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PUTIN: VOTE FOR ME OR FACE DISINTEGRATION

November 29, 2007 The London Daily Telegraph reported: "President Vladimir Putin has warned Russians to vote for him in parliamentary elections this weekend or face the country's "disintegration". He also appeared to confirm that he would step down next year, in a televised address to the nation ahead of the elections on Sunday.

Urging voters to back his United Russia party, Mr Putin warned that the liberal opposition which governed Russia after the 1991 Soviet collapse wanted to "return to a time of humiliation, dependency and disintegration."

"We should not allow back into power the people who... want to change and muddle Russia's development plans," he said.

Mr Putin, 55, warned against the "dangerous illusion" of believing his legacy was safe. United Russia is forecast to win easily two thirds of seats in the State Duma. The tiny liberal parties are not expected to win a single seat and complain they are victims of heavy handed Kremlin tactics."...

But Garry Kasparov, the chess legend turned bitter Putin opponent, said this morning that Russia risked becoming a dictatorship, as he left jail after serving a five-day sentence for organising an illegal opposition protest.

Police arrested Kasparov last weekend after he tried to protest outside the central election commission headquarters. Speaking to reporters outside his home after he was released, Kasparov said his trial was a "kangaroo court". He added: "I hope people around the world can see what happens to opposition activists in Russia ... This regime is entering a dangerous phase of becoming a dictatorship."

Although as president he cannot actually take a Duma seat, Mr Putin heads the electoral list of United Russia, which is presenting the parliamentary election as a referendum on the ex-KGB officer's highly popular rule.

Today's television address had been closely watched for any sign of Mr Putin's plans after he completes his second term next year and is required to step down. The only hint he gave was to say that "the result of the parliamentary elections will, without a doubt, set the tone for the elections for a new president."

That appeared to confirm that Mr Putin will not seek to override a constitutional ban on seeking a third consecutive term in a March 2 presidential vote. However, Mr Putin has repeatedly said he intends to retain a major role, prompting speculation that he might hang on to power, or at least retain influence through a handpicked successor."..."

OLMERT TO HAARETZ: TWO-STATE SOLUTION, OR ISRAEL IS DONE FOR

November 29, 2007 Haaretz reported: "'If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished," Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Haaretz Wednesday, the day the Annapolis conference ended in an agreement to try to reach a Mideast peace settlement by the end of 2008.

"The Jewish organizations, which were our power base in America, will be the first to come out against us," Olmert said, "because they will say they cannot support a state that does not support democracy and equal voting rights for all its residents."

Olmert pointed out that he had said similar things in an interview he gave four years ago, when he was deputy prime minister under Ariel Sharon, in which he revealed for the first time his proposal for a withdrawal from most of the occupied territories.

"Since then, I have systematically repeated those positions," he said, adding that people "will say I'm having problems and that's why I'm trying to do [a peace process], but the facts must be dealt with justly."..."

JERUSALEM ISSUE LOOMS LARGE AT ANNAPOLIS PEACE CONFERENCE

November 26, 2007 The Voice of America reported: "Israeli and Palestinian leaders and delegates from around the world are gathering for this week's Middle East peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland. One of the most difficult issues on the agenda is the status of Jerusalem, a city that is holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Robert Berger reports from the VOA bureau in Jerusalem.

Israeli right-wing activists have launched the "One Jerusalem" campaign, demanding that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will not make concessions on the Holy City at this week's peace conference in the United States. Activists are passing out half a million gold ribbons at intersections, urging Israelis to tie them to their cars in solidarity with a united Jerusalem.

One activist, Baruch Segal, told VOA that negotiating for Jerusalem is a catastrophic mistake. "It breaks my heart to see what the government is doing, that they think this can bring peace by dividing up Jerusalem," said Segal. "It is a disaster."

Israel captured East Jerusalem, including the sacred Old City, from Jordan during the Six Day War in 1967. Since then, it has been an Israeli slogan that Jerusalem would remain the united capital of the State of Israel forever.

But in a major policy shift, Prime Minister Olmert has said that he is prepared to hand over many of the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem to Palestinian control.

Polls show that a majority of Israeli Jews oppose the plan, but less predictably, it has also aroused mixed feelings among Arab residents of Jerusalem.

An Arab shopkeeper, who identified himself as Marwan, prefers to remain under Israeli rule. He says the Palestinian Authority has not established a stable government since it began to rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1994.

"And everything went downhill after this," said Marwan. "You ask me, 'You want to live under Palestinian government?' I say, 'There is no Pal government yet.'..."

VENEZUELAN PROTEST CHAVEZ'S REFERENDUM

November 29, 2007 The Associated Press reported: "Tens of thousands of people flooded the streets of the capital Thursday to oppose a referendum that would eliminate term limits for President Hugo Chavez and help him establish a socialist state in Venezuela.

Blowing whistles, waving placards and shouting "Not like this!" the marchers carried Venezuelan flags and dressed in blue—the chosen color of the opposition—as they streamed along Bolivar Avenue.

"This is a movement by those of us who oppose a change to this country's way of life, because what (the referendum) aims to do is impose totalitarianism," said former lawmaker Elias Matta. "There can't be a communist Venezuela, and that's why our society is reacting this way."

The rally marked the close of the opposition's campaign against the proposed constitutional changes, which will be submitted to a vote Sunday. Chavez plans to lead rallies in favor of the reforms Friday.

Venezuelans will vote on 69 proposed changes to nation's 1999 constitution that would, among other things, eliminate presidential term limits, create forms of communal property and give greater power to the presidency."..."

ISRAELI SAYS ELUSIVE BIBLICAL WALL FOUND

November 29, 2007 My Way News reported: "A biblical wall that has eluded archaeologists for years has finally been found, according to an Israeli scholar. A team of archaeologists in Jerusalem has uncovered what they believe to be part of a wall mentioned in the Bible's Book of Nehemiah.

The discovery, made in Jerusalem's ancient City of David, came as a result of a rescue attempt on a tower which was in danger of collapse, said Eilat Mazar, head of the Institute of Archaeology at the Shalem Center, a Jerusalem-based research and educational institute, and leader of the dig.

Artifacts including pottery shards and arrowheads found under the tower suggested that both the tower and the nearby wall are from the 5th century B.C., the time of Nehemiah, according to Mazar. Scholars previously thought the wall dated to the Hasmonean period (142-37 B.C.). The findings suggest that the wall is actually part of the same city wall the Bible says Nehemiah rebuilt, Mazar said. The Book of Nehemiah (chapters 3-6) gives a detailed description of construction of the walls, destroyed earlier by the Babylonians.

"We were amazed," she said, noting that the discovery was made at a time when many scholars argued that the wall did not exist. "This was a great surprise. It was something we didn't plan," Mazar said. However, another scholar doubted whether the wall was biblical.

The first phase of the dig, completed in 2005, uncovered what Mazar believes to be the remains of King David's palace, built by King Hiram of Tyre and also mentioned in the Bible."..."

SLOVAK POLICE SAY 'DIRTY BOMB' URANIUM SEIZED

November 30, 2007 Agence-France Presse reported: "Hungarian and Slovak police seized enriched uranium that could be used in a "dirty bomb" when they arrested three traffickers in a joint operation, officials said Thursday.

"According to preliminary information, the material could have been used to make a so-called dirty bomb," Slovak deputy police president Michal Kopcik told journalists in Bratislava. The traffickers wanted 1.6 million dollars for the 481.4 grammes of material, Kopcik said. It contained uranium-235, the type used in nuclear reactors and nuclear warheads, and the naturally occurring uranium-238.

"The radioactive uranium was even more dangerous because it was in powder form," Kopcik explained. The arrests followed an international operation lasting several months.

Two suspects were detained on Wednesday on the Slovakian side of the border and one in Hungary, the police chief said. One was a 40-year-old Ukrainian, another a 49-year-old Hungarian living in Ukraine and the third a 51-year-old Hungarian.

Police said the uranium had come from the former Soviet Union but did not give further details. The radioactive material was due to be sold for 3,500 dollars a gramme, he added, giving a total price of about 1.6 million dollars (one million euros)."..."

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