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Weekly Wrap: Yachts, Rockets and Jessica Rabbit

By Unfair Observer

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The news of the week was, of course, President Vladimir Putin's 63rd birthday. The event was celebrated with an ice hockey game — Putin scored seven goals — and a missile strike on Syria by Russian warships in the Caspian Sea. The latter was likely a gift for the landlocked flotilla, residing in one of the unlikeliest places for a naval battle and, indeed, far away from any war zone in the world.

The whole Syrian operation, in fact, looks like a birthday gift for Putin, especially if you consider the enthusiasm with which the Russian military reports the wholesale destruction of militants and their equipment. No better birthday gift than a dead terrorist.

Of course, a joke dating back to the Chechen wars in the 1990s mentioned a Russian general who, upon reading a draft press communique about 500 slain militants, called his press person and told him, "Dude, make that 1,000. No mercy for the bastards!" But it's only a joke. We know the Defense Ministry is telling us the whole truth and it doesn't matter that no military observers outside the country believe it when it says it is only targeting the Islamic

State.

The best war-related item of the week, however, came from the state-run Rossia-24 television channel, which showed a slim weatherwoman resembling Jessica Rabbit — including the iconic red dress — reporting with aloof sexuality that the weather in Syria is just perfect for bomb strikes.

A mix of sex and bombs — it's like this is a multiplayer online game for adolescents and not the conflict of the decade.

Banning Fun at Weddings

Meanwhile in Chechnya, authorities in the capital Grozny banned fun at weddings. The list of offenses that will bring the police on you and your beloved includes things like shooting in the air (makes sense) and being drunk (well ...), but also starting to dance before your elders do, inviting a girl to dance, dressing up in "clothes not fitting the Chechen mentality" and — wait for it — cutting the cake.

OK, so Caucasus weddings do resemble large-scale, albeit cheerful, riots, and could do with fewer firearm discharges. But seriously, cake?

But the best thing is, of course, the part about defending the national mentality. There's more in that vein in the original document, which rambles on about "protecting and promoting traditions and customs of the Chechen people."

Don't get me wrong, your uncle Unfair Observer is all for upholding ethnic identities, bar the shooting. But the thing about mentality is that you don't legislate for it. Because if you could stop culture from changing by law or decree, we would all still wear pelts and pray to Thor, Perun and Quetzalcoatl — since other foreign gods like Jesus and Allah definitely don't fit our original mentalities.

And don't even get me started on those mechanical contraptions like cars and iPhones. Definitely non-traditional — though reports say that even Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov owns several.

Give up your smartphone, Ramzan! Your forefathers did not have one.

No Comment

This week, a number of Russian officials refused to speak about a number of things. Among these was a claim that the Russian ruling establishment is rotten to the core — this from leading journalist Oleg Kashin, who was beaten into a coma in 2010.

The busted perpetrators recently named a local governor offended by Kashin as the mastermind behind the attack, but the governor was not even questioned. When an angry Kashin wrote an open letter about it, the Kremlin spokesman said there was nothing in the letter that required comment.

Meanwhile in Irkutsk, a local lawmaker withdrew her resignation request — filed after her daughter killed two while drunk driving last July. The lawmaker also offered no comment

on why exactly she sees herself as fit to continue serving the nation.

And finally, the government approved a bill to classify the rosters of real estate, yacht and private airplane ownership. You know, the rosters that produce about half of all corruption exposes in Russia. The FSB, which drafted the bill, said it was needed because the data is often used for "compromising purposes."

So essentially, the powers that be won't say anything when they are accused of gargantuan embezzlement (yachts! private jets!), condoning attempted murder or lacking the moral fiber to take responsibility for their own children.

No comment, indeed. And guards, please seize the serf who said "impunity." It's the flogging block for him.

A Rocket That Did Not Fit

And finally, at Russia's all-new spaceport Vostochny, a rocket could not fit into one of the newly built docks. The dock was just too small. A construction error. Could happen to anyone.

This is the project that blew numerous deadlines and was mired in so much officially confirmed embezzlement that there was not even the money to pay the workers. And this being the fourth spaceport in the world with the capability for manned launches, and so guaranteed close scrutiny.

Let's just try to understand it. So you're a constructor tasked with building a spaceport. You sit down to draft a game plan, ask your crew about tasks and priorities. Someone mumbles, "We need to make sure it can be used to store and launch rockets, you know." And you go, "Nah, man, don't waste time on these trivialities! Think big! And get me those fiscal documents, I need to do some reviewing."

And then these people go and join another war.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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