

Russia has invincible missile, says Putin

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Vladimir Putin

Moscow: Russia has developed "invincible" nuclear weapons that can "reach anywhere in the world", President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday in his annual state of the nation address here.

The speech was the last before an election Putin is expected to win in 17 days time. He was laying out his key policies for his fourth presidential term.

The Russian President unveiled a weapon that he said "could not be stopped by the US missile defence shield in Europe and Asia", the BBC reported.

He showcased a range of new weapons, including a missile that could "reach anywhere in the world", and highlighted two nuclear-capable weapons -- a cruise missile and a submarine-launched unmanned underwater vehicle.

The warhead, Putin said, was "a low-flying, difficult-to-spot cruise missile with a nuclear payload with a practically unlimited range and an unpredictable flight path, which can bypass lines of interception and is invincible in the face of all existing and future systems of both missile defence and air defence".

Putin also said that he would regard a nuclear attack on any of its allies as a nuclear attack on Russia itself, adding that "the response would be immediate".

During the two-hour televised speech to a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament, Putin said that he intends to halve poverty in the country within the next six years.

"We must solve one of the key tasks for the coming decade -- to ensure a confident, long-term growth of real incomes of our citizens, and in six years, at least to halve the level of poverty," he was quoted as saying by Tass news agency.

Putin said he wanted to increase employment and longevity as these are necessary to secure stable population growth in the next 10 years.

He faces seven challengers on March 18 although none is expected to attract widespread support. Prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been barred from running, called on voters to boycott the poll, the BBC reported.

Putin has so far done little campaigning and said little about his plans for the next six years. The Russian President said he wanted his country to emulate life-expectancy rates in Japan and France.

He also said "Russia could not take its power for granted".

"We have no right to allow the stability we have achieved to lead to complacency. Especially since we are far from resolving many problems."

"Russia is now a leading country with a powerful foreign economic and defence potential. But from the point of view of the extremely important task of ensuring people's quality of life and welfare we, of course, have not achieved the level we require.

"But we have to do this and will do this," he said.

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