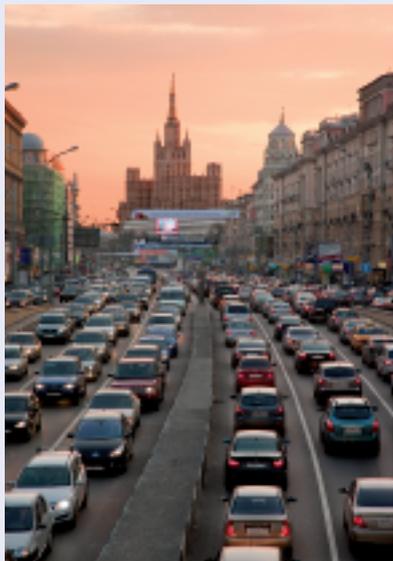


MOSCOW PROTESTS Russia has a new symbol of “me-first” power that’s beginning to produce widespread protest. They’re called “migalki,” flashing blue and red lights with a siren added for effect. Increasingly, lower level Moscow bureaucrats are attaching them to their cars in an effort to make like VIPs and bypass traffic that bottles up common folk. Every week, limousines, SUVs and Mercedes fitted with “migalki” produce accidents (many posted to YouTube). As a result, Muscovites are growing increasingly angry with government officials, who are seen as the main culprits.

“The blue lights have for years epitomized Russia’s double standard for the rich and powerful and the hoi polloi. The lights allow cars to drive in special lanes, go the wrong way and ignore speed limits and red lights,” wrote ABC News in April. Despite 2002 legislation to try to curb the trend, the heads of the security services, federal ministries and of-



Jai/Corbis/D. Carrasco

ficials of number of large companies such as Gazprom are allowed to use the lights.

Leonid Nikolayev heads a group called Solidarity that wants the lights and sirens banned and has become something of a hero in the fight against them. Hiding out in a corner of Red Square, leapt on the roof of a car with blue siren on as it left the government building. **Unfortunately for Nikolayev, the owner happened to be a member of the FSB, the Russian secret police, which replaced the KGB.** He was arrested on vandalism charges. But his act sparked a movement. In April, dozens of drivers stuck blue bucket on their cars to imitate the “migalki.” More demonstrations followed by a group calling itself “The League of Blue Sirens.”

Officials were not happy. A bill was presented to parliament that would require a permit to stage anti-siren demonstrations. Threatening to introduce restrictive laws in a common Kremlin tactic to blot out what it doesn’t like.

GENERATION B It took five years to amass the money and two years to film. Serbian artist Jelena Zlatkovic, a professional costume designer, was determined to make a step-by-step movie on how she made good on her dream to buy a house. While the process is simple enough in some countries, Serbia isn’t most countries. **The Balkan state has been in economic trouble for years, and a recent survey suggested that more than 100,000 college graduates are unemployed and forced to live at home.**

Zlatkovic was determined to come up with an inspirational antidote to bad times. The result of her effort is a 27-minute documentary entitled simply

ROBO-MARRIAGE Not long ago in Tokyo a robot celebrated its first marriage. The event was a long time coming. Technology has been a faithful partner to daily life in Japan for decades. While the West was struggling with computers, Japan was well ahead of the curve. The latest trend, however, is unconnected to the traditional use of electronic devices to solve practical problems of daily life. The movement now, at least in Japan, is toward the production of androids, machines with human features that were first created by Honda in 1986. **Tomoiro Shibata and Satoko Inoue became man and wife in front of a female-looking robot I-Fairy and produced by the company where the bride works, Kokoro. With backlit eyes, a gentle voice and wearing a flower garland, I-Fairy raised its arms and instructed Satoko to lift her veil and groom to kiss. Meanwhile, a man with a PC orchestrated the movements of the five-foot-tall robot.** 🤖

The bridegroom, a professor of robot-

“How to buy a house in Serbia.” It was picked from among 25,000 entries in the “Short Film Corner” of the recent Cannes Film Festival. **Zlatkovic worked four jobs, in addition to her primary work, which was making greeting cards and stationery that she then peddled for 15 hours a day to any takers on the streets of Belgrade.** Never mind bad weather. Every morning for five years, seven days a week, she dutifully rose at 8 a.m., defying snow, rain and extreme heat, abandoning friends, relationships, travel and all forms of leisure, all to reach her goal. Eventually, she raised enough money to



Getty Images/Sankei

ics Japan’s Nara Institute of Science and Technology, was won over. “It would have been nice if I-Fairy was just a little bit smarter, but overall she expressed herself well.” His new wife was similarly enthusiastic. “I enjoyed the whole thing a lot,” she said. “I think the Japanese really need to consider robots as friends, although many people still

buy a 40-square meter apartment in Belgrade, where housing prices are high relative to average income. Some properties run more than €2,000 per square meter. **Statistics suggest that 80 percent Serbians between the ages of 15 and 30 live at home, earning them the nickname the “boomerang generation.”** Though the phenomenon is widespread worldwide, it’s particularly visible in countries whose economies are in transition. A third of all Serbs between 31 and 35 are solely supported by their family and 90 percent of divorcees go home to live if their marriages fail. Serbia has been di-

want to use androids for specific purposes”. 🤖 Japanese companies are trying to find a role for humanoids in daily life. **The University of Tokyo has already “created” two baseball players, an android child and an android that stacks carts. Amazingly, they can laugh and smile, intentionally programmed to “touch the hearts of people.”** Some androids are being designed to replicate a full range of human emotion; much the way science fiction

has depicted them for decades. 🤖 If your friends are falling short, you can always get in line for an I-Fairy. For now, there are three in the world. Price: \$47,000. 🤖

Honda’s humanoid robot ‘ASIMO’ conducts a class on ecology at Nakagawa Primary School on March 10, 2010 in Tokyo, Japan.

agnosed as being ill with “prolonged adolescence fever,” caused by financial hardships and the stresses provoked by the job hunt. Italy has been saddled with some of the same criticism. “The idea of my move was to make young people understand that in the end nothing can stop them,” say Zlatkovic, “I hope I’ve motivated people to never give up. **If you want something you need to make a very specific plan. You need to have exceptional determination, particularly when things get rough.**” Just who might be willing to endure such sacrifices to reach a goal isn’t clear. *Sanja Lucic*

WARVILLAGE Following Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the new frontier for luxury tourism may well be the new-age iron curtain that divides Lebanon from Israel, namely the Golan Heights. Khali Abdullah, a Shiite building contractor, is using the \$2 million he put aside from 40 years of working in Africa to build a fairytale on the contested border. **The Village Chateau Wazzani Touristique aims to become the first five-star tourist destination specifically located in a war zone.** The Lebanese army, which has approved the construction, has a guard tower just above the pool, while the Israeli soldiers will view all the goings-on in the Chateau.

Even UN peacekeepers pass the construction site twice daily to ensure Abdullah’s wild project doesn’t revive hostilities. Robert Fisk, a journalist for London’s “Independent,” wondered out loud if Abdullah wasn’t mad. “That ‘s what everybody tells me,” he says. **“But this is my land. I have the right to live on it and build on it. No one can send me away. Everything’s completely safe here. No Israeli cluster bombs came down here during the 2006 war.”** Who would want to spend holidays in the village? “We offer a mixture of styles, including an Arab-Byzantine castle that the Lebanese like a lot and an interior that has more of a North African feel, so that our guests feel like they’re in an international environment.” Abdullah says he’s expecting tourists seeking a quiet, out-of-the-way holiday. **All you hear are storks and eagles — aside from the sight of Israeli tanks, Lebanese and UN troops. Not exactly an oasis of peace.** “Of course,” says Abdullah, “I do recommend to my visitors before booking that they make sure there’s no new wave of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel on the horizon.”