

Putin Thanks Russian Santa Claus for Presidency

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Vladimir Putin on Thursday thanked Father Frost — the Russian version of Santa Claus — for having helped him become president and urged the mythical figure to help carry out Moscow's plans.

Putin first became president on New Year's Eve in 1999, when Russia's first post-Soviet leader Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned and Putin — who was then prime minister — took on the role.

Father Frost, a bearded figure very similar to Santa Claus, distributes gifts to children on New Year's Eve throughout the former Soviet Union. He is assisted by his granddaughter, Snegurochka, or the Snow Maiden.

"My relationship with Father Frost has always developed in a good way," Putin said during his annual end-of-year press conference.

"I am grateful to him that I can meet with you in my capacity."

"I hope that he will not only give us gifts, but also carry out the projects of the country and of each citizen," the Russian president added.

Putin was responding to a question from a journalist based in Veliky Ustyug — a town in northwest Russia that is home to Father Frost — about a lawsuit by a person claiming Russian Santa Claus had not fulfilled his wishes for 23 years.

"I can advocate for Father Frost and remind the plaintiff that Father Frost only fulfills the wishes of boys and girls who have been good," Putin said, adding the plaintiff should "analyze his behavior."

Putin's marathon press conference with Russian and foreign journalists typically lasts for around four hours and oscillates between serious questions and pageantry, with some reporters wearing costumes and holding up signs to grab the president's attention.

On Thursday, one journalist came clad in a Snegurochka costume.

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