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## Putin wins presidency

More than half the Russians vote for the former spy

MOSCOW, Mar 27: Vladimir Putin's election as president was hailed Monday as the start of a new age in Russia even though the new master of the Kremlin has yet to spell out how he will handle the daunting challenge of restoring political order and invigorating the ailing economy, reports AP.

Little known and a political outsider, one of the first tasks of Russia's second democratically elected president will be to choose a prime minister, come up with specific proposals to revive the economy, and clear corruption out of the government.

The presidential inauguration is to take place in early May. Dmitry Kozak, the government chief of staff, told the Interfax news agency Monday that a new prime minister would not be named until after the inauguration.

"The government will be formed by the head of state and the prime minister", Kozak was quoted as saying, adding that "new people are likely to appear."

Other senior government of-

ficials indicated that Putin intended to forge new policies. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said "correctives" would be made in Russia's foreign policy now that Putin has been elected.

The former KGB spy has a full agenda. He must confront the ongoing war against rebels in the breakaway republic of Chechnya and take into account the strong support of a nearly a third of the electorate who voted for his Communist opponent.

With 95.51 per cent of the vote counted in Sunday's presidential election, Putin led with 52.64 per cent. Communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov was second with 29.34 per cent and liberal Grigory Yavlinsky third with 5.84 per cent. The other eight candidates lagged far behind.

World leaders sent congratulations, and Putin spoke by telephone Monday with President Jiang Zemin of China and Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Putin's victory came as a relief to many Russians after the rule of former President Boris

Yeltsin, whose unpredictability, poor health and allegations of corruption within his family contributed to his political demise.

A "time of political adventures and experiments" is over in Russia, said former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, whose abrupt dismissal by Yeltsin in March 1998 set off two years of political instability.

"Putin is a man who gets down to work in earnest, a man who will be able to establish order and discipline and speed up economic development," Chernomyrdin told Interfax.

Chernomyrdin dismissed fears that Putin's call for strong government might lead to dictatorship, saying "Russian society would never accept a return to authoritarianism."

Despite Zyuganov's stronger than expected showing, analysts said Putin had gained support on traditional Communist turf and benefited from apathy among voters who in earlier elections had supported nationalists and reformers.

"There is a popular longing for a person who would come and satisfy everyone. That has happened to Yeltsin before, and it's taking place now," said Dmitry Dreshkin, chief analyst of the Central Election Commission.

No serious voting violations were reported, either by Russian or international election observers. Bjorn von der Esch, a member of the observer mission from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said that the vote was "free and fair." However, an OSCE statement expressed concern about media bias in both private and government-controlled media.

Putin has promised to restore Russia's international and military might, fight economic and political corruption, revive Russia's economy, as well as battle poverty and social injustice that have contributed to continuing support for the Communists.

Although Putin managed to avoid being forced into a runoff

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Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with Central Electoral Commission Chairman Alexander Veshnyakov (L) during their meeting at Kremlin in Moscow yesterday. The official ceremony of Putin's inauguration as Russian president will take place between May 5 and May 8.

—AFP photo

## Expensive ride

By Special Correspondent

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury has been billed over Tk 1,65,000 by a private helicopter company for a flight to Sylhet and return to the capital on Saturday.

The bill was submitted by Best Aviation, the lone aviation company in the country that rents helicopters.

The Speaker went to Biswanath in Sylhet to address a public function. But he could not deliver his speech there "as the function was foiled due to a trouble created by a group of party activists."

When asked last night why he undertook such an expensive travel, the Speaker replied, "It was an emergency."

Responding to another question if he was entitled to use helicopter service, he replied, "I am fully entitled."

Asked why he did not requisition a government chopper which would have cost less, he said, "There are lengthy procedures involved and it would have taken time."

Managing Director of Best Aviation Mr Halder-uz Zaman said the Speaker was billed for using the chopper for two hours and fifteen minutes. The Speaker was given some dis-

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## Humayun stages silent protest

From Nurul Kabir and Iqbal Siddique

SYLHET, Mar 26: Noted writer Humayun Ahmed and his family and supporters have 'successfully' staged the much talked about day-long hunger strike at the main entrance of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology today, with the opposing groups agitating a couple of kilometres away.

The district administration ensured adequate police protection to Ahmed and his entourage all the way from the railway station to the hotel to the university, which is six kilometres off the town. But they 'allowed' the opposing groups, organised under the All-Party Action Committee, to block the Madina Market road leading to the university. Several hundred militant supporters of the APAC put barricade on the point, a little more than two kilometres from the university with three platoons of police watching.

Apart from Ahmed's motorcade, they hardly allowed any vehicle or people to get through the barricade until 3:30 p.m., half an hour before the hunger strike was over. Some people, including a Dhaka-based journalist, who tried to force their way through the barricade were assaulted. Ahmed Abid, a reporter with daily Banglar Bait, received serious injuries and was admitted to Sylhet M. A. G. Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Everything in the town went normal on the day despite fears of violence among political circles.

Humayun Ahmed had announced the programme on February 28 to lodge 'a personal protest' against attack on the university teachers and closure of the institution amidst political dispute over naming of a few academic buildings and dormitories after personalities such as Sheikh Mujibur and Jahanara Imam.

The APAC has been opposing the naming while the ruling party and a faction of the freedom fighters, organised under Muktyjoddah-Janatar Mancha, have been supporting it. However, some Awami League men have reportedly been backing the opposition.

Chancellor of the university President Shahabuddin Ahmed asked the authorities to refer the matter to the Senate which itself is yet to be constituted.

Humayun Ahmed and his family including his mother Ayesha Akhter, wife Gulitekin

Ahmed, his brother Dr. Jafar Iqbal and his wife Dr. Yasmin Huj - both teachers of Shahjalal University, another brother Ahsan Habib and his children arrived at Sylhet by train at 5:15 in the morning. With them came more than 50 left-leaning political leaders and activists, a few academics including Prof. Anisuzzaman and Syed Monjurul Islam of Dhaka University, Prof. Hayat Mamud of Chittagong University and some NGO activists like Salma Sobhan of Ain-O-Shalish Kendra. ADAB also had

its representation.

Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, the district Muktyjoddah commander and convenor of the 501-member Shahjalal University Sanghati Bandhan, a committee formed to make Humayun's programme successful, received the delegation at the railway station. Some 50 other people including joint secretary of the district Awami League Iftekhar Hossain Shamim and cultural activists of the town were also present.

Most of them except Humayun Ahmed and his family

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Noted writer Humayun Ahmed and his family during the day-long hunger strike at the main entrance of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet on the Independence Day.

—Star photo by A K M. Mohsin

## No JS body meeting during session

PMO tells legislators

By Staff Correspondent

Members of the parliamentary standing committees have been asked not to hold meetings while the house is in session.

According to the sources in parliament, the office of the Prime Minister has instructed the Parliament Secretariat recently to take necessary steps in this regard with a view to meeting the quorum requirements during the session of the house.

As per the instruction of the Prime Minister's office, the Parliament Secretariat has informed the members of the standing committees about the instruction of the Prime Minister's office.

Talking to The Daily Star a couple of days ago, a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education admitted that they had received a letter on Thursday last which contained the instruction for refraining from holding meetings when the house was in session.

Replying to question, he pointed out that earlier they held several meetings while the house was in session.

The member, however, informed the Star that they had cancelled a meeting, which was scheduled for April 4 next, as per the instruction.

It may be mentioned here that the house goes into session today.

## Hartal observed in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Mar 27: An eight-hour hartal was observed by the All Party Action Committee (Opposition) here today.

The APAC has been agitating to realise its four-point demand including withdrawal of naming of the buildings and dormitories of Shahjalal University. Today's hartal was called to protest 'police action' that foiled opposition programme yesterday.

The district BNP secretary Ariful Haque Chowdhury and an activists were picked up by a police from Ambarkhana area of the town when they were picketing at about 8:30 am today. Police also seized four motorbikes used by the pickets. However, they were released after about an hour.

All modes of transport were off the road and educational institutions remained closed during hartal. Transactions in the banks remained suspended and the commercial establishments were shut down.

A rally was held at the Modhuban point with city Jamaat Ameer D Shafiqur Rahman in the chair. District BNP president Ahsan Reza Chowdhury, and district Jatiya Party president Giasuddin Ahmed addressed the meeting. The speakers said novelist Humayun Ahmed is playing a part of the conspiracy of the government and left politicians. The whole game is against the sentiment of the people of Sylhet. It would not be tolerated, they said.

## Our new numbers

19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215  
Phones: 812 4944, 812 4955  
& 812 4966  
Fax: 812 5155

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## Another JS session sans opposition

Ruling party plans to push through 38 bills in 8 days

By Nazmul Ashraf

The opposition parties are almost certain to continue their boycott when the 17th session of the seventh parliament begins today at the Jatiya Sangsad.

Scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m., the session will run until April 6, the JS Business Advisory Committee decided yesterday.

As many as 38 bills -- 13 by the government and 25 by private members -- could be considered by parliament during the brief session, said meeting sources.

There will also be a general discussion on United States

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## Citicorp gets down to business

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman's privatisation consultant, the Citicorp, has started working from yesterday, aiming at unloading 49 per cent of its stake and finding a strategic partner, Biman sources said.

The consultant, under a 2 million dollar world bank aided project, would complete the work in 10 months.

It had signed an agreement with the Biman on February 27 to this effect.

It was selected out of some 44 companies which partici-

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## CAREER OPPORTUNITY

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## Inside Today

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## The Furore over a Political Right Turn in Europe

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### Focus

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Mar	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
28		6-13 pm
29	5-53 am	

Prayer Timings		
March 28		
Fajr	5:00	5:30
Zohr	1:00	1:30
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:15	6:20
Esha	8:00	8:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

## BAPEX under pressure

Energy Ministry lobbying for PSC with a Canadian company

By Sharier Khan

The Energy Ministry is pushing the Bangladeshi oil and gas exploration company BAPEX to sign a production sharing contract (PSC) with a Canadian company that seeks unusually high profit and other options inconsistent with the Model PSC.

The Canadian company, Nico Resources, which was disqualified in the Second Round Block Bidding in 1997, has proposed to jointly develop and produce gas from three already discovered gas fields at Feni, Kamta and Chhatak, owned by BAPEX and Petrobangla. Nico is seeking 90 per cent share, offering only 10 per cent to BAPEX.

The gas fields were discovered by Petrobangla but 'abandoned' for various reasons. Nico has proposed a gas purchase and sale formula which will make gas costlier for Bangladesh, sources said.

The Model PSC of the government outlines a gas pricing formula based on six months' average price of high sulfur fuel oil (HSFO) in Singapore market. The model PSC determines the 'ceiling price' of HSFO at 120 dollars per ton and the floor price at 70 dollars.

But Nico has proposed a ceiling price of 140 dollars per ton and a floor price of 70 dollars, the sources said.

"In fact, no other PSC operator in Bangladesh, despite taking risks in exploration unlike Nico, is seeking such high price," said a source commenting on Nico's proposal.

After approval by the BAPEX board, Nico's proposal will be sent to the Petrobangla board for further processing. Promoted by a strong political lobby, Nico last year submitted a joint study proposal to the government to assess the status of the three gas fields.

As soon as Nico submitted its study proposal, the Energy Ministry instructed BAPEX to initiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with it for a joint venture agreement to study, develop and produce gas from the three gas fields.

Despite BAPEX's reluctance to go for a joint venture or a joint study with a 'weak' company like Nico to assess its own gas fields, the Energy Ministry continued to hammer on a joint venture deal without assessing the benefits, the sources said.

Nico conducted a joint study of the gas fields with a financial grant from Canadian aid agency CIDA and took two BAPEX officials to Canada to

complete the task. "Nico's involvement is almost risk-free because there are already adequate data on these gas fields. In contrast, other PSC operators in Bangladesh are taking a lot of risks in their exploration activities," observed an official.

Besides, the existing PSCs with other oil companies ensure high profit margin for Bangladesh. There is no reason why BAPEX should get 10 per cent share in these discovered gas fields, instead of 90 per cent," he added.

Above all, Nico even lacks the funds for conducting a joint study with BAPEX. It was disqualified by the government in the Second Round Bidding. There are many reputed oil companies including Malaysian national oil company Petronas which had proposed to develop such abandoned or ring fenced fields. In such a situation why should Nico be given any priority?" the official asked.

Meanwhile, the Energy Ministry has stopped funding BAPEX for its exploration activities in Salda - 2 gas field for the last three months.

BAPEX struck a small gas field in Salda river area under Kosba thana near the Indian

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