

The Year Russia Stopped Blowing Bubbles

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Revisit the [biggest stories of 2010](#), brought to you by the staff of The Moscow Times. From Yury Luzhkov's firing, to raging wildfires in central Russia, to the emergence of the country's own Silicon Valley, and more.

When historians look back on 2010, perhaps they will understand much more than those who were here at the time. Partly because nobody could see more than three meters all summer as the 40-cigarette-per-day smog settled upon us, partly because the absurd and the news sometimes melded into one.

Perhaps they will understand why Moscow thieves stole a sewage removal truck complete with hundreds of cubic meters of cargo, why a man built his own guillotine for a suicide attempt yet failed to cut his head off, or why OMON riot police attacked bubble-blowing teenagers in St. Petersburg.

Whatever they do, though, the historians should mark down the words of an unknown policeman who provided the quote of the year.

It was he who barked "Put away your bubbles," to a group of teens who had decided on a balmy April day to celebrate spring by blowing bubbles on the street in an innocent flash mob.

They were promptly set upon by a group of rubber-bullet shooting thugs, who seemed to have confused them with a gay pride march — and who seemed to think you need bullets to burst bubbles. Riot police then rushed in and held the bubble-blowing teens for walking on the grass.

Some people are allowed to blow bubbles, some just aren't.

The art group Voina, whose previous performances included a sex show in a museum, continued to push the boundaries of art.

In one of their most puerile — and funny — stunts to date, the group drew a giant penis on a drawbridge in St. Petersburg facing the local FSB headquarters.

Several members of the group are now facing prosecution for the more revolutionary rampage through the northern capital, in which they overturned parked police cars — one of which was occupied.

Then there was the one involving a chicken, a woman and a supermarket, which made even some of the most hardened among the Internet generation groan. Others just avoided buying poultry at that supermarket.

Sometimes things seem ordained. The name of the Moscow club where an off-duty policeman shot a bouncer in a brawl: "Bada Bing." Mayor Yury Luzhkov was on holiday as the city sweated and squinted through the smog that forest fires brought to the capital. And then the poor soul who built a guillotine to kill himself alone, without a tumbrel or a knitting crone, and got just a broken-neck death, uncut by his dedicated — if flawed — workmanship.

There were new scams, like the man who offered to tell people how much they weigh by lifting them up — only to pick their pockets. Or the old ladies who would faint in front of potential victims and then, as the good Samaritan went to their rescue, would pilfer all their valuables. One blogger suggested that you could steal \$4 billion of state money via an oil company, but that was too ridiculous for anyone — even the prosecutor's office — to believe.

But dominating 2010 was the tandem, the yin and yang of Russian life, the comic book heroes whose antics often seemed to get more and more bizarre as the year went on.

Pity the children, as at times the two seemed as if they were vying to see who could embarrass Russia's kids more. If President Dmitry Medvedev's saying "I'll be back" to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't have his son Igor going "Daaaaad" and mock

vomiting, then his now-regular use of smileys on his Twitter feed must have the poor kid hitting his head against the desk at school.

Medvedev's use of a smiley after tweeting about how good it was to talk to the Japanese prime minister, and after the furor his landmark visit to the disputed Kuril Islands caused, makes you wonder what would have happened had he joined the microblogging service in 2008. “Georgia has started bombing :(“

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was not exactly showing his mature side either. Medvedev's partner in crime, “Robin to Putin's Batman” as one embassy's confidential briefing rather harshly characterized the relationship, seemed to be on gap year for most of 2010.

He basically took off the summer, perhaps after reading “Hundred things to do before you have to become president again” in the latest Real Men's Health magazine. Fly a jet so you can drop water bombs on a fire, check. Race a Formula One car, check. Shoot whales with a cross-bow, check. Take a road trip alone with the wild Siberian nature, 100-car entourage and snipers. Oh yes.

The signs, some say, are of a man trying to recapture his youth. A mid-life crisis. Thank god, his children are probably saying, that he hasn't gone the whole hog and run off with a woman more than half his age.

The year brought Russia another world sporting event as it was awarded the 2018 World Cup, but the public retained a sense of humor by voting, so far, for, Zoich, a squat, hung-over blue frog with Olympic rings for his eyes, as the top candidate for the symbol for the Olympic Games.

Zoich looks as if he has been watching Russian news for the year nonstop. Sadly, Zoich doesn't look likely to be officially chosen. Not with a standing order to “Put away your bubbles.”

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