

Putin in a new light

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE centenary of Russia's October Revolution is only months away. The world is keen to witness how Vladimir Putin projects himself and the future of Russia on the once-in-a-century celebrative occasion. The eagerness to understand him has grown in recent times because of his strong-

handed role in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The inquisitiveness about him is all the more pronounced as the controversy over Trump-Putin relations refuses to die down.

"There were, in fact, two revolutions in Russia 100 years ago," reminds Robert Service, a professor of Russian history at St Antony's College, Oxford University. The February Revolution which brought about the downfall of Tsar Nicholas II was never "greatly feted by the Communist administration." It was believed that Nicholas's replacement—a liberal-led provisional government by Alexander Kerensky—"brought absolutely no benefit to working people." So according to Communist dogma, only the October Revolution merited unconditional acclaim, added the eminent professor of Russian history.

Lenin was right that the provisional government under Alexander Kerensky had lost its grip on the country: "And when the Bolsheviks struck, they pushed at a door that was already ajar." Putin, the "supple political gymnast" that he is, continues to resist, so it is claimed, public calls for the closure of the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square but noticeably avoids praising Lenin.

Indeed, Putin has called on the Russians to respect the memory of Nicholas with "a halo of official esteem descending upon him." Books extol the Tsar's virtues.

In a speech the Russian president gave last year in Stavropol, he blamed Lenin for establishing a

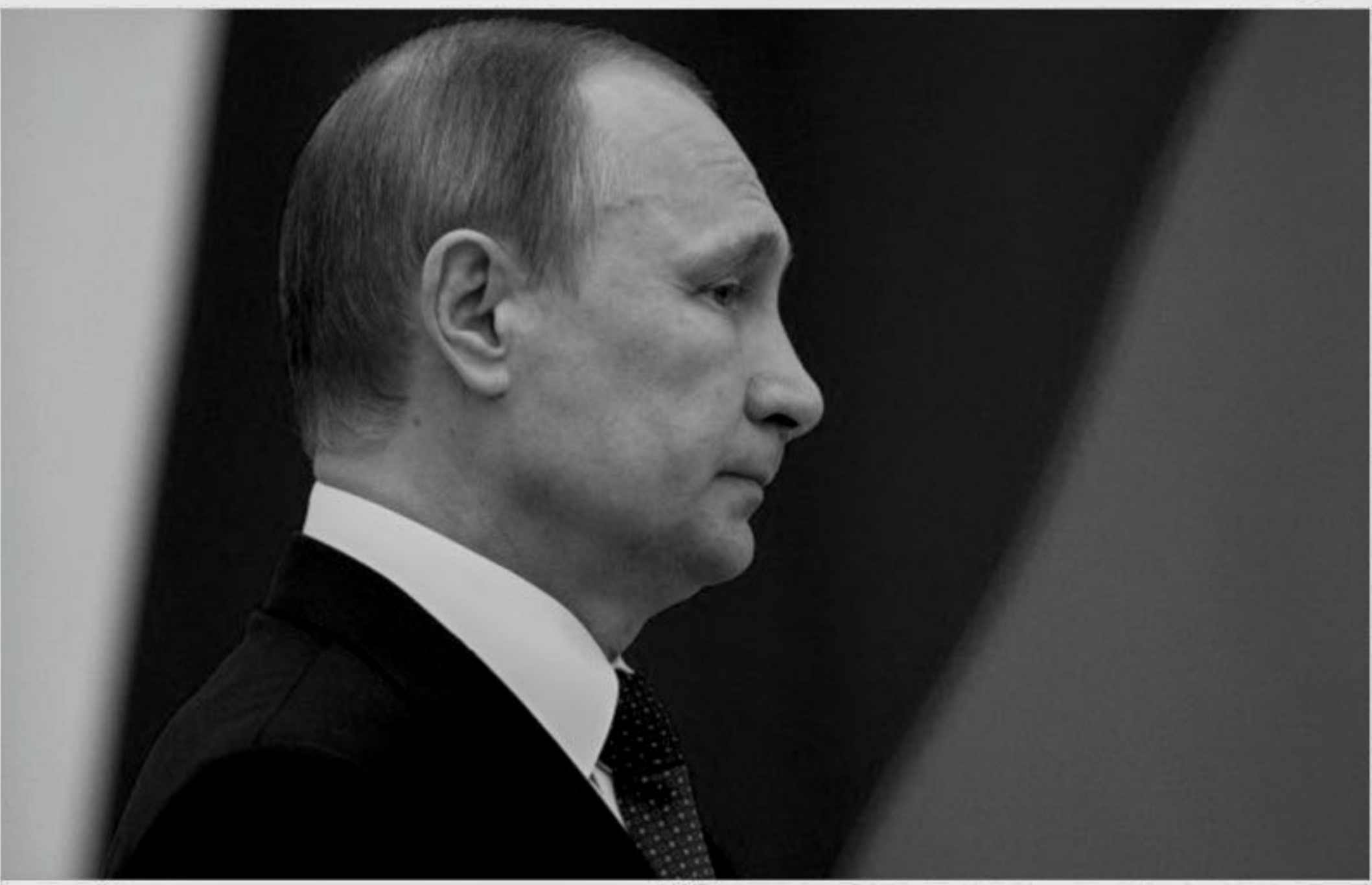


PHOTO: PAVEL GOLOVKIN/POOL/RUSSIA

Putin wants to revamp Russia's tarnished image due to the Afghan debacle.

federal state structure that made the USSR liable to disintegrate. Though nostalgic about the Soviet era, he gave no credit to Lenin for having founded the USSR. Actually, political pundits had eulogised the Soviet constitution for granting the federating units even the right to cede which served as a cementing rather than a disintegrating factor.

Putin's emphasis is elsewhere. He has declared that the break-up of the USSR was "the greatest geo-political catastrophe of the 20th century."

The official ideology applauded "Russia's greatness as an international power and declared that Russians do well when they live in peace with one another." See the best in tsarist and Soviet Russia and appreciate the continuities in the country's traditions—this seems to be the clarion call of the Russian president.

He is a stickler for internal peace which is

considered key to protection of wealth amassed by the ruling class under capitalism. With an inherent stake in stability, he has been ruling the country since 2000—"If his ideology fails to quieten people, he is quick to coerce them."

Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, on December 13, 2016 had announced that he would run for the presidency in 2018. Subsequently found guilty at a retrial in an embezzlement case, he was given a five-year suspended prison sentence. This has thrown his proposed candidature in doubt.

The death of Alexander Litvinenko, a former officer with the Federal Security Service, successor of KGB, was reported in 2006, clouding the relations between London and Moscow.

Vladimir Putin took up the reins of government on the back of adversities followed by a set of

favourable circumstances. In the first category fell the throwing in the towel in Afghanistan coupled with a humiliating withdrawal of forces from the country. The break-up of Soviet Union ensured the end of the country's superpower status. The Russian Federation lost its global prestige while enduring a massive economic depression throughout the 1990s.

Predictably, what might be going through Putin's mind is restoring Russia's image from the dishonour it suffered through the Afghan debacle. Thus, in atonement for failure in Afghanistan, Russia is acting tough in the Middle East. Putin believes that the US has barged into countries like Iraq and Libya "which had once been under the Soviet influence."

So he seized the opportunity of ramping up the pro-Assad military system. This happened when Obama and Cameron had made it clear that they were not putting boots on the Syrian ground. By propping up Bashar al-Assad Putin has flagged Russia's "re-emergence as a regional power."

Significantly, on taking over power in 2000, the Russian president was greatly helped by an upturn in the world market price of petro-chemical products. The country's budget got healthier with revenues from oil and gas exports as Moscow's foreign debt burden was considerably lightened.

In this context, Putin could revamp the country's armed forces and modernise its nuclear weapons. In an attempt to fill in the diplomatic vacuum left since Obama's departure he managed to put together a peace conference with Turkey and Iran in the Kazakh capital of Astana. He is set to project Russia as a rising power.

Trump has added an extra USD 54 billion to an already oversized US military budget. Russia and China too have increased their military expenditures. Is the world teetering at the edge of a resumption of Cold War and arms race?

The writer is a commentator on current affairs and former Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

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Is the judiciary in peril?

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

DELHI University teacher GN Saibaba has been sentenced to life imprisonment for his links with Maoists. With due respect to the court, I beg to differ with the punishment. Maoists

constitutions which guaranteed free speech in every way, but a person like Adolf Hitler used the same constitution to found the worst of rules. It took a full-fledged war to oust him and his philosophy.

Even now Germany takes stringent steps to see to it that the ghost of Nazism does not surface. The swastika has been found scribbled on the walls of Berlin. It seems that some Germans are still dreaming about ruling the entire Europe. Economically, the country does dominate but politically it has not yet learnt to take its turn.

It is surprising that Maoism has very little following although it is the same kind of philosophy which does not entertain another point of view. Nationalism in Germany is so deep that it does not allow any other thinking which may be embracing other parts of Europe. The country has allowed some immigrants who have become a great burden on Greece. Berlin is now vigilant. It is not possible now to migrate to Germany even on humanitarian grounds.

New Delhi is unnecessarily worried. The idea of India counts so much with the people that there is no room for any other thought to germinate. It is probably this Indian-ness which binds people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The Maoists cannot penetrate.

Democracy is more than a faith with the people. It was seen how the popular leader Indira Gandhi was swept off her feet soon after lifting of the emergency in 1977. She too was defeated at the polls. The voters did not like the authoritarian rule and revolted against it when they got the opportunity.

The ruling BJP, which was then Jan Sangh, also suffered and its followers were put behind bars. Even then Delhi Mayor Hansraj Gupta was not spared. Members of the Jan Sangh and the Gandhites shared the same cell. The Janata Party was born in the jail itself. The credit, however, goes to Raj Narain, a socialist, who challenged Ms Gandhi for her poll malpractices. The Allahabad

High Court debarred her from occupying any elected post for six years. She, however, imposed the emergency but that is a different story.

The DU teacher and four others who were sentenced for life did not commit any heinous crime to deserve the punishment. Even otherwise, I believe that the Maoists should have a say and express their viewpoint as citizens of this country. It should be left to them to choose or reject their philosophy but the criterion should be that they do not incite violence.

The experience has been that once you make leeway in one case the demand would be that the same attitude should be exhibited in other cases. The precedent will be quoted and the court would have to decide whether the case was similar or any different.

Fortunately, the victims would most likely appeal in higher courts and it all will depend on what the verdict of the higher judiciary is going to be.

Ultimately, it would come to what Maoism means. In a country where the constitution guarantees free speech and expression, the views of a particular philosophy cannot be banned. But there should be no exhortation to violence. The manner in which the killings have taken place in Bastar indicates that the Maoists have no respect for life and would use any method to ensure that their idea is not opposed.

The court should not be influenced by what the Maoists preach or not because I find that verdicts are becoming dependent on the philosophy that the ruling party espouses. It is healthy to see that appointment of judges is now by the collegium of senior Supreme Court judges. Yet my experience says that the chief justice comes to be influenced by those in power. This was not the case till recently. The judges were appointed by the government and they delivered some of the best of verdicts. It is no use recalling time but taking necessary steps to create and return the same atmosphere of independence to the court.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

DECLASSIFIED CIA FILES, 1971 Bangabandhu told journalists, off the record, that 7th March speech would be equivalent to announcement of independence

The CIA recently made available online several thousand documents on Bangladesh's pre- and post-independence events. Today, The Daily Star publishes a declassified document which hints that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had intended his 7th March speech to be an announcement of independence. The document is printed below, as released by the CIA. One part of a sentence was redacted by the agency before declassification.

Central Intelligence Agency
Directorate of Intelligence
4 March 1971
INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM
PAKISTAN
(Situation as of 1200 EST)

- Shiek[h] Mujibur Rahman's call, during a mammoth rally in Dacca yesterday, for a peaceful, disciplined "struggle" helped to reduce tension in the city on the night of 3-4 March. Mujib, however, also called on his followers to refuse to pay taxes to a non-representative government and asked them to disrupt communications in the city. In line with the latter, he urged the Bengalis to build barricades and dig ditches across the roads to impede the movement of troops.
- In an interview last night with several foreign correspondents, Mujib was evasive about his plans but eventually admitted "off the record" that at the rally he has scheduled for 7 March he will announce the equivalent of independence for East Pakistan. This will involve the writing of separate constitutions by East and West Pakistan with the subsequent discussions of the form of linkage that might be possible. The US Consul General in Dacca notes that a two constitution-two prime minister solution had previously been suggested for the two wings of Pakistan and that Z. A. Bhutto, leading West Pakistan politician, reportedly had expressed his agreement with it.
- Mujib in his interview claimed the West Pakistanis had been secretly reinforcing their armed forces in the East wing. A US

official reported seeing the arrival of PAF C-130 at Dacca late on 3 March. The US Embassy in Ceylon reports a local newspaper carried pictures in its 3 March edition of two PAF C-130s at the International Airport in Colombo. (All Pakistani air-craft, both civilian and military, are prohibited from crossing over India due to the recent plane hi-jacking crisis, and they have been flying between West and East Pakistan via Colombo.) Meanwhile, [redacted] a ship-load of West Pakistani troops is due to arrive at the East Pakistani port of Chittagong soon.

4. Across the border in Calcutta, the citizens of West Bengal are watching the activities of their fellow Bengalis in East Pakistan with great interest. Calcutta newspapers are giving top play to Pakistani developments and sympathy is being expressed for the East Pakistanis. Most citizens of West Bengal recognize that the creation of a "Greater Bengal" would be difficult, but there is widespread belief that Pakistan will split and near unanimous hope that present trade and communication barriers between East Pakistan and West Bengal can be eliminated.

5. The US Consul General in Dacca foresees no real danger for the American community in East Pakistan unless sustained fighting develops between the Bengalis and the army, and then only if the army loses control resulting in a complete breakdown in law and order. The Consul General estimates that if evacuation of US nationals became necessary, some 900 would avail themselves of the opportunity.

QUOTABLE Quote

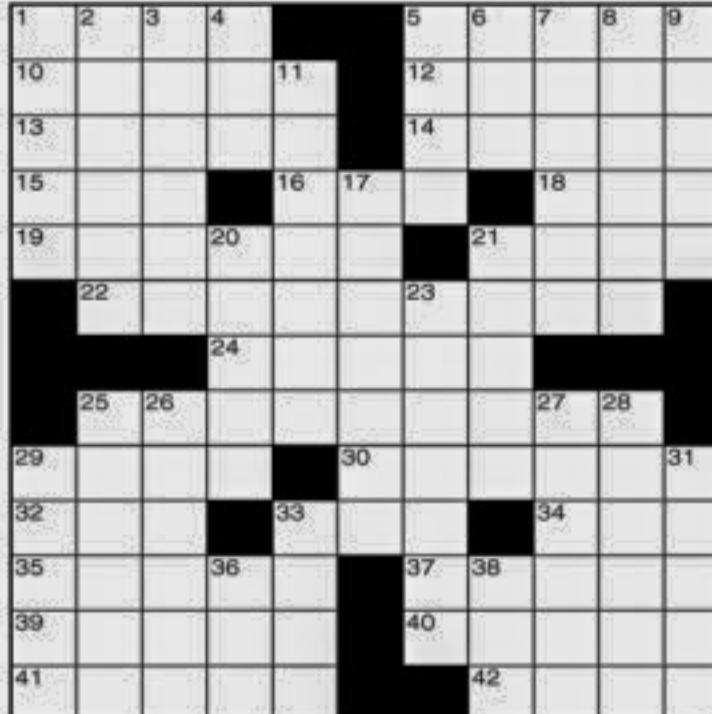


FRANK MURPHY
POLITICIAN AND JURIST FROM MICHIGAN

Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion all have a double aspect - freedom of thought and freedom of action.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Ship-to-ship call
 - 5 Ticket category
 - 10 Scooter's kin
 - 12 Baseball's Derek
 - 13 Spoils
 - 14 Superior to
 - 15 Mess up
 - 16 Disallow
 - 18 Diner treat
 - 19 Wicker material
 - 21 Some mines
 - 22 Rough-housing
 - 24 Pairs of hearts
 - 25 Easy-maintenance hair-dos
 - 29 Singer Snow
 - 30 Non-studio movies
- DOWN**
- 1 Yellow color
 - 2 "Way to go!"
 - 3 Portugal's second-largest city
 - 4 Besides
 - 5 Trojan War hero
 - 6 Ball girl
 - 7 Perfect place
 - 8 Humor
 - 9 Grove makeup
 - 11 Bloodline
 - 17 Resistance to change
 - 20 Downer, slangily
 - 21 Kilt pattern
 - 23 Concert star
 - 25 Chatty bird
 - 26 Ready to come home
 - 27 Lusty drive
 - 28 Ready for mailing
 - 29 Court sport
 - 31 Party dip
 - 33 Citi Field team
 - 36 Bob Cratchit's son
 - 38 Snap



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C A M P S I V O R Y I M O U T
T E N O R P A N S Y
I N S U T E N S I L
N U T P A D T E E
G E E S D U P E S
R U T P E R
S T E A M A M O R
M E R T O E O R O
E R U P T E D V I A
D E C A L S T I E S
A N K L E E V E N T
L A S E R L A S T S

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES



by Kirkman & Scott

