《俄罗斯经济陷入泥潭 普京不是万能的》

PIKALEVO, Russia — The factory meeting room where the Russian leaderVladimir V. Putin browbeat one of Russia ’ s richest tycoons in front of cameras from state television has become a shrine, hallowed ground where Mr. Putin showed a path out of economic pain for ordinary people and calmed a spasm of worker unrest.

???????——?????·V·??(Vladimir V. Putin)???

“It all happened here. This is where he solved the future of our factory,” Sergey Lyakhov, a manager at the sprawling plant, said, proudly showing off the tidy third-floor conference room.

“?????????????????????????????”???????????????·????(Sergey Lyakhov)???????????????????

But that was nearly seven years ago, when Mr. Putin, now president, was prime minister. Today, the economic troubles that Mr. Putin came here to make a big show of solving are back, only worse and involving far more intractable problems than just the “trivial greed” of tycoons that Mr. Putin blamed for Pikalevo’s tumult in 2009.

???2009????????????“???????”??????
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Pikalevo, about three hours east of St. Petersburg, and the rest of Russia are now mired in the country’s longest recession since Mr. Putin came to power at the end of 1999, with the World Bank warning last month that the nation’s poverty rate would increase this year to 14.2 percent of the population, “undoing nearly a decade’s worth of gains.”

??1999??????????????????????????(World Bank)????????????????????14.2%?“?????????”?

Russia’s current crisis, though largely caused by market forces beyond the Kremlin’s control, notably a slump in the prices of oil and gas, has pushed Mr. Putin into a corner. After years of taking credit for a booming economy, which also had little to do with his actions, and casting himself as a can-do leader capable of untying the toughest economic and political knots, he faces a crisis that has exposed the stark limits of his power and prowess.

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A recent rebound in oil prices has lifted hopes in the Kremlin that the worst of Russia’s economic storm has passed, but it has also highlighted just how much Mr. Putin’s fortunes depend on unpredictable and uncontrollable outside forces like the energy market or the economic sanctions imposed by Europe and the United States.

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Mr. Putin’s power, for example, does not touch the torrent of slurry, a muddy sludge used to make cement, that now flows uselessly into an overflowing storage pit. The sludge is a byproduct of alumina production at Pikalevo’s biggest industrial plant, and it used to feed production at an adjacent cement factory. But that factory, hammered by slumping demand as a result of Russia’s recession, has slashed production and takes only 20 percent or less of the brown muck it used to buy.

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??????????????????????????????????20%?????

As leader of the world’s biggest country, a nuclear power intent on asserting itself on the world stage, Mr. Putin has far more pressing concerns than Pikalevo’s myriad troubles. But throughout his 16 years in power, whether as president or prime minister, Mr. Putin has presented an image of an omniscient and omnipresent leader interested in and capable of addressing his country’s most microscopic concerns.

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“He is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in Russia,” said Maxim Volkov, the chief executive of the Pikalevo factory visited in 2009 by Mr. Putin, the largest of three interdependent but, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, separately owned plants. “This is very good but also very bad.”

“???????????????????”??2009????????????????????????·????(Maxim Volkov)??“?????????????”???????????????????????????????????

While praising Mr. Putin as a “tough and efficient” leader who ended the drift and decay that characterized the rule of President Boris N. Yeltsin in the 1990s, Mr. Volkov said the concentration of power in the Kremlin had left the president “responsible for all the idiots who work under him” and for solving all the county’s quarrels and problems, no matter how small.

?????????“?????”????????90??????·N·???(Boris N. Yeltsin)????????????????????????????????????“??????????”?????????????????????????????

“The government simply cannot resolve every dispute in this country,” he said.

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For 16 years, however, the Kremlin, aided by hagiographic reports on television, has been telling and, to a large degree, convincing Russians that, in the case of their leader, one man could do just about anything and everything.

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His visit to Pikalevo in 2009 helped construct this image. But the problem he solved then was relatively simple: The three separate private owners of a once-unified industrial combine could not agree on the price of the products they supplied to one another and which each needed to keep going. Starved of vital supplies, they halted production, leaving workers without work and Pikalevo’s 22,000 residents without heat and hot water. Angry residents blocked a nearby federal highway in protest.

??2009??? ???????????????????????????????2.2?????????????????????????????????????

In just a few minutes, during a televised meeting in June 2009 with the owners, including Oleg V. Deripaska, a billionaire aluminum magnate who owns the biggest of the three factories, Mr. Putin put everything right. Describing the owners as “cockroaches,” he accused them of making “thousands of people hostages to your own ambitions, your nonprofessionalism and maybe simply your trivial greed; it is absolutely unacceptable.”

?2009?6???(Oleg V. Deripaska)????????????????????????? ??????????????????????“??”??????“???”

The owners, fearful of losing their assets, swiftly ended their quarrel. Behind the scenes, the Kremlin leaned on Gazprom, the state-controlled gas giant, to cut the price of energy to the Pikalevo plants and on state-owned banks to provide cheap credit.

???(Gazprom)??? ??????

The factory at the center of those troubles, Mr. Deripaska’s alumina plant, is now pumping out its primary product, a chemical compound used in aluminum smelting, as well as hot water for the whole town and a tide of slurry for the adjacent cement factory that no longer wants it.

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And this, in a nutshell, is the Kremlin’s current nightmare: With low global energy prices and Western sanctions over the Ukraine conflict crimping Russia’s prospects of recovery, the economy has hit a wall. It simply cannot compete with China, the United States or even the European nations that Russian state media constantly portray as fading has-beens. The easy and popular fixes the Kremlin used in the past to resuscitate the economy — or at least placate the public — have all been exhausted.

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