

1522

Suleiman the Magnificent accepts surrender of the surviving Knights of Rhodes, who are allowed to evacuate. They eventually settle in Malta and become known as the Knights of Malta



1803

French flag lowered in New Orleans to mark the formal transfer of the Louisiana Purchase from France to USA, purchased for \$15M

1812

"Grimm's Fairy Tales" or "Children's and Household Tales" by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm is first published

1917

Soviet state security force and forerunner to the KGB, the Cheka forms, under Felix Dzerzhinsky after decree by Vladimir Lenin

Putin claims upper hand

Russian leader says Kyiv and Western backers must move first on peace talks

● Putin addresses annual press conference

● Claims battlefield momentum in Ukraine

● Threatens further territorial seizures

AFP | Moscow

Russia's Vladimir Putin yesterday said the ball was in the court of the West and Kyiv in talks to end the war in Ukraine, while hailing Moscow's recent battlefield gains and threatening more.

Speaking during his annual end-of-year news conference -- a staple of his 25-year rule -- Putin told Russians that Moscow was intent on pressing on in Ukraine, striking a confident tone.

The 73-year-old repeatedly says that Moscow will seize the rest of Ukrainian land he has proclaimed as Russian by force if talks fail.

Putin said yesterday he did not feel personally responsible for the tens of thousands of people killed since Moscow launched its offensive, which has become Europe's worst conflict since World War II.

"We did not start this war," he said, repeating a frequent narrative pushed by Moscow throughout the conflict.

"We do not consider ourselves responsible for the loss of life."

Putin ordered the all-out assault in Ukraine in February 2022, sending troops and tanks towards Kyiv.

He also denied dragging out settlement talks and turning down proposals -- claiming Moscow had agreed to "some compromises" -- without elaborating.

"The ball is now fully and completely on the side of our Western opponents... first of all the head of the Kyiv regime and their European sponsors," Putin said.

The United States, Ukraine and Europeans have been refining a proposal first put forward by Washington last month that many saw as heeding most of



Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives to hold his annual end-of-year press conference



Our troops are advancing along the entire line of contact... the enemy is retreating in all directions

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Moscow's core demands for how the conflict should end.

'Our troops advancing'

Putin said that Russia's recent advances in Ukraine should force Kyiv to agree to a deal -- that original version of which included Ukraine ceding land to Moscow.

Russia and Washington are also pushing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to hold a presidential election, with Putin saying Russia could halt long-range strikes on voting day.

Listing a string of cities and towns in eastern Ukraine now eyed by the Russian army, the Kremlin chief said he was certain Moscow would soon capture more settlements.

"Our troops are advancing along the entire line of contact," Putin said.

"I'm sure that before the end

of this year we will still witness new success," he added.

The Russian army made its biggest advance in Ukraine in a year in November, AFP analysis of data from the US-based Institute for the Study of War showed.

Speaking at the same time from an event in Cairo, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov condemned a European proposal to send a multinational force to police any potential peace deal in Ukraine as a "brazen" threat to Russia.

And Putin also warned of "severe" consequences if the EU used Russia's frozen assets to fund Ukraine's recovery and defence, after Brussels failed to approve a plan to tap the funds.

In another message to the West, Putin said that Russia would not attack other countries -- as long as it was treated "with respect" -- without clarifying what he meant.

As he spoke, Zelensky said on a visit to Warsaw that Russia would come for Poland if Ukraine fell.

Downplays economy woes

The four-and-a-half-hour long televised event -- a mix of questions from the press and call-ins from Russia's 12 time zones -- is

a fixture of the Russian political calendar, generating frenzied media coverage in the weeks leading up to it.

The Kremlin said almost three million people had sent questions to Putin and security was heavy in Moscow during the event.

Putin mused on everything from geopolitics to regional de-

Russian journalist proposes to girlfriend during Putin's TV marathon

Under the glittering lights of the Eiffel Tower, during a romantic walk on a tropical beach, or nestled in a quiet corner of your favourite restaurant? Planning the perfect proposal is a struggle familiar to would-be newlyweds the world over.

Halfway through Vladimir Putin's end-of-year press conference -- televised across Russia and coming after the Russian leader threatened to level Ukrainian cities and not back down in his nearly four-year military offensive in the country -- is not high on many lovers' list.

For regional journalist Kirill Bazhanov, it was just the mo-

YOU
KNOW WHAT

Nearly three million questions were submitted by citizens ahead of Putin's tightly controlled televised event, which was broadcast live across Russia's 12 time zones under heavy security in central Moscow

velopment issues to his views on love and family life, at times pledging to intervene to fix the problems of citizens caught up in local bureaucracy.

He downplayed the economic costs of the war for Moscow, even as the Central Bank trimmed interest rates amid slowing growth.

Russia has lived under massive Western sanctions for almost four years, while ramped up military spending has strained the public finances and caused prices to surge.

Dressed in a red bow tie and holding a poster reading "I want to get married", Bazhanov caught the eye of the longtime ruler and got his chance.

"I know that my girlfriend is watching the press conference now. Olechka, marry me!" he said, drawing applause from the audience of mostly pro-government regional journalists.

Putin uses his hours-long TV marathon both as a forum for fiery foreign policy statements and to offer up all sorts of advice on love and family matters, recite poetry or promise to fix potholes.



TOP
4

TWEETS

01



I welcome the election by the General Assembly of @BarhamSalih of Iraq, as the next @UN High Commissioner for @Refugees. My utmost gratitude to @FilippoGrandi for his leadership & tireless efforts in protecting refugees, displaced persons & stateless people.

@antonioquerque

02



Congratulations to @BarhamSalih on being elected High Commissioner for Refugees. All of us at UNICEF are looking forward to continuing the strong partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR to protect the rights of children and families who have been forced to flee.

@unicefchief

03



We committed, we delivered. The decisions taken by European leaders are a crucial contribution to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. Because the only way to bring Russia to the negotiation table is to strengthen Ukraine.

@eucopresident

04



We reserve our right to use the cash balances from Russian assets immobilised in the EU to finance the loan. This is the solution we found together. And financing Ukraine beyond 2027 will be part of the next long-term EU budget discussion.

@vonderleyen

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

Bangladesh protesters demand arrest of student leader's killers

AFP | Dhaka

Protesters rallied across Bangladesh yesterday for a second straight day calling for the arrest of the gunman who shot and killed a key figure in last year's pro-democracy uprising.

As news spread that 32-year-old student leader Sharif Osman Hadi died in hospital in Singapore on Thursday, crowds took to the streets in an outpouring of mourning and anger.

Several buildings were vandalised, including the offices of media outlets.

Hadi was shot by masked gun-



An aerial view shows protesters at Shahbagh intersection in Dhaka

men while leaving a mosque in the capital Dhaka last week. He

was initially wounded and flown to Singapore for treatment, but eventually succumbed to his wounds.

In Dhaka yesterday, protester Sajid Al Adeeb said that "people have gathered here demanding the swift arrest of those who killed Hadi."

"I urge the government to take immediate and appropriate steps to arrest those responsible," the protester added.

"Above all, I want Hadi's ideals to live on."

Al Adeeb was among thousands of protesters, some carrying national flags and placards, chanting slogans and demanding the capture of those behind the

killing of Hadi, who was due to run in elections planned for next year.

Protests were also held in the cities of Gazipur, Sylhet and Chattogram yesterday.

Late Thursday, people set fire to several buildings in Dhaka including the offices of leading newspapers Prothom Alo and the Daily Star.

Staff trapped in the Daily Star newsroom said the building filled with smoke.

"I can't breathe anymore... You are killing me," reporter Zyma Islam wrote on Facebook, before firefighters managed to bring the blaze under control and rescue the employees.