

Presidential polls in Russia today

MOSCOW, Mar 25: Russians got a day of rest from campaigning today as they prepared for a Sunday presidential election which Acting President Vladimir Putin is virtually certain to win, reports Reuters.

From midnight Friday, campaigning was banned to allow people to reflect on their choice but, in opinion polls were correct, many had already made up their minds in favour of Putin.

He enjoyed a wide lead over closest rival, Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, although doubts remained whether Putin would get the 50 per cent needed to win in the first round. Failure to do so will mean a runoff.

His apparently sure victory has meant for a dull campaign but has raised questions about Russia's future course.

Putin, who has gone from being an obscure spy chief to possible leader of the world's largest country in less than a year, appealed on Friday for

people to turn out and vote.

He said the 108 million eligible to go to the polls across 11 time zones had to choose a leader capable of restoring Russia's prestige and overseeing its vast nuclear arsenal.

Looking stiff and tense, Putin made the appeal in a television address as he sat at a desk with the Russian red-white-and-blue tricolour flag in the background.

"We are electing a president whose duty will be to revive the economy, restore the country's prestige and leading role in the world and provide for everyone an effective system of government, stability and prosperity," Putin said.

He said it was his obligation to ask Russians "to carry out your constitutional duty. It is imperative to go to the polls on Sunday and choose the president of a new Russia."

Voting for the 11 candidates will begin in Russia's Far East when it is still late today in

Moscow then sweep across the time zones from Vladivostok to the western Kaliningrad enclave.

Voting lasts from 8 am to 8 pm from 2000 GMT on March 25 to 1700 GMT on March 26. An exit poll and the first provisional election results from the Far East will be available as the last western polling stations close. A clearer picture will emerge within hours.

Election commission chief Alexander Veshnyakov said the first results would be known at 9 pm Moscow time.

Putin said Russia had emerged stronger from the difficulties of recent months, particularly the military campaign in Chechnya in which Russian casualties have mounted in recent weeks.

Russia, he said, was "one of the biggest countries in the world and a mighty nuclear power."



US President Bill Clinton prepares to get off a plain colour Gulfstream jet at Islamabad International Airport yesterday. Clinton was scheduled to meet with Pakistan's President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar and General Pervez Musharraf yesterday. Clinton is on the final stop of his six-day trip to South Asia. — AFP photo

Tight security in Pak capital for Clinton

ISLAMABAD, Mar 25: Soldiers stood guard on most street corners, army helicopters buzzed low overhead and jeeps with mounted machine guns patrolled tree-lined streets, readying for US President Bill Clinton's visit to Pakistan's capital, reports AP.

Along the route Clinton was to travel, soldiers combed the grass with dogs that sniffed for explosives Friday. Troops roamed with hand-held mine detectors. An estimated 5,000 soldiers and thousands of police were deployed.

Clinton is to hold two meetings with Gen Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless military coup in October, as well as participate in a working lunch before making a television address to the Pakistani nation.

Clinton does not venture anywhere abroad without heavy protection, but security for his trip to South Asia has been extraordinary. A major reason is terrorism, an elevated concern throughout his travels on the sub-continent.

Clinton cancelled a helicopter visit to a Bangladeshi village at the start of his trip because of the possible danger. According to published reports, US officials believe groups linked to accused terrorist Osama bin Laden, or Bin Laden himself, may have plotted attacks on Clinton during the trip.

Clinton's next stop was India, and he was to arrive in Pakistan on Saturday.

Pakistan is headquarters to militant Muslim groups fighting in Indian-ruled Kashmir. In Afghanistan, next door to Pakistan, Bin Laden has been given refuge by the hard-line Taliban. In November, six rockets were fired in a two-minute volley at several different locations in Islamabad in a synchronised attack on the US embassy, an American cultural center and UN offices.

The rockets missed the embassy and did no damage to the UN facility, but a rocket went through a window at the American Centre. No one has been caught in the attack.

BRIEFLY

Annan to visit Havana, Geneva

Secretary-General Kofi Annan will next month pay the first visit to Havana by a UN Chief for nearly 15 years, according to travel plans announced by the UN on Friday, Reuters reports from United Nations.

Annan will fly to Havana on April 10, after trips to Geneva, Rome and Florence. He pays an official visit to Cuba on April 11 and then attends a summit meeting in Havana on April 12 and 13 of the Group of 77 developing countries, which now has 133 members.

Violence claims 2 in Aceh

A clash between rebels and security forces in strife-torn Aceh province killed two people dead, a police spokesman said Saturday, AP reports from Banda.

Local police chief Lt. Col. Syafei Aksal said a separatist guerilla was shot dead by police in north Aceh, about 1,750 km northwest of Jakarta, on Friday. A local villager was also killed in central Aceh on Friday after a separate clash between soldiers and rebels, he said.

5 villagers killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Mar 25: Muslim separatist rebels shot dead five sleeping Muslim villagers in the troubled Indian state of Kashmir, an army official said today, reports AFP.

Major general PPS Bindra said the attack occurred overnight Friday at the village of Ramvan, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the Kashmir winter capital Jammu.

"A group of militants stormed the home of Muslim family and shot dead two men and three women," he said. "Two other men were injured in the attack."

Bindra said the family was targeted because its members did not cooperate with Muslim separatist rebels.

Indian forces shoot dead 5 suspects of Sikh massacre

JAMMU, Mar 25: In a gun-battle with Islamic militants today Indian soldiers shot dead five men suspected of involvement in the massacre of 40 Sikhs in Kashmir earlier this week, reports AP.

Acting on a tip off, soldiers cordoned off Pacharthan Patribal, a village 80 km south of Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital, and began firing on two houses where seven militants were believed to be hiding, police said.

The militants retaliated, and in the ensuing two-hour gunbattle, five rebels were killed. Police later blasted the houses where the two remaining militants were hiding, setting the houses ablaze. Officials were waiting for the fire to subside to find out if the two other insurgents were dead.

Gunmen kill 2 policemen in Karachi

KARACHI, Mar 25: Gunmen shot and killed two policemen in southern Karachi in a drive-by shooting today in the heart of the troubled port city, said police, reports AP.

The two sub inspectors of police were shot and killed while on a motorcycle, they said. No one has taken responsibility but police said both men were at the forefront of a police crackdown several years ago against a minority ethnic party, the Muttahida Qami Movement.

Pakistan's largest city of Karachi has been wracked by bitter religious and ethnic violence in recent years. The military-led government has promised to try to curb the violence.

Stampede at SA disco leaves 13 children dead

DURBAN, Mar 25: Chaos erupted after someone threw a tear gas canister into a crowded South African disco Friday, leaving 13 children dead and 44 injured in a stampede, reports AP.

The Throb Nightclub was packed with schoolchildren celebrating the end of the school term when the tear gas canister was thrown into the crowd, fire department spokesman Jay Kannlappen said.

Kevin Govender, 19, is a regular at the club and was there Friday. "About three to four songs had been played when suddenly people started screaming, pushing and running towards the doorway. I didn't know what was happening, but found that I couldn't breathe," he said. "I was forced to join the scramble to get out of the club as fast as I could."

He fell and was trampled upon, but managed to get up and escaped uninjured. His clothes were torn and he had lost a shoe.

About 600 children were in the club, and police suspect that one of the children released the tear gas. KwaZulu-Natal police spokesman Bala Naidoo said a brick wall collapsed during the chaos.

Anderson Marimuthu, 18, said he feared a friend had died in the chaos. "I had just reached the safety of the exit and as I turned to look back, I saw this wall hurtling downwards on the people below," he said.

The youngest of those killed was 11. The injured suffered mainly abrasions, respiratory problems and head injuries. Several victims were seriously injured.

R K Khan hospital superintendent Dr. Prakash Subban said most patients ranged from 12 to 18.

The club had two exits, but the children had access to only one, said Narend Singh, provincial minister for agriculture and environmental affairs.

However, clubowner Rajan Naidoo said the club had four exits, and that all were open.

"I think the children panicked and headed for the main entrance where they initially came in," he said.

Singh called for an investigation into why children as young as 11 were at the club. Naidoo said it was matinee disco, and that the general policy was to serve alcohol only to those 18 and older.

Community volunteers set up an emergency center with trauma counselors to help parents who feared their children might have been caught in the stampede.



Rescue workers look for victims trapped under the wreckage of Antonov-12 cargo plane that crashed onto several houses Friday in Kadirana, near Sri Lanka's only international airport. At least six crewmen - five Russian and one Sri Lankan - were killed and two people on ground also perished in the crash during bad weather while many more escaped with injuries. The aircraft broke into several pieces and the main wings rested on a brick wall of a house. — AFP photo

Laden seen in Afghanistan discussing Clinton's visit

ISLAMABAD, Mar 25: Alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden appeared weak and gaunt at a meeting of followers to discuss US President Bill Clinton's visit to Pakistan, an Afghan witness says, and a Western intelligence official reports bin Laden is seriously ill with kidney and liver disease, reports AP.

Bin Laden has kidney failure and "his liver is going," the official said on condition that neither he nor his nation be identified. He said bin Laden's followers are trying to find a kidney dialysis machine for bin Laden. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia, however, insists bin Laden is fine.

"His health is good. There is no problem with his kidney or liver," said Ahmed Ullah, a Taliban spokesman reached by telephone this week in southern Kandahar, the headquarters of the religious militia.

Despite his illness, it has been business as usual for bin Laden, the Western intelligence official said Thursday. "He is still operating an enormous terrorist network around the

world," he said.

Bin Laden, a Saudi exile accused by the United States of organising the deadly 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was seen March 17 with 100 followers in a remote mountain valley in Afghanistan's eastern Laghman province, said an Afghan who attended the meeting.

"He is very much weak. His face is very thin," said the man, who has close contacts with Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia and accompanied a Taliban security officer to the meeting.

He clenched his fists and pushed them into his eye sockets to indicate how sunken bin Laden's eyes appeared. The Afghan also requested that his name not be used because of the potential danger.

He described how bin Laden, believed to be in his late 30s, coughed frequently and seemed to become quickly exhausted, even while seated. The Saudi took milk, rather than the traditional tea, for refreshment, he said.

"The sheik speaks for five or

10 minutes," he said, "and then he drinks some milk and gets up and walks around."

The Afghan also spoke to a doctor who accompanied bin Laden to the valley and was told the ailment afflicting bin Laden is the circulation of his blood which "is not being cleaned in the right way."

"I asked him, 'Why is the sheik very weak, very unhappy looking?' and he told me, 'He is very sick.'"

The Afghan doctor, speaking the native Pashtu language, further told the man the problem was with bin Laden's "jigger," the Pashtu word for liver.

The United States is offering 5 million dollars reward for bin Laden's capture. In November the United Nations imposed sanctions on the Taliban to press a demand that they hand over bin Laden for trial.

The Taliban have refused, saying Afghan tradition forbids handing over guests to enemies.

With bin Laden in Afghanistan and radical Islamic groups based in Pakistan, security for Clinton's five-hour visit today is extraordinary.

Palestinians, Israelis mum on talks

WASHINGTON, Mar 25: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators kept their mouths shut on Friday by order of their US hosts, but a few tantalizingly positive descriptions lit up the Middle East's secretive peace process, reports Reuters.

Kept away from the media at a quiet US Air Force base overlooking the sweeping Potomac River, the two seven-member negotiating teams were reportedly enjoying a good rapport under the eye of a US team led by special envoy Dennis Ross.

"There has developed a very cordial working relationship," State Department spokesman James Rubin told reporters as a fourth day of talks was conducted away from the glare of the cameras at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington.

It's clear that both sides like and respect each other, and we think that is an important ingredient in ultimately being able to reach agreement," he added.

The teams have given Ross a vow of silence that in theory will aid negotiations, and so far no expressions of either frustration or outright optimism have leaked from either side.

But another hint of Middle Eastern optimism at the onset of Washington's cherry blossom

season came from Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who said his country would continue to play a role as mediator and facilitator.

Speaking two days before President Bill Clinton's third summit with Syria and as the negotiations continued in Washington, Moussa said he saw "windows of opportunity."

He characterised his optimism like this: "Very much optimistic is a bit too much, but somewhat optimistic, cautiously optimistic — but it's not very much optimistic because of the track record of the peace process."

Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat Common and Co-ordination Section

Re-Tender Notice

Tenders in sealed envelopes with two envelopes — one containing technical tender and other financial tenders are invited from bonafide computer trader/local agent/dealer for purchasing modern and with fast capacity colour laser printer and Pantrium-III computers for use in the Sangsad Bhavan office of the Honourable Speaker of the 7th Jatiya Sangsad.

(2) Tenders can be deposited in the tender box kept at the office chamber of the Deputy Secretary (Administration-1) of the Secretariat from 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon on 04-04-2000. Tenders will be opened the same day at 12:10 PM in presence of the tenderers (if anyone remains present).

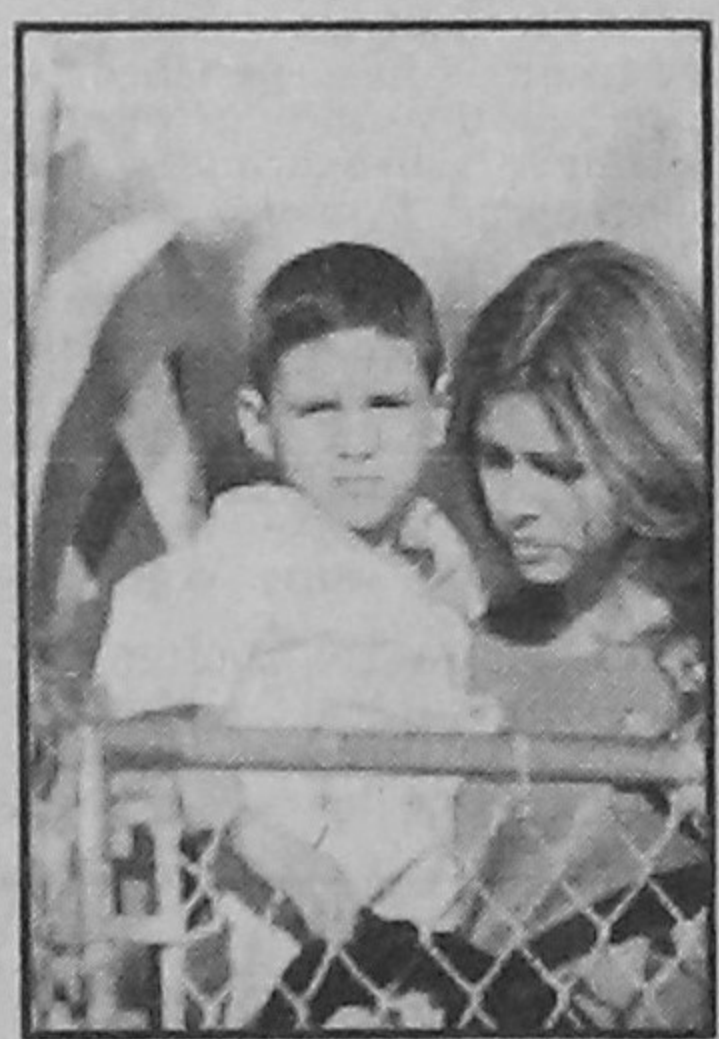
(3) Trade licence regarding business for the current fiscal year, income-tax certificate and attested photocopy of certificate regarding VAT and original receipt for purchasing schedule will have to be submitted with the tender.

(4) 2.50 (two and a half per cent) of the total estimated expenditure as the earnest money in the form of Bank Draft/Pay-Order (refundable) in favour of the undersigned will have to be submitted alongwith the financial tender. Tenders will be treated as rejected if earnest money is deposited alongwith the technical tender.

(5) Tender schedule containing detailed description of the tender and other terms and conditions and specification of printers can be procured from the Accounts Section-1 (South-West Bloc, Level-5, Room No. 524) from 02-04-2000 to 03-04-2000 during office hours on payment of Taka 250/- (two hundred and fifty) (non-refundable) by applying in the pads of the respective establishments along with trade licence. More than one schedule will not be delivered to a single tenderer.

(6) The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason.

Md Rabiul Islam
Assistant Secretary (Common)
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DFP-6681-21/3
G-555



Six-year-old Elian Gonzalez is carried into his relatives' home by cousin Marisleyis Gonzalez Friday in Miami, Florida. A US official ruled out arbitration in the Elian Gonzalez case, calling for the swift return of the shipwreck survivor to his Cuban father. — AFP photo

Believe it, or not!

WALNUT CREEK, California, Mar 25: Chris Hoyle heard the scream and looked up from her desk to see a man falling past her window — head first, reports AP.

"His head was down, his feet were up, and he came whizzing by screaming," she told the Contra Costa Times.

She ran outside and shouted to a man near the five-story building, "Is everyone all right? I just saw a man fall off the roof."

"Yeah, that would be me," Ken Larsen, 34, told her. His arm was scratched and his shoulder bruised, but nothing was broken. In fact, he said, he landed on his feet.

Larsen had been laying telecommunications cable on the roof.



Kultida Yenprasert, 21, (C), receives congratulations from Thailand's two former Miss Universe Porntip Narkhirankanok (R), and Apatsara Hongsakul (L), after she was crowned Miss Thailand 2000 late Friday in Bangkok. Kultida will represent Thailand in the next Miss Universe pageant in Cyprus. — AFP photo

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Executive Engineer Kishoreganj Public Works Division Kishoreganj

Tender Notice No 36(P)/1999-2000

Tender Invitation Notice

Tenders in No 2911 BD Form in sealed envelopes are invited from building contractors/contractors firm as per financial feasibility enlisted with the Public Works Department for the completion of the undermentioned work. Tenders will be opened on the day of submitting at 12.15 PM in presence of the interested tenderers (if anyone remains present). Tenders must be submitted in a sealed envelopes on which the name of the work, address and the address to whom the tender is submitted will have to be mentioned.

- Name of work : One in Kishoreganj under a project titled jail reforms/development (food godown and kitchen construction). Sub-head: Construction of food godown in Kishoreganj District Jail. Fiscal year-1999-2000.
- Estimated expenditure : Tk 8,87,817/-
- Estimated money : Tk 17,756/-
- Time limit for completion of work : 60 (sixty) days.
- Names of offices : Public Works Division, Kishoreganj/Mymensingh/Tangail/Jamalpur/Sherpur/Netrokona.
- Last date of selling : 02-04-2000 (during office hours).
- Last date of : 03-04-2000 (till 12.00 Noon).
- Ready tender schedule containing Bangladesh Form No 2911 including additional terms and conditions can be seen in the offices stated and interested contractors themselves can purchase tender schedule on payment of usual fees for Tk 400/- (four hundred) only (non-refundable) and on payment of usual fees for Tk 25 (twenty-five) only (non-refundable) for No. 2911 Form by producing registration book or their representatives whose signature has been attested by the contractor on the authorisation can purchase by producing all original registers of enlistment and certificate of registration of the Value Added Tax Department. No form will be sold on the day of opening tender.
- Contractors will have to produce the original copies of certificate regarding TIN from the appropriate authority and registration certificate from the Value Added Tax Department at the time of purchasing tender. Original copies of the certificates will have to be produced. Copy of the certificate attested by the class I official and money receipt for purchasing tender will have to be enclosed with tender. Otherwise tender will be treated as rejected.
- If the rate of the more than one bonafide tenderers for the work becomes the same, then contractor will be selected through a lottery on the specific date of the Superintending Engineer, Mymensingh Public Works Circle.

Kazi Mohiul Alam
Executive Engineer
Kishoreganj Public Works
Division, Kishoreganj

DFP-6644-21/3
G-554