunov whether the (made-up, and by now deleted) story was true.

Not everyone thought the ordeal funny: "Now think about parents raising money for overseas treatment for their ill children — in rubles," wrote blogger Mitya Aleshkovsky.

But others saw new opportunities rising from the ashes of the fallen ruble: "Hey bros, fines for an unsanctioned rally are now just 100 euros [$125]," tweeted rights activist Pavel Chikov.

Hefty fines once amounting to $600 (in rubles) for individuals were among the top measures to curb protest activity imposed by the Kremlin in the 2010s. But it looks like those have devaluated alongside everything else.

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