

WORLD
world

Putin reveals plan to use body double

AFP | Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday 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.

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

Conspiracy theories have long circulated suggesting that Putin had died and been replaced by a lookalike



times of the fight against terrorism."

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 in the North Caucasus while suicide bombers targeted Russia's main cities.

"Was that in the early 2000s?" asked interviewer Andrei Vandenko, who is doing a series of inter-

views with Putin to mark 20 years since he became president.

"Yes," said Putin.

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

"Well yes, go, put in appearances," Putin confirmed.

These centred on the 67-year-old's apparent lack of signs of ageing, the disappearance of bags under his eyes and his seemingly worsening knowledge of German, which he learned when working as a Soviet agent in East Germany.

In 2015, Putin disappeared 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

An Australian boy with dwarfism whose distress from bullying became a viral video will donate hundreds-of-thousands of dollars in donations to charity rather than a trip to Disneyland.

The clip of nine-year-old Quaden Bayles showed him crying and repeatedly saying he wanted to die after being bullied at school, sparking an outpouring of support from around the world.

The video was watched millions of times and prompted US comedian Brad Williams to start a GoFundMe page that eventually raised almost US\$475,000.

Although the funds were meant to send Bayles and his mum to Disneyland, his aunt told Australia's NITV News that the money would be used

for charities instead.

"What kid wouldn't want to go to Disneyland, especially if you have lived Quaden's life. To escape to anywhere that is fun that doesn't remind him of his day to day challenges," she was quoted as saying.

"But my sister said 'you know what, let's get back to the real issue'. This little fella has been bullied. How many suicides, black or white, in our society have happened due to bullying."

"We want the money to go to community organisations that really need it. They know what the money should be spent on, so as much as we want to go to Disneyland, I think our community would far off benefit from that."

Australian actor Hugh Jackman and NBA player Enes Kanter were among the hundreds of thousands posting support for Bayles.

Earth captures new 'mini moon'

Washington

Earth has acquired a second "mini-moon" about the size of a car, according to astronomers who spotted the object circling our planet.

The mass -- roughly 1.9-3.5 meters (6-11 feet) in diameter -- was observed by researchers Kacper Wierzchos and Teddy 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, which was also discovered by the Catalina Sky Survey)."

Its route suggests it entered Earth's orbit three years ago, he said.

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory's Minor Planet Center, which collects data on minor planets and asteroids, in an announcement said "no link to a known artificial object has been found," implying 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 Tesla 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 around for very long.

"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

Moscow

Cases 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 polar bears are a long-established fact, but we're worried that 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 polar bears is increasing," said Mordvintsev, a senior researcher

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 lack of food.

"In some seasons there is not enough food and large males attack 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 only from scientists but also from local people."



Over the last quarter-century, Arctic ice levels by the end of summer have fallen by 40 percent, said Sokolov. He predicted that polar bears would eventually no longer hunt on sea ice and be confined to shore areas and high-latitude archipelagos.

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 there.

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 entering areas of human habitation, particularly to raid rubbish dumps for food.

from the growing number of oil workers and defence ministry employees."

This winter the area from the Gulf of Ob to the Barents Sea, where polar bears used to hunt, is now a busy route for ships