Conspiracy

theories have

long circulated

suggesting that

Putin had died

and been

replaced by

a lookalike

# Putin reveals plan to use body double

AFP | Moscow

ussian President Vladimir Putin yester-day revealed there was a secret plan to use a double to make public appearances for him, while insisting he vetoed it -- and that he is the real

Putin's comments showed that a conspiracy theory widespread on the internet that the Russian strongman has been impersonated over the years or even replaced by a lookalike is not entirely without basis.

TASS state news agency showed Putin a list of popular Russian-language Internet searches including "Putin double proof".

"Are you real?" the interviewer asked.

"Yes," said Putin. He said he has never had a double but when asked if the idea had ever been discussed, he confirmed it had.

"I refused to have doubles," Putin said. "It was during the hardest times of the fight against ter- views with Putin to mark 20

Putin as prime minister and then president oversaw the second war against separatists in Chechnya from 1999 to 2000.

After Russian armed forces claimed victory, Islamist insurgent attacks became frequent ances," Putin confirmed. in the North Caucasus

> ers targeted Russia's main cities. "Was that in the early 2000s?" viewer Andrei viet Vandenko, who is doing a series of inter-

while suicide bomb-

years since he became presi-

"Yes," said Putin.

"The double would go where things were dodgy?" asked Vandenko.

"Well yes, go, put in appear-

These centred on the 67-yearold's apparent lack of signs of ageing, the disappearance of bags under his eyes and his seemingly worsening knowledge of German, which he asked inter-learned when working as a Soagent in East Germany. In 2015, Putin dis-

appeared from public view for 10 days, unleashing a frenzy of speculation that he had once again become a father, been deposed in a palace coup, fallen ill, had cosmetic surgery or even

> died. "It's boring without gossip," Putin said after reappearing.

## Bullied Australian boy to donate \$475,000 to charity



The video of Quaden crying has been viewed millions of times online (Courtesy of BBC)

Sydney

of dollars in donations to was quoted as saying. charity rather than a trip to Disneyland.

Quaden Bayles showed him has been bullied. How many crying and repeatedly saying suicides, black or white, in our he wanted to die after being society have happened due to bullied at school, sparking an bullying." outpouring of support from around the world.

lions of times and prompted the money should be spent on, US comedian Brad Williams So as much as we want to go to to start a GoFundMe page Disneyland, I think our comthat eventually raised almost munity would far off benefit US\$475,000.

Although the funds were meant to send Bayles and his Jackman and NBA player Enes mum to Disneyland, his aunt Kanter were among the huntold Australia's NITV News dreds of thousands posting

YOU

Over the last quar-

ter-century, Arctic ice

levels by the end of sum-

mer have fallen by 40

percent, said Sokolov.

He predicted that polar

for charities instead.

'What kid wouldn't want to n Australian boy with go to Disneyland, especially if Adwarfism whose dis- you have lived Quaden's life. tress from bullying became To escape to anywhere that is a viral video will donate funthat doesn't remind him of hundreds-of-thousands his day to day challenges," she

"But my sister said 'vou know what, let's get back to The clip of nine-year-old the real issue'. This little fella

"We want the money to go to community organisations that The video was watched mil-really need it. They know what from that."

Australian actor Hugh that the money would be used support for Bayles.

## Earth captures new 'mini moon'

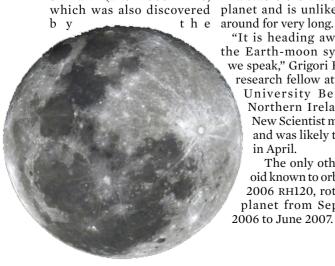
Washington

Earth has acquired a sector Earth's orbit three years ago, he said. the size of a car, according to astronomers wno spotted the object circling our planet.

meters (6-11 feet) in diameter teroids, in an announcement -- was observed by researchers Kacper Wierzchos and Teddy ficial object has been found," Pruyne at the NASA-funded Catalina Sky Survey in Arizona on the night of February 15.

"BIG NEWS. Earth has a new temporarily captured object/Possible mini-moon called 2020 CD3," likely to be a C-type asteroid, Wierzchos tweeted on Wednesday.

The astronomer said it was a "big deal" as "this is just the second asteroid known to orbit Earth (after 2006 RH120,



Catalina Sky Survey)."

Its route suggests it entered

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory's Minor Planet Center, which collects The mass -- roughly 1.9-3.5 data on minor planets and assaid "no link to a known artiimplying it was likely an asteroid captured by Earth's gravity.

"Orbit integrations indicate that this object is temporarily bound to the Earth."

Tech entrepreneur Elon Musk said the car-sized object was not the Telsa Roadster he launched into space in 2018, which is now orbiting the Sun.

"It's not mine," he tweeted. Earth's new neighbour is not in a stable orbit around the planet and is unlikely to be

"It is heading away from the Earth-moon system as we speak," Grigori Fedorets, research fellow at Queen's University Belfast in

Northern Ireland, told New Scientist magazine, and was likely to escape in April.

The only other asteroid known to orbit Earth, 2006 RH120, rotated the planet from September 2006 to June 2007.

# Cannibalism on rise among polar bears

**¬**ases of polar bears killing and eating each other are on the rise in the Arctic as melting ice and human activity erode their habitat, a Russian scientist said Wednesday.

"Cases of cannibalism among lack of food. bolar bears are a long-established fact, but we're worried enough food and large males atthat such cases used to be found rarely while now they are recorded quite often," said polar bear expert Ilya Mordvintsev, quoted by Interfax news agency.

"We state that cannibalism in

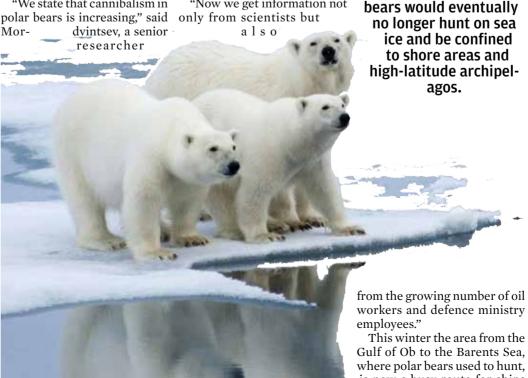
at Moscow's Severtsov Institute of Problems of Ecology and Evolution.

Speaking at a presentation in the northwestern city of Saint Petersburg, he suggested that the behaviour could be due to

In some seasons there is not tack females with cubs," he said.

The rise in cases may also be partly due to more people working in the Arctic and reporting such behaviour, he said.

"Now we get information not



carrying LNG (liquefied natural gas), Mordvintsev said.

"The Gulf of Ob was always a hunting ground for the polar bear. Now it has broken ice all year round," he said, linking this to active gas extraction on the huge Yamal peninsula that borders the Gulf of Ob, and the launch of an Arctic LNG plant.

## **Quitting normal hunting** grounds

Russia, already a key global oil and gas exporter, is keen to develop its LNG potential in the Arctic. It has also significantly upgraded its military facilities

Another Russian scientist, Vladimir Sokolov, who has led numerous expeditions by the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute, based in Saint Petersburg, said this year polar bears had mainly been affected by abnormally warm weather on Spitsbergen Island to the west in Norway's Svalbard archipelago, where there have been no ice floes and little snow.

Russian researchers have recorded growing numbers of polar bears moving away from their traditional hunting grounds as ice melts due to global warming.

Russians living in Arctic settlements have sounded the alarm over dozens of bears en-Gulf of Ob to the Barents Sea, tering areas of human habitawhere polar bears used to hunt, tion, particularly to raid rubbish is now a busy route for ships dumps for food.