



## 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 95.1 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.

"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.

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.

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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

## Humayun stages silent protest

From Nurul Kabir and Iqbal Siddique

SYLHET, Mar 26: Noted writer Humayun Ahmed and his family 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 above 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 Bani, 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 Jahangir Imam.

Ahmed, his brother Dr. Jafar Iqbal and his wife Dr. Yasmin Huq – 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, 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 Muktijoddah 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 Hu-

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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 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 he had received a letter on Thursday last which contained the instruction for taking necessary steps for refraining from holding meetings when the house was in session.

Replies 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 6 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 activist 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 MA Haque, town BNP president Ahsa Reza Chowdhury, and district Jatiya Party president Glasuddin Ahmed addressed the meeting. The speakers said novelist Humayun Ahmed is playing as 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.

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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## 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 Haider-uz Zaman said the Speaker was billed for using the chopper for two hours and fifteen minutes. The Speaker was given some d

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## Citicorp gets down to business

By Special Correspondent  
Bangladesh's private sector 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 participated.

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## CAREER OPPORTUNITY

Rhône-Poulenc Rorer is a global pharmaceutical company working to improve human health and quality of life of people throughout the world. As one of the world's leading life sciences companies, our goal is to help people stay healthy. We are working for doctors and patients around the world dedicated to the discovery, development, manufacture and marketing of pharmaceutical products.

A vacancy in the senior management position has arisen in its local affiliate Rhône-Poulenc Rorer Bangladesh Limited for its expanding marketing activities.

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### Prayer Timings

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

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.

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 develop and produce gas from the three gas fields.

Nico's proposal will be placed in the BAPEX board today for approval, they 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.

Source: Islamic Foundation