

Yushchenko poised for govt

Associated Press
Kiev, December 30

UKRAINE'S OPPOSITION leader Viktor Yushchenko forged ahead with thrashing out a new government today as the Supreme Court dismissed part of a last-ditch legal challenge by his defeated pro-Moscow presidential rival.

The Supreme Court rejected two complaints about the conduct of the election from the defeated candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, and said it expected to rule on the fourth and final objection. Yanukovich has also filed an appeal with the central election commission, which was due to be decided today and in case of rejection could then be appealed to the Supreme Court.

Yushchenko, who won last weekend's presidential elections by more than 2.2 million votes, said in a late-night television interview that his Our Ukraine bloc's two main allies would each be offered a quarter-share of Cabinet posts. And he revealed that among the top candidates for Prime Minister was radical opposition figure Yulia Tymoshenko, one of the main organisers of his "orange revolution" and a controversial figure in this divided nation.

"There is an agreement under which my faction and I will mobilise support for the



AP
Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko (right), parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn (centre) and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma attend a prayer service in Kiev on Thursday.

candidacy of Yulia Tymoshenko," the Opposition leader said ahead of his interview on the Opposition Channel 5 network.

In the first concrete indications of the make-up of the new Yushchenko administration, he said the Tymoshenko bloc and the Socialist Party

of Oleksander Moroz would be equally represented in the government.

Apart from Tymoshenko, other candidates under con-

sideration for the post of Premier were Moroz, Petro Poroshenko, an Our Ukraine deputy and owner of *Channel Five*, and Anatoly Kinakh, a leader of a small pro-business party, he said.

Yanukovich meanwhile pressed on with his legal challenges in both the Supreme Court and the election commission, which was to announce its decision at a public meeting later tonight. The Prime Minister has vowed to exhaust every avenue of appeal, including a full-scale hearing by the supreme court, raising the spectre of more legal wrangling stretching into January.

Observers say the appeals are unlikely to scupper the results of Sunday's poll as Yanukovich lacks mass popular support and because the number of irregularities were not enough to narrow the gap between the candidates.

One of Yushchenko's first priorities will be to try to heal divisions in Ukraine, with huge tensions between the nationalist Ukrainian-speaking west and the Russian-speaking east and south, a bastion of support for the Prime Minister. Relations with Russia, which had backed the pro-Kremlin PM in a Cold War-style battle with the West for influence in its former Soviet-bloc backyard, are seen as a problem.

Foiled Viktor moves against poll victor

Kiev, Dec. 29 (Reuters): Defeated Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich pulled out of a cabinet meeting today under pressure from his liberal opponent, but tried to keep a toehold on power by contesting the election result.

Yanukovich — clinging to his Prime Minister's post by a technicality — has refused to concede defeat in Sunday's re-run presidential election. But the West-leaning winner, Viktor Yushchenko, has pledged that the cabinet he still leads will not be allowed to meet.

The government initially cancelled a meeting at its headquarters after Yushchenko's supporters massed to keep Yanukovich out. "We will not let Yanukovich in. He will not be able to conduct a meeting," one of the organisers said. It then moved its session to another part of the capital, but the embattled Premier stayed away, according to Vitaly Lukyanenko, press secretary for finance minister Mykola Azarov.

Instead Yanukovich, who has vowed never to acknowledge his rival's victory, lodged complaints with the election commission and the Supreme Court alleging violations in



Opposition supporters at a blockade of the government headquarters in Kiev. (AFP)

Sunday's ballot. Parliament sacked Yanukovich as head of the government early this month, shortly after an election run-off won by him was annulled as fraudulent.

But the outgoing President, Leonid Kuchma, never signed a final decree, although on election day he said the loser should concede within two days.

Official confirmation of the result of the re-run could

take several days, but the preliminary full count gave Yushchenko 51.99 per cent to the Premier's 44.19 per cent.

A spokeswoman for the Central Election Commission said it had received the complaint late yesterday listing violations of election law in all of Ukraine's 225 electoral districts. The civil chamber of the Supreme Court had already begun considering Yanukovich's complaints.

Yushchenko, who wants to nudge the former Soviet state towards Europe, told tens of thousands of supporters last night that Yanukovich had no right to remain in office.

"Let me officially declare there will be no meeting of the government, this illegal government," Yushchenko said. Yanukovich's return to work this week appeared to be a sign that he hopes to exploit his sole remaining power base.

Parliament speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn, a key player in moves to end weeks of turmoil sparked by the rigged poll, said the Premier's continued presence had "caused indignation for no good reason", according to Interfax Ukraine news agency. Western observers have praised the poll but Russia said there had again been violations.

The Council of Europe, a human rights watchdog and one of the few pan-European organisations of which Ukraine is a member, has urged all sides to accept the verdict.

Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, speaking for the EU, telephoned Yushchenko and welcomed the results, an EU statement said.

Court battle likely again in Kiev

Guardian News Service
Kiev, December 28

UKRAINE'S BITTER presidential election took a new twist last night when the vanquished government candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, refused to accept defeat and vowed to challenge the victory of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko.

Yushchenko won the elections with a whopping two-million vote lead, election officials said. The Central Election Commission said Yushchenko won 51.99 per cent to Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich's 44.19 per cent, according to its final preliminary vote

tally. The decisive win, acknowledged by international leaders and election observers, had seemingly ended a remarkable three-month struggle for power in Europe's largest country. But Yanukovich said: "I will never recognise such a defeat, because the constitution and human rights were violated in our country and people died."

In reference to eight reported deaths at polling stations, mostly from natural causes, he added: "Who will take responsibility for these lives?" He said he would take almost 5,000 complaints to the supreme court. Asked if he would consider going into Oppo-

sition, he replied: "In the first place, I didn't lose."

A court challenge would mimic the Opposition's reaction to the first attempt to hold the presidential run-off on November 21, which was riddled with fraud, provoked huge Opposition protests and was finally invalidated.

The defiance contrasted with broad international recognition of Yushchenko's victory. The Polish President, Aleksander Kwasniewski, offered his congratulations, and the European commission president, Jose Manuel Barroso, said the vote was "a good day for Ukraine and for democracy".

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Exit polls indicate victory for Yushchenko

Associated Press

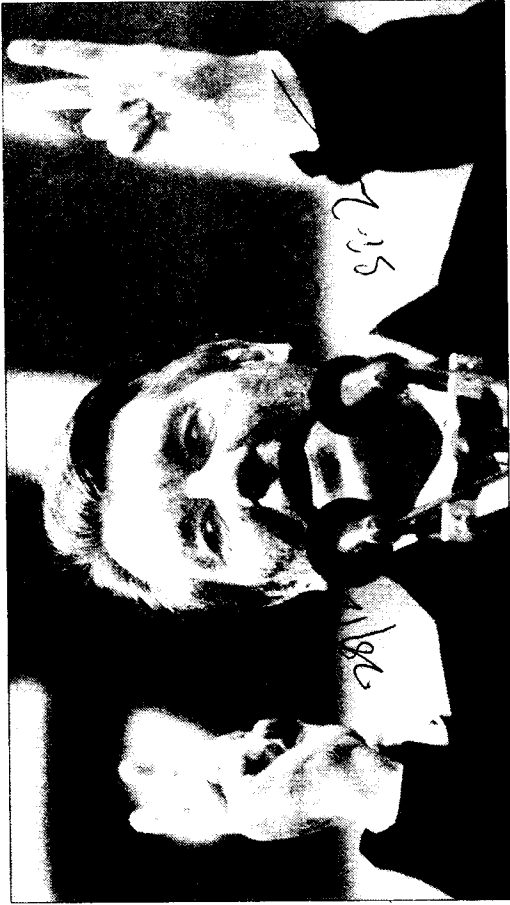
UKRAINE, Dec. 27. — Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko celebrated his apparently decisive triumph in Ukraine's protracted presidential contest today. He thanked the protesters who spent weeks camping out in the capital's frozen streets to secure his victory and the nation's freedom.

Three separate exit polls gave him a 15 to 20 percentage-point lead over Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovych. But the vote count gave Mr Yushchenko a narrower lead. With ballots from 98,49 per cent of precincts counted by 1 p.m. (1100 GMT), Mr Yushchenko was leading with 52.29 per cent votes as compared to Mr Yanukovych's 43.92 per cent votes.

"Now, today, the Ukrainian people have won. I congratulate you," he told a jubilant crowd in Kiev's Independence Square, the centre of massive protests following the 21 November presidential run-off that was annulled after allegations that it had been a fraud.

"We have been independent for 14 years but we were not free," Mr Yushchenko said adding: "Now we can say this is a thing of the past. Now we are facing an independent and free Ukraine." But Mr Yanukovych had not conceded defeat and Mr Nestor Shufrych, a lawmaker and Yanukovych ally, said that they would appeal against the results.

Results were trickling in slowly from two regions in pro-Yanukovych territory in eastern Ukraine. Central Election Commission chairman Mr Yaroslav Davydovych urged election workers to do



Mr Viktor Yushchenko flashes the victory sign to supporters at the Independence Square, in Kiev on Monday. — AFP

their jobs. "Put political issues aside. The state is waiting for results," he said.

Georgian President Mr Mikhail Saakashvili, whose own accession to power on a wave of peaceful protest in November 2003 inspired Ukraine's Opposition, congratulated Mr Yushchenko in a Ukrainian-language message delivered over Ukrainian television. Mr Saakashvili, who attended law school in the erstwhile Soviet Ukraine, apparently is the first foreign leader to publicly recognise Mr Yushchenko's victory.

Poland's former President Mr Lech Walesa told the Polish news agency PAP that Mr Yushchenko's victory meant, "Ukraine is on its way to freedom and democracy has made a small move towards Europe." International observers

praised the election as calm and orderly. Mr Yushchenko was not taking chances. He called his supporters onto the square today afternoon to defend the election victory, if necessary, and asked for their help in what he called the main task facing the nation, that is forming a trustworthy government.

Some 12,000 foreign observers watched Sunday's unprecedented third-round vote to help prevent a repeat of the apparent widespread fraud on 21 November. This time too complaints were lodged by Mr Yanukovych's headquarters. But Mr Mykola Melnyk, a member of the Central EC insisted: "This repeat vote was fair and honest, especially in comparison with the second round."

Crown of thorns

KIEV, Dec. 27. — Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko's apparent victory in Ukraine's presidential election heralds the end of a hard-fought battle, but his real fight is only just beginning. He is poised to take charge of a deeply divided nation, one at odds with its biggest trading partner, wracked by corruption and gripped by tensions arising from the voting last month that was annulled after allegations of widespread fraud forced Sunday's rerun.

The economy is booming, but most of Ukraine's key industries are controlled by a handful of tycoons, most of whom are backed by Mr Yushchenko's opponent, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, who had been declared winner by 21 November ballot. And the political team Mr Yushchenko must rely on to fulfill the dreams of millions of Ukrainians is a cobbled-together coalition with vastly different ideas about how much power the presidency should have.

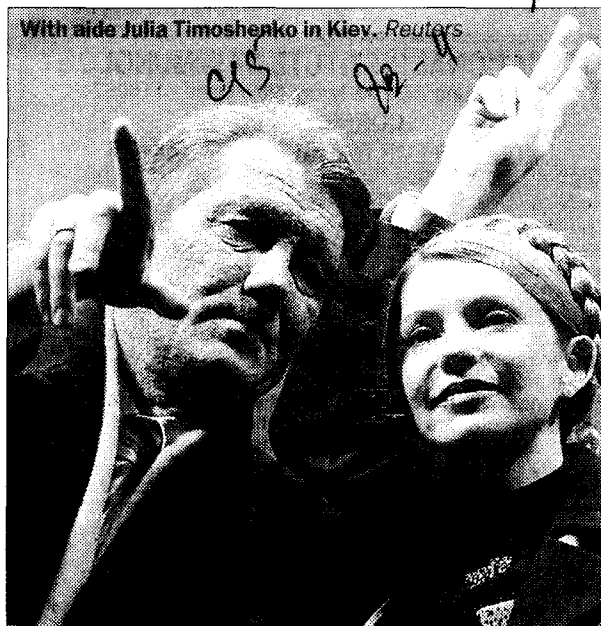
Adding to Mr Yushchenko's troubles is Mr Yanukovych who seems to be in no hurry to concede, thereby clouding Mr Yushchenko's victory with the threat of a prolonged court battle over legitimacy. The bitter campaign deepened the rift between Ukraine's Russian-speaking, heavily-industrialised east and cosmopolitan Kiev and the west, where Ukrainian nationalism runs deep.

"The situation in the east will be a very big challenge," Mr Darya Gilushenko, a political analyst with the Kiev-based International Centre for Policy Studies said. "He will have to be very attentive to this region, to its problems because right now they believe he is ignoring them."

It also remains unclear whether Mr Yushchenko will be able to smooth over relations with the Kremlin, Ukraine's former Soviet-era master. Russian President Vladimir Putin openly backed Mr Yanukovych, and while he has said that he could work with Mr Yushchenko, he also suggested that Mr Yushchenko's strength came as a result of foreign meddling, notably that of the United States of America.

Mr Yushchenko has promised that his first foreign trip would be to Moscow, and he told journalists last week: "I have no intention of creating new problems." — AP

A new era for Ukraine, says Yushchenko



OLENA HORODETSKA
KIEV, DECEMBER 27

WESTERN-leaning Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko took an unbeatable lead on Monday in Ukraine's re-run presidential election, claiming victory and hailing the beginning of a new era in the ex-Soviet republic.

With more than 90 per cent of Sunday's ballot counted, the Central Election Commission said Yushchenko had an unassailable lead with almost 54 per cent of the votes against just above 42 per cent for Moscow-backed Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich.

The results suggested Yushchenko, his face disfigured by bumps and spots from dioxin poisoning which he

blames on authorities, had won by a big enough margin to carry out a major overhaul of what he sees as years of corrupt government.

"I want to say this is a victory of the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian nation ... today we became free," Yushchenko told reporters at his headquarters in Kiev. The re-run was forced when the Supreme Court upheld charges of vote-rigging in a November 21 election that Yanukovich won.

"This is the beginning of a new epoch, the beginning of a new great democracy."

He later addressed tens of thousands of supporters in Independence Square, where earlier fireworks had lit up the sky when exit polls showed him as winning.

—Reuters

Exit poll boost to Yushchenko

Kiev, Dec. 26 (Reuters): Liberal challenger Viktor Yushchenko won a re-run of Ukraine's rigged presidential election by a substantial margin, according to an exit poll published just after voting closed today.

A Yushchenko win is likely to push the ex-Soviet state, poorly managed for years but with huge economic potential, closer to Europe and, Moscow fears, further away from its traditional influence.

Yushchenko scored 56.5 per cent in the exit poll to 41.3 per cent for Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, whose victory last month was overturned by the Supreme Court. A second exit poll gave him a

slightly wider margin of victory, 59.1 per cent to 38.4 per cent. Yushchenko — backed by hundreds of thousands of protesters who brought central Kiev to a halt for over two weeks — claimed he was cheated of victory in the November 21 election.

The Supreme Court later agreed there had been fraud and annulled the result which had given victory to Yanukovich.

The first exit poll represented 80 per cent of the 30,000 sample conducted by the Kiev International Institute for Sociology and the Razumkov Centre. The second poll, by the Centre for Social Monitoring, surveyed 13,000 voters.

Yanukovich accuses his rival of trying to stage an "orange coup" on behalf of foreign powers. "I expect the Ukrainian people to make the correct choice. I voted for our future, the future of the Ukrainian people," he said as he voted.

Turnout, just short of 55 per cent at 1300 GMT, was little changed from the two previous rounds. More than 33,000 polling stations in the country of 47 million people had remained open for 12 hours.

About 12,000 foreign observers were monitoring the vote.

A former Prime Minister and central bank governor, Yushchenko has promised to build a modern economy free



Yushchenko after casting his vote in Kiev. (AFP)

"I will win. That's 100 per cent. I'm absolutely certain," Yushchenko, holding his youngest son in his arms, told reporters after casting his ballot in the capital.

The Russian-backed

of the corruption which marked the 10-year mandate of outgoing President Leonid Kuchma. The outgoing President said he hoped the campaign would now come to an end.

"Today, we will at last have a new President," firebrand opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko said. "Today, it will be a beginning of a new era in Ukraine."

Yushchenko has been careful to describe neighbouring Russia — on which Ukraine depends for energy supplies — as a strategic partner.

He has appealed also to Russian-speaking voters in the east of the country which backs Yanukovich.

Exit polls give Yushchenko victory

Reuters
Kyiv, December 26

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Viktor Yushchenko with his one-year-old son outside a polling station in Kiev on Sunday.

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Legal changes

After the Supreme Court annulled Yanukovich's victory, parliament approved a series of legal changes to eliminate electoral fraud and trim the powers of any future president. Yushchenko described the last-minute changes as a "fly in the ointment". His team said the effect on the vote would be minimal.

But he has been careful to describe neighbouring Russia — on which Ukraine depends for energy supplies — as a strategic partner.

He has appealed also to Russian-speaking voters in the east of the country, which backs Yanukovich.

Kuchma backed Yanukovich in the earlier vote but the latter now attacks him bitterly. Kuchma told reporters he hoped the campaign would now come to an end. "Dear God, let this be the final vote," Kuchma said, suggesting the loser concede within two days.

"I hope this time we will make it work, though I feel people are divided," Lidia, walking with a support, said after voting in Kiev, where support for the challenger is strong. "I voted for a free, democratic Ukraine — Yushchenko, of course. I hope people like me will be cared for."

AP

Ukrainians choose President in run-off

CIS HD-15

KIEV (UKRAINE), DEC. 26. Rival candidates Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich faced off on Sunday in a repeat election triggered by a disputed runoff vote and massive protests that resulted in an unprecedented third round in Ukraine's fiercely-waged presidential contest.

The vote is momentous for Ukraine, a nation of 48 million people caught between an eastward-expanding European Union and NATO, and an increasingly assertive Russia.

The Opposition candidate Yushchenko, a former Central Bank chief and Prime Minister, wants to bring Ukraine closer to the West, while the Kremlin-backed Prime Minister Yanukovich emphasises tightening the Slavic country's ties with Russia as a means to maintaining stability.

Oresta Stepanchuk, a Kiev teacher, said she was casting her ballot for Mr. Yushchenko "because he offers us some prospects, some decent life." Another voter at the same precinct, Mykola Vladimirov, said he supported Mr. Yanukovich because "the others will sell the country to Americans."

At least we now have a chance to live as independent people, but with him [Mr. Yushchenko] we will be no more than American slaves," he said.

Round-the-clock protests

Mr. Yushchenko, whose face remains badly scarred from dioxin poisoning he blamed on Ukrainian authorities, has emerged as the

front-runner, building on the momentum of round-the-clock protests that echoed the spirit of the anti-Communist revolutions that swept other East European countries in 1989-90.

His backers launched the demonstrations after Mr. Yanukovich was named the winner of the disputed November 21 runoff. The Supreme Court later annulled the results and ordered Sunday's repeat vote — an unprecedented third round being monitored by a 12,000 international observers.

The outgoing President, Leonid Kuchma, said he cast his ballot hoping the results would stick.

"In my opinion, the one who loses should call and congratulate the winner ... and put an end to this prolonged election campaign."

Tent city

As the polls opened, smoke from cooking fires rose above one end of Kiev's stately main avenue, the Kreshchatyk, where Mr. Yushchenko supporters have camped out in a tent city for the five weeks.

"What we did during the last 30 days was a tribute to our ancestors," Mr. Yushchenko told reporters after voting in Kiev's trade union building. "I know they are looking at us from heaven and they are applauding."

Casting his ballot at a different Kiev polling station alongside his wife, Lyudmila, Mr. Yanukovich said: "I voted for the future of Ukrainian people. I am waiting for Ukraine to make the right choice." — AP

27 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Ukraine court takes on electoral law

AS ASSOCIATED PRESS

5-4
KIEV, Dec. 25. — Ukraine's Constitutional Court ruled today that Opposition-initiated restrictions on allowing disabled people to vote at home violate the constitution, a day before a repeat of the presidential election.

The head of the elections commission said the re-vote must be held as scheduled, despite the court's ruling.

Supporters of Opposition presidential candidate Mr Viktor Yushchenko had pushed for the restrictions saying they are necessary to prevent a repeat of the vote fraud that marred the 21

November presidential runoff. Ukraine's Supreme Court invalidated the results of the November vote, cancelling the victory of Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovych and ordering a new ballot.

The Constitutional Court said in its ruling Saturday that the restrictions on allowing disabled people to vote at home were unconstitutional and must be lifted immediately.

Yaroslav Davydovych, head of the Central Election Commission, told journalists that he was not yet aware of the ruling, but said that election officials will "react in an adequate way."

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We will fulfil the decision of the Constitutional Court," he said.

"We don't have another alternative. The vote must be held." Pro-Yanukovych lawmakers lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Court, claiming that the electoral law changes passed this month would deprive millions of their right to vote. The changes also included provisions that restricted absentee balloting.

Parliament passed the changes as part of a package deal that included political reforms called for by outgoing President Leonid Kuchma and pro-Yanukovych lawmakers limiting some presidential powers.

26 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Yushchenko lambasts PM at TV debate

Reuters
Kiev, December 21

LIBERAL CHALLENGER
Viktor Yushchenko on Monday launched a bruising attack on Ukraine's Prime Minister in a live debate, his rival in a rigged presidential election, repeatedly putting him on the defensive.

Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich face each other in a new election December 26, ordered by the Supreme Court after it overturned the November 21 vote, won by Yanukovich, on grounds of mass fraud.

Crowds in Yushchenko's orange campaign colours

brought Kiev to a halt for two weeks to demand a new vote, exposing again the split between Ukraine's nationalist west, behind the challenger, and the Russian-speaking east, which supported the prime minister.

Yushchenko, whose face is disfigured by dioxin poisoning he blames on authorities, redeemed a limp performance in a debate staged before the now discredited previous vote.

He demanded a moral explanation for what he said had been 3 million illicit votes. Yanukovich, looking nonplussed, repeatedly asked his rival to hold talks



AP

Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko's wife, Kateryna, and son Taras watch the televised debate in Kiev on Monday.

ing Yushchenko, a former prime minister and central banker, asked his rival

to form policy jointly. "You're a religious person, right?" the West-leaning

across a stark blue studio. "Thou shalt not steal ... And then you stole 3 million votes ... Perhaps the Supreme Court is lying and you are telling the truth?"

Speaking in calm, measured Ukrainian, the country's sole state language since independence, he accused the Prime Minister of demeaning tens of thousands of protesters who thronged city squares by referring to them as "bastards" or "orange rats".

Yanukovich, backed by big neighbour Russia in the earlier campaign, said his two years in office had improved living standards.

Ukraine hunt for poisoner

JULIUSSTRAUSS

London, Dec. 13: A criminal investigation into the poisoning of the Ukrainian Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko began yesterday after tests showed that his blood contained 1,000 times the normal level of dioxin.

The poisoning caused the severe chloracne which led to the disfigurement of his face.

The results of the investigation are likely to prove politically explosive amid feverish speculation that Yushchenko was the victim of a Cold War-style poisoning by members of the country's intelligence services.

The inquiry, announced by the Ukrainian authorities last night, will be led by a prosecutor general who recently took on his post as part of a deal between the Opposition and the authorities aimed at ending the country's political standoff.

Several officials have recently defected from the government to Yushchenko's camp, increasing the likelihood that the truth behind the apparent attempt to kill him will be made public.

Last night, Yushchenko, who returned to Kiev from a private clinic in Vienna with his wife, Kateryna, and baby, sought to draw a line under the case until after a new round of presidential elections on December 26.

"I don't want this factor to influence the election in some way, either as a plus or a minus," he said. "This ques-



Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko hugs a girl in Vienna. (AFP)

brandy or contracted herpes.

However, suspicions that members of the intelligence services could have been involved grew yesterday after doctors disclosed that the poisoning was only confirmed because of a newly pioneered test and would otherwise have been untraceable. Dr Michael Zimpfer, director of the clinic in Vienna that treated Yushchenko, said it was only after blood and tissue samples were sent to Amsterdam that doctors were able to confirm their suspicions.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

tion will require a great deal of time and serious investigation. Let us do it after the election. Today is not the moment."

He went on to praise the tens of thousands of Ukrainians who demonstrated for weeks in sub-zero temperatures until the authorities agreed to a new vote. "We haven't seen anything like that for the past 100 years. I think it would be appropriate to compare this to the fall of the Soviet Union or the fall of the Berlin Wall."

Viennese doctors said at the weekend that tests showed Yushchenko had ingested a near-fatal dose of dioxin, probably in his food or drink.

Confirmation that he was

poisoned is likely to improve his chances in the run-off. Doctors have given him the go-ahead to return to the campaign trail but said it may be years before his face returns to normal.

The disclosure that Yushchenko had ingested dioxin, an extremely rare poison, has increased suspicion that the regime of the outgoing President, Leonid Kuchma, which had the most to gain from his demise, may have been involved.

Yushchenko fell mysteriously ill in September after a late dinner at the country house of Volodymyr Satysuk, the first deputy chairman of the SBU, Ukraine's intelligence service and the successor to the KGB.

Government officials privately dismissed his claims that he had survived an assassination attempt, saying he had probably drunk too much

Kiev compromise

From presidential to parliamentary system

Ukraine's electoral crisis, which split the country down the middle and threatened to re-ignite the Cold War, appears to be amicably resolved. The government and opposition agreed to constitutional reforms that were passed by a 402-21 margin in parliament, opening the way to a repoll on December 26. It would appear that Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich expects to lose the repoll, his mentor, outgoing President Leonid Kuchma, held out for and won substantial dilution of presidential powers after centralising power in his own hands and exercised it questionably during his decade-long tenure. On the other hand Viktor Yushchenko, leader of the opposition who expects to be President, has made considerable sacrifice for the sake of national reconciliation and reassuring the recalcitrant East which is dominated by the Russians.

Under the constitutional reforms that he agreed, the President will exercise only a veto power over parliament's nominees for prime minister, foreign minister and defence minister. Other Cabinet ministers will be chosen unilaterally by parliament. It is fair to say that with the adoption of the reforms, Ukraine is moving from a presidential system of the type prevalent in the USA, to more of a parliamentary system on a European model. Yushchenko's coalition ally, Yulia Tymoshenko, thinks that he got a bad deal and shouldn't have compromised, as the political momentum was with him. The only saving grace, from his point of view, is that the reforms won't kick in till parliamentary elections are held in spring 2006. If he becomes president now after the repoll, he can choose his ministers for the interim period. His supporters must be hoping that when 2006 comes around they will sweep parliament, evenly divided between both sides, putting an end to the problem of divided authority. Meanwhile Yushchenko will try to use his ability to compromise to build support in the eastern Ukraine, currently solidly in Yanukovich's camp. But for now, at least, the spectre of instability and civil unrest has been staved off.

13 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

12 DEC 2004

Doctors confirm Yushchenko poisoning

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIENNA, Dec. 11. — Doctors poisoning caused the mysterious illness of Ukrainian Opposition leader and presidential candidate Mr Viktor Yushchenko, doctors said today, adding it could have been put in his soup.

Mr Yushchenko is now in satisfactory condition and

dioxin levels in his liver have returned to normal, Dr Michael Zimpfer, director of Vienna's private Rudolfinnerhaus clinic, told a news conference. Dr Nikolai Korpan added that no functional damage would remain and that Mr Yushchenko was "fully capable of working".

A series of tests run over the past 24 hours provided con-

clusive evidence of the poisoning, Dr Zimpfer said. "There is no doubt about the fact that Mr. Yushchenko's disease especially following the results of the blood work — has been caused by a case of poisoning by dioxin.

"We suspect involvement of an external party, but we can't answer as to who cooked what or who was with him

while he ate," the doctor said, adding that tests showed the dioxin was taken orally.

Blood tests have been run on Mr Yushchenko before, but this time the hospital sent the samples to a hospital in Amsterdam which is using a new analysis method that could test it for dioxin, Dr Korpan said.

When first seen by the

Austrian doctors, Mr Yushchenko was in a critical stage but was "not on the verge of dying", Dr Zimpfer said. "If this dose had been higher, it may have caused death."

The illness has left Mr Yushchenko with a badly disfigured face. The tests showed he suffered from chloracne, a type of adult acne caused by exposure to toxic chemicals.



Mr Viktor Yushchenko

THE STATESMAN

Ukraine poison kiss

Washington, Dec. 10 (Reuters): The wife of Ukrainian Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko said today she tasted poison on his lips when she kissed him, and blamed the poisoning for disfiguring her husband's face.

"I thought there was something different about my husband when he came home that night — because he has never taken any medicine, he's a very healthy man," Kateryna Yushchenko said in an interview on ABC's *Good Morning America*.

"And I tasted some medicine on his breath, on his lips. And I asked him about it, he brushed it away, saying there is nothing."

She said the next day her husband became ill and eventually was rushed to a hospital. "We were told that if we had only waited a few hours, we might have lost him," Kateryna Yushchenko said. She did not specify when the incident occurred.

Viktor Yushchenko fell ill in September while on the presidential campaign trail and was flown to Austria for treatment. He later

accused the authorities of trying to kill him with poison. Speaking from Kiev, the Chicago-born Kateryna Yushchenko said her husband's facial disfigurement increased over a period of weeks. "It started slowly because obviously poison hits different parts of your body at different times, but it's been coming out more and more," she said.

"But doctors assure us that when the poison goes away, his face will return to the way it looked before. My husband was known as a very handsome man and I know he'll look the same."

Asked about who might have poisoned her husband, she replied: "My husband has said it's basically the people in power, the people who don't want the system to change."

Moscow-backed Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich was declared the winner in the Ukrainian contest's November 21 run-off, sparking street protests in support of Yushchenko and accusations the government rigged the election against him.

THE TELEGRAPH

Ukraine parliament nod to electoral reforms

Associated Press

KIEV, Dec. 8. — Ukraine's parliament adopted electoral and constitutional changes today in a compromise intended to defuse the nation's political crisis, prompting Opposition leaders to say they would lift a blockade of government buildings.

The vote came as a surprise after more than two weeks of political manoeuvring and street protests. It suggested that Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko's camp had determined prolonged unrest could weaken the country and his own position ahead of the 26 December re-run of the presidential election, particularly in the pro-Russian east of the country.

The package was approved in a 402-21 vote with 19 abstentions. Lawmakers stood and cheered as President Leonid Kuchma signed the measure.

"Over the last 100 years, Ukraine has more than once suffered through a crisis, but there was always enough common sense to find a way out and a decision," Mr Kuchma said.

Under the changes, the President no longer has the power to appoint his own government, but keeps the right to reject parliamentary nominees for the top three positions — Prime Minister, foreign minister and

defence minister. The parliament also earns the right to appoint all other Cabinet positions without presidential approval.

"This makes it impossible to have an authoritarian government in Ukraine," said Mr Mikhail Pogrebinsky, a Kiev-based political analyst with close ties to Mr Yanukovich.

To prevent electoral fraud in the new ballot, restrictions will be placed on absentee voting.

Mr Yushchenko's supporters had pushed strongly for the changes, but had resisted constitutional reforms, fearing they would weaken the presidency.

They had also called for the resignation of Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovich, who was declared the winner of the 21 November runoff which was later annulled by the Supreme Court. But Mr Kuchma refused to fire him and he retained his post after the parliamentary session ended without taking any action on the issue.

Ukraine's Opposition planned to lift its blockades of government buildings at 7 p.m. (5 p.m. GMT) today, Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz said.

As word about the decision spread, demonstrators — exhausted after spending two weeks in the streets in the freezing Ukrainian winter, expressed relief.

After signing the text, Mr Kuchma



President Leonid Kuchma signs a document during the Ukrainian parliament's emergency session in Kiev on Wednesday. — AFP

shook hands with parliament Speaker Mr Volodymyr Lytvyn and the deputy Speakers.

"We didn't go beyond the limits and didn't fall over the precipice," Mr Lytvyn said. "I hope that after this decision, the situation will stabilise."

Lawmakers also began to reshuffle the Central Election Commission, voting to oust its head, Mr Serhiy Kivalov. The vote was 146-129. A decision to nominate him again was met with shouts of "Shame!" by Yushchenko supporters.

09 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Ukraine Parliament backs reforms

CS By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, DEC. 8. Ukraine's Parliament on Wednesday approved a package of bills to defuse a post-election crisis that has gripped the post-Soviet republic for over two weeks.

Verhovna Rada overwhelmingly endorsed a constitutional reform to trim presidential powers and amendments to the electoral law to prevent the kind of fraud that ruined a close presidential race last month and provoked a full-fledged political crisis.

The power reform effectively transforms Ukraine from a presidential to a parliamentary republic. It transfers power to appoint all top posts except for the Prime Minister, Defence and Foreign Ministers from the President to Parliament. Even then the Parliament has a key say in choosing Prime Minister as the President nominates a candidate for the post after consultations with the parliamen-

tary parties. The President's candidates for the Defence and Foreign Ministers also need to be approved by legislators.

Package deal

The Opposition led by the former Prime Minister, Viktor Yushchenko, lifted its objections to supporting changes in the Constitution after the outgoing President, Leonid Kuchma, agreed to sack the Prosecutor-General and overhaul the Central Election Commission. The Opposition also won a nine-month delay for the power reform, which will become effective from September 1, 2005.

The package deal clears the way to a re-run of the second-round runoff between Mr. Yushchenko and the Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, whose victory in the Nov. 21 vote was overturned by the Supreme Court last week.

It is yet to be seen whether the compromise achieved in

Kiev today will help douse separatist tendencies in the pro-Russian south-eastern regions which threatened to vote for autonomy if the pro-Western Opposition leader becomes President. Russia, which backed Mr. Yanukovich in the presidential poll, accused the West of interfering in the crisis by using double standards in election monitoring and bringing pressure on the Supreme Court and the Government.

The NATO military alliance today postponed ministerial talks with Ukraine until a "legitimate government" is in place in Kiev, an official said.

Russian prosecutors today reconfirmed an arrest warrant issued through Interpol for Mr. Yushchenko's right-hand ally, Yulia Timoshenko. She is accused of swindling the Russian Defence Ministry of hundreds of millions of dollars when she was Deputy Prime Minister in Ukraine's Cabinet headed by Mr. Yushchenko in 1999-2001.

09 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

I'll accept the will of Ukrainians: Putin

By C J Chivers



12-11 *CS*
Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday adjusted his hard-line position on the presidential election in Ukraine, saying that he would accept the choice of the Ukrainian people and would work with whichever candidate wins the second run-off election, now scheduled for December 26.

Putin effectively conceded that his unequivocal choice for the Ukrainian presidency, Prime Minister Viktor F Yanukovich, might not prevail in the repeat vote, leaving him few options but to accept a victory by the opposition candidate, Viktor A Yushchenko. *SPD*

In acknowledging that possibility, Putin eased away from statements he had made in recent weeks that had left him in the awkwardly isolated position of supporting a candidate whose campaign was marred by fraud, and whose personal history includes convictions for violent crime. But beyond that tacit acknowledgement, Putin gave little ground. He openly grumbled about the new direction of Ukrainian political affairs. He suggested that the pro-democracy demonstrations and other events in Kiev, Ukraine's capital, which led to the Supreme Court's nullification of Yanukovich's victory, set a dangerous precedent and demonstrated the ills of a rambunctious democracy.

The political crisis in Ukraine, which has deadlocked the nation of 48 million for more than two weeks, has become a political challenge for Putin. It is an issue in which he has invested his personal stature, and it has exposed some of the limits of both his power and, his critics have said, his judgment.

The realisation in Moscow that Ukraine is moving in ways the Kremlin did not anticipate has ignited a round of especially strident statements from Russia's political elite, as well as sustained hand-wringing on news programmes and in newspapers. NYT News Service

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5/12
219

Ukraine run-off vote on Dec 26

Kiev: Ukraine's Central Electoral Commission on Saturday set December 26 as the date for a new run-off presidential election after the Supreme Court annulled the disputed November 21 poll and ordered a new ballot.

Parliament must now endorse the decision, which must then be signed into effect by outgoing president Leonid Kuchma.

The announcement came shortly after pro-Russia Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich said he would stand in the new run-off against pro-western opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko after the Supreme Court stripped Yanukovich of victory in the earlier poll. "I am certain that the Supreme Court's decision is a violation of the Ukrainian constitution and that it was taken under pressure from the street," he said in a statement distributed to journalists.

"Without any doubt, I have no other choice but to

run again and to win," added Yanukovich.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court agreed with an appeal by the opposition that results from the previous election, which showed Yanukovich winning over Yushchenko by some one million votes, should be annulled because of fraud and ordered a new poll.



Yanukovich



Yushchenko

The European Union has welcomed the Ukraine Supreme Court's decision to annul the results of a contested presidential election and order a new vote, saying it hoped the ruling would lead to a swift resolution of the crisis.

"I appeal to all parties and institutions in Ukraine to fully cooperate in the implementation of the decision of the court with a view to holding free, fair and transparent elections," EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said.

The US also welcomed the decision by Ukraine's Supreme Court to annul the bitterly disputed presidential election. AFP

05 DEC 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Ukraine elections declared invalid

**Court orders
repoll by
December 26**

Agencies
Kiev, December 3

THE SUPREME Court declared the results of Ukraine's disputed presidential run-off election invalid and ruled on Friday that the run-off should be repeated by December 26, bringing cheers from tens of thousands of opposition supporters massed in Kiev's main square.

The ruling, made after five days of hearings by the court's 18 justices, was a major victory for Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, who had rejected the government's demands that an entirely new election be held.

The Opposition had pinned its hopes on the court's ruling in its bid to overturn the results of the November 21 run-off vote in which Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich was declared the winner. The Opposition said the vote was rigged to cheat Yushchenko of victory.

The ruling appeared to run counter to what beleaguered outgoing President Leonid Kuchma had sought in nearly two weeks of bitter wrangling.

Presiding Judge Anatoly Yaremko said a new run-off vote should be held by December 26. When the ruling was announced, the opposition supporters who have massed for nearly



Supporters of Ukrainian Opposition leader Victor Yushchenko celebrate after hearing the supreme court verdict in the central square of Kiev on Friday. AFP

“This is a great victory of all people who have been standing at the square, a great victory for Ukrainian democracy,” said Mykola Katerinchuk, the Yushchenko lawyer who wrote the appeal. Representatives from Yanukovich and the Central Election Commission left the courthouse before the judges announced their decision. The runoff had triggered a massive political crisis, with tens of thousands of Yushchenko supporters maintaining a round-the-clock vigil in the capital for the 12th day Friday and laying siege to official buildings.

KIEV CRISIS

- Nov 21** Ukrainians vote in runoff presidential election.
- Nov 22** Election officials declare Yanukovich has won, with 49.42 per cent compared with Yushchenko's 46.7 per cent.
- Nov 23** Yushchenko declares himself the winner of the runoff.
- Nov 24** Opp leaders call for strike. Outgoing President Leonid Kuchma says Yushchenko supporters are trying to carry out 'a coup d'etat'.
- Nov 25** Yushchenko files an appeal with the Supreme Court. Court agrees to delay official certification of the results, preventing Yanukovich from being inaugurated.
- Nov 26** Kuchma, Yushchenko and Yanukovich meet jointly with European envoys.
- Nov 27** Ukraine's parliament declares the election invalid.
- Nov 28** Legislature in Yanukovich stronghold of Donetsk calls a referendum on autonomy.
- Nov 29** Kuchma proposes new elections.
- Nov 30** Opp supporters walk out of EU-mediated talks and protesters try to break into Parliament.
- Dec 1** Parliament votes no confidence in the government. European-brokered talks between the two candidates show momentum toward holding a new ballot.
- Dec 2** Kuchma flies to Moscow for meeting with Putin.
- Dec 3:** Supreme Court declares elections invalid.

Yanukovych ousted, new poll likely

Agence France Presse

KIEV, Dec. 1. — A divided Ukraine today faced the likely prospect of new presidential elections after the Supreme Court said that both candidates had asked it to annul the disputed results of a runoff vote and outgoing President Leonid Kuchma called for a brand new poll.

The dramatic announcement by the Supreme Court came hours after Ukraine's Parliament voted to oust Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovych from power and replace his team with a "people's government" made up of supporters of pro-western Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko.

The regional legislature in Mr Yanukovych's eastern home region of Donetsk, meanwhile, decided to hold a referendum on 9 January seeking a measure of autonomy from the country's central government — a move that would transform Ukraine into a federation.

The parliamentary no-confidence vote, with 229 in

thousands of orange-clad demonstrators reveled in the streets of Kiev as it became increasingly clear that the government was folding its hand and giving in to 10 days of "orange revolution" protest.

"Yanukovich's team contends that the results given do not reflect the ballot protocols, especially in the west of the country, and is asking the court to annul the results of the 21 November vote," Mr Justice Anatoly Yarema told a court hearing on alleged fraud in the ballot.

The United States also picked up on the new vote proposal while Russia — which had initially recognised Mr Yanukovych's contested 21 November victory over Mr Yushchenko — hedged its bets and issued no comment.

The shift came after the European Union's foreign policy chief Mr Javier Solana and Polish President Mr Aleksander

Kwasniewski rushed to Kiev along with other European and Russian officials to resolve a dispute that threatens to sink Ukraine's economy and divide the country.



Police guard the parliament building in Kiev as it is surrounded by hundreds of Opposition supporters on Wednesday. — AFP

favour, 3 more than necessary in the 450-seat parliament, came minutes after

the chamber's first attempt to pass the measure failed to garner enough support.

With senior European mediators in town trying to resolve the crisis, tens of

02 DEC 2004

Ukraine House sacks govt, rivals happy

Kiev, Dec. 1 (Reuters): Ukraine's Opposition scored a victory today in its drive to overturn what it says was a rigged election, when parliament sacked the government of Prime Minister and president-designate Viktor Yanukovich.

Several hurdles remain before Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko can claim outright victory in a crisis that has threatened to tear apart the ex-Soviet state which sits between former master Russia and an expanded EU. The vote passed at the second attempt through secret ballot at an unruly sitting of the Assembly, with Yushchenko's backers sporting orange scarves and ties — his campaign colour. Outside, tens of thousands

of his supporters followed the debate through loudspeakers, cheering wildly at every procedural measure and embracing as the outcome was announced.

"It is an important and serious victory for us but there is still a lot to be done," parliamentary deputy Mykola Tomenko told the crowd in nearby Independence Square, taken over by Opposition supporters since the disputed November 21 presidential election. The Opposition has vowed to use "People Power" to win demands for a new election soon.

Approval came just before the start of efforts by international mediators to help settle the crisis. Deputies had also voted to create an interim "govern-

ment of national trust". Outgoing President Leonid Kuchma made clear he would not easily give up his battle with the Opposition, rejecting its key demand the presidential run-off his protegee won be held again. "Any rerun would simply be a farce. I cannot see it in any other way and I will never support it as it would be unconstitutional," he told a meeting of economic officials.

The Supreme Court was sitting for a third day to decide whether the election was fraudulent. If it rules in favour of the Opposition, the Central Election Commission will have to revoke the victory it handed to Yanukovich and can then either set a repeat vote or a completely new election which would take up to three months to complete.

Yanukovich, who has repeatedly said there was cheating in Yushchenko's stronghold in western Ukraine, submitted his own case on fraud, one of the court's judges said. "Yanukovich has submitted to the Supreme Court an appeal on the inactivity of the Central Election Commission," the judge said. "It says the commission distorted the outcome of the election during the count. Consequently, the results do not reflect the will of the people."

The sacking of Yanukovich, crucially for the Opposition, means he has effectively lost his administrative power base to help in a new election.

But there is widespread speculation that Kuchma will drop him and look for a new

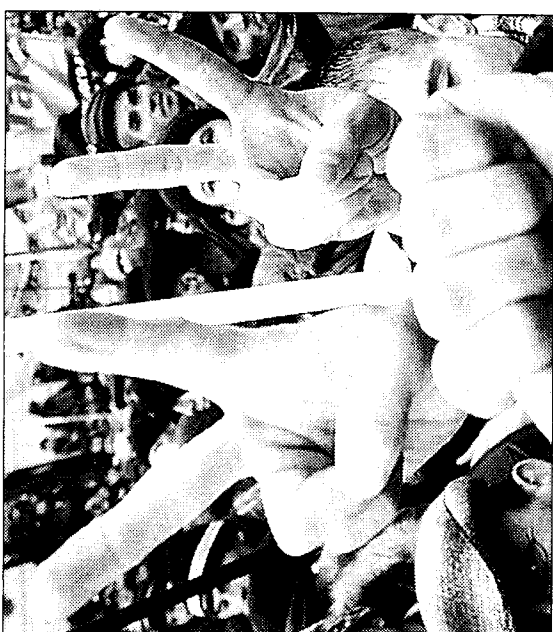
protege to challenge Yushchenko.

The sides have been deadlocked, neither quite able to deliver the final blow and aware that one false step could trigger mass violence in a country which has voted largely along linguistic and cultural lines.

So bitter has the political debate become that the losing side faces being completely shut out of power.

"It's very important that violence not break out there, and it's important that the will of the people be heard," Bush said.

Kuchma, whose 10-year rule is tarnished by scandal and poor economic management, has suggested he might agree to the longer process of a new election from scratch.



Supporters of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko celebrate in Kiev. (AFP)

Ukraine's top court meets on election crisis

Kiev: Ukraine's top court met on Monday to try to resolve an election crisis that threatens to split the country, but said it could take days to issue a ruling in a case that is also chilling relations between the West and Russia.

Legal experts said the supreme court was unlikely to be able to satisfy either side in the bitter dispute over whether Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich won the Nov 21 presidential election by fraud, as alleged by his opponent Viktor Yushchenko.

"Examining the case could



Supporters of Viktor Yushchenko hold a rally in Kiev demanding a re-poll

take anywhere from a few hours to several days, depending on how many representatives each side puts forward and the nature of their statements," court press secretary Liana Shlyaposhnikova told reporters just before the hearing started.

The westward-leaning Yushchenko wants his Moscow-backed rival's victory annulled and a new vote to be held on Dec 12. Thousands of Yushchenko supporters massed outside the court in the morning, chanting "Truth" and "Yushchenko".

The court, Ukraine's highest legal body, consists of about 100 judges. Some 21 will sit for this case, their names kept secret until the last minute to guard against pressure on them.

The campaign chief of Yanukovich resigned on Monday, saying a re-run of the disputed presidential vote would be the best solution to the country's political crisis. "The best solution to resolve the situation would be holding a re-run of the vote as quickly as possible," Serhiy Tigipko told reporters. Agencies

30 NOV 2004 THE TIMES OF INDIA

HD-10
30/11

The battle for Ukraine

By Vladimir Radyuhin

By winning over Ukraine the West hopes to provoke a domino effect of regime change in other ex-Soviet states.

THE POLITICAL crisis in Ukraine has pitted Russia against the West in the fiercest battle yet for influence in the former Soviet Union. In a crucial presidential poll in Ukraine this month Moscow threw its weight behind the Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, who favours closer ties with Russia, while the United States and the European Union backed the pro-Western Opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko. The pro-Russian candidate was declared winner in the November 21 runoff with a three per cent margin, but the Opposition refused to concede defeat alleging mass vote rigging, and organised large-scale student protests in the capital Kiev that paralysed the government machine. After a week of rallies by supporters of the two presidential contenders, Ukraine's Parliament intervened to condemn election violations and to call for cancelling the poll result to pave the way to a new election. The dispute has now moved to the Supreme Court, which on Monday began to look into charges of election fraud.

The stakes for Russia in the standoff are enormous. The Opposition candidate is committed to taking Ukraine into NATO and the European Union. If Ukraine is pulled into the Western orbit, Russia may soon find American nuclear submarines moored next to its southern fleet base in Ukraine's Sevastopol in the Black Sea. Its plan to build a viable free-trade union among the former Soviet republics will also suffer a setback.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, travelled six times to Ukraine in recent months to demonstrate his support for the Government candidate. In the run-up to the crucial vote, he ordered an easing of travel rules for millions of Ukrainian workers in Russia and promised to push for dual citizenship between the two countries. Mr. Putin was the first foreign leader to congratulate Mr. Yanukovich on his election victory. It is Russia's new assertiveness and resurgent power in the former Soviet Union that the West is trying to stop in Ukraine.

"Ukraine is a crucial test of the changing geopolitics in Eurasia," Ariel Cohen of the U.S. Heritage Foundation, a think-tank of neo-Conservatives in the Republican Administration in Washington, wrote last week. "It is a large-scale trial run — of Russia re-establishing control in

the former empire and expanding its access to the Black Sea and South-Eastern Europe."

By winning over Ukraine the West hopes to redraw the political map of the former Soviet Union, provoke a domino effect of regime change in other ex-Soviet states and wrest neighbouring Moldova and Belarus, as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia from the Russian orbit. Experts warn that Russia itself may become the next target.

"The West has turned Ukraine into a giant test ground for technologies of toppling the Government in Russia," said Gleb Pavlovsky, a Kremlin-linked political consultant who worked for the pro-Moscow candidate in Ukraine's election.

The U.S. hand in Ukraine's election was all too obvious. The money and expertise provided by the U.S. Freedom House, Soros Foundation, and other consultancies went to prepare a "chestnut revolution" in Ukraine. It was modelled after the "rose revolution" in Georgia that brought a pro-U.S. leader to power a year ago, and a student revolt in Serbia that toppled the President, Slobodan Milosevic, in 2000. Student movements were the driving force in all these regime change campaigns — Otpor in Serbia, Khmara in Georgia and Pora in Ukraine. Exit polls paid for from American and other Western funds sparked off mass protests by showing an improbably big lead for the Opposition candidate.

The Opposition has succeeded in projecting the election as a choice between democracy and corrupt oligarchic rule. This struck an enthusiastic cord with millions of Ukrainians, above all students and intellectuals, and obscured the fact that the Ukrainian vote was more a fight between rival business clans who earned their fortunes during the crime-ridden post-Soviet privatisation. The "democratic" contender, Mr. Yushchenko, served as Prime Minister in 2001-2002, and both he and the current Premier, Mr. Yanukovich, were appointed by one and the same President, Leonid Kuchma. The Opposition team also includes another former Prime Minister, Anatoly Kinakh, and half a dozen former

Deputy Premiers.

The U.S. attempt to tear Ukraine from Russia has aggravated a deep split that has always existed in Ukraine between the industrialised southeast and agricultural west. The southeast voted heavily for Mr. Yanukovich, who hails from Donetsk, Ukraine's industrial powerhouse, and central and western Ukraine backed Mr. Yushchenko. While the southeastern provinces of Ukraine have been part of Russia and later the Soviet Union for 350 years, western Ukrainians were under Polish and Austro-Hungarian rule for long stretches of history. Half of Ukraine's 48-million population lives in the east, speaks Russian and has Russian cultural and religious roots, while in the west many do not know a word of Russian and have a deeply ingrained suspicion of "imperial" Russia.

After several western regions said they would only recognise Mr. Yushchenko as their President, eastern provinces threatened to set up an "autonomy," fanning fears of a partition of Ukraine. Delegates from 17 Russian-speaking regions, which generate 80 per cent of the country's GDP, met in emergency congress on Sunday to form a coordination council to prepare "adequate action" if Mr. Yushchenko is declared President.

Russian analysts think that Ukraine may indeed break up.

"Ukraine as a sovereign state has existed for the past 13 years only," says Mr. Roy Medvedev, a historian. "The process of nation-building only started when Ukraine became a constituent republic within the Soviet Union and it was far from complete when the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991."

For all Western interference, it is Mr. Kuchma who bears the main responsibility for the election crisis in Ukraine. While an Opposition victory could spell disaster for the Kuchma clan (his son-in-law, Viktor Pinchuk, is one of the wealthiest Ukrainian oligarchs), the President did precious little to promote a credible alternative to Mr. Yushchenko. Even though Mr. Kuchma could choose from half a dozen popular and loyal politicians as his successor he picked Mr. Yanukovich whose two convictions for

theft and assault as a teenager made him an easy target for the Opposition.

Mr. Kuchma's plan was to undertake a constitutional reform that would give Parliament, instead of the President, the authority to appoint the Prime Minister. He hoped a weak government challenger to the charismatic Opposition candidate in the presidential race would persuade undecided deputies among Yushchenko opponents to support his power reform bill. However, the plan was stalled as many legislators suspected Mr. Kuchma of trying to prolong his 10-year rule by moving from the President's to the Prime Minister's office.

The political crisis in Ukraine has made constitutional reform inevitable. An emergency session of Parliament called at the weekend to discuss the crisis decided to reopen the reform debate next month. The election has revealed so deep a split between Ukraine's east and west that a President backed by one part of the country can hardly be acceptable to the other. However, a compromise will be easier to strike if Ukraine becomes a parliamentary, rather than a presidential, republic.

Today in Ukraine, as in Russia, the President is omnipotent. He can appoint and sack the Prime Minister and other Ministers and has direct control over the so-called "power ministries" — Defence, Interior, Foreign, and the security service. If the power is redistributed from the President to Parliament, where each region has a fair share of votes, conflicting interests of different territories and pressure groups can be better articulated and reconciled.

However, this may not be enough to preserve the territorial integrity of the country and douse the separatist fires set off by the election controversy. It may be necessary to reconstitute Ukraine from a unitary to a federative state, giving more economic and legislative rights to regions.

Whatever the outcome of the current standoff, the next President will have far less room for manoeuvre and in any case will not be able to drastically change the tack of Ukraine's foreign policy from the East to the West. Ukraine will continue to depend on Russian energy supplies and on the Russian market for its industrial and agricultural produce. And no Ukrainian leader can afford to ignore the interests of the Russian-speaking half of the population.

THE HINDU

Kiev faces partition as court weighs vote

Fred Weir & Agencies
 Moscow/Kiev, November 29

UKRAINE DRIFTED towards partition on Monday as an eastern region that supported pro-Moscow Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich in the disputed presidential election announced it will hold a referendum next Sunday on declaring "autonomy" from Kiev.

The coal-mining and steel region of Donetsk will ask voters to vote on "determining the region's status" on Sunday, while other heavily-russified regions of Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk and Crimea may follow suit in the next few days, experts said.

"It is very hard to overestimate the danger of these secessionist movements to Ukraine," says Nikolai Petrov, an expert with Moscow's Carnegie Centre.

"Ukraine is a country of rather essential regional contrasts, which have become deeply inflamed in the course of the current crisis

Meanwhile, Ukraine's top court examined on Monday claims of massive irregularities in bitterly-disputed presidential elections as the country's civilian leadership scrambled to quell talk of national disintegration but warned of impending economic breakdown.

With thousands of protesters from both camps competing for the presidency massed outside the supreme court building here, Yanukovich, the officially-declared winner of the November 21 ballot, said he would accept a new vote in two key regions of the country.

But as the political crisis that has rocked this 48-million-strong eastern European state for the past eight days continued, outgoing President Leonid Kuchma warned that the country's financial system "could fall down like a house of cards" within days if the dispute were not resolved.

A 21-judge panel began considering charges from

opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko that the runoff ballot between himself and Yanukovich had been rigged to ensure the latter's victory. A judge said no ruling would be issued on Monday.

Yanukovich, whose support is strongest in the Russian-speaking eastern and southern regions of Ukraine and who favours reinforcing ties with neighbouring Russia, described calls from Yushchenko for new voting as "illegal".

He was shown on television however telling Kuchma and aides that he was prepared to go along with a plan for a new vote in two of his eastern strongholds — the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk — where Yushchenko supporters have alleged massive voting fraud took place.

"If a decision is taken to hold a re-run vote in Donetsk and Lugansk, in that case I will ask the inhabitants of Donetsk and Lugansk to go to the polls and vote," he said.



REUTERS

BITTER SQUABBLE A supporter of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko (right) argues with a supporter of Moscow-backed Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich during a joint rally outside Ukraine's top court in Kiev on Monday.

over last week's allegedly rigged presidential elections, he adds.

Ukraine, Europe's second-largest state by territorial, linguistic, religious and cultural differences make them almost foreigners to one another.

Let us hold fresh polls, says Kuchma

Associated Press

KIEV, Nov. 29. — Outgoing President Mr Leonid Kuchma said today that repeating last week's disputed presidential election might be the only way out of a crisis that has badly split Ukraine, the Interfax reported.

"If we really want to preserve peace and accord, if we really want to build a democratic state ... let's hold new elections," Mr Kuchma was quoted as saying. He added that Ukraine needs a "legitimate President". Mr Kuchma, who has backed Mr Viktor Yanukovich, had previously spoken of compromise, but today's statement amounted to a dramatic boost for Opposition chief Mr Viktor Yushchenko, who says the vote was rigged and has demanded a repeat.

It came as the country's Supreme Court convened to consider Opposition requests to invalidate the election because of fraud — after eight days of demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of Yushchenko supporters braving snow and freezing cold to blockade government buildings and try to bring government to a halt.

Under Ukrainian legislation, the court cannot rule on the overall results but can declare results invalid in individual precincts.



Supporters of the two presidential rivals face each other during a rally outside the Supreme Court in Kiev on Monday. — AFP

Mr Mykola Katerinchuk, an aide to Mr Yushchenko, said the appeal focused on results in eight eastern and southern Ukrainian regions — over 15 million votes, almost half of the total cast in the runoff.

The ruling could pave the way for a new vote, which the Opposition is demanding, or remove the only barrier to the inauguration of Mr Yanukovich, who has the backing of Mr Kuchma and the Kremlin, which still yields significant political and economic influence over energy-dependent Ukraine.

Mr Yanukovich was declared the winner with a

EU, Nato warn against break-up

BRUSSELS, Nov. 29. — Both EU foreign policy chief Mr Javier Solana and Nato head Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer issued warnings today against a division of Ukraine as a result of the current political crisis facing the ex-Soviet country. "The unity of Ukraine is essential," said Mr Solana, who travelled to Ukraine last week to try to mediate in the crisis following contested presidential elections. Nato chief Mr De Hoop Scheffer, meanwhile, underlined "the importance of territorial integrity of Ukraine." — AFP

margin of 871,402 votes.

While the Supreme Court's decision is likely to boost the legitimacy of whichever side it seems to favour, it could also fuel anger in the other camp. Thousands of pro-Yushchenko and pro-Yanukovich supporters massed outside the court building

this morning, mingling in a peaceful rally and distinguishable only by their orange and blue-and-white campaign banners. Demonstrations continued tonight as throngs packed Kiev's Independence Square, waving Ukrainian and orange flags in support of Mr Yushchenko.

30 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Ukraine standoff talks at standstill

Kiev, Nov. 28 (Reuters): Talks to end Ukraine's presidential election standoff are going badly, the outgoing President said today while the country seethed with street rallies and threatened to break apart over the crisis.

"As I understand, the (working group) talks are going on with considerable difficulty. No one can say what sort of compromise can be found or whether one will be found at all," President Leonid Kuchma said.

"But I believe ... that a compromise is very necessary for Ukraine," he said opening the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council.

In the capital Kiev, tens of thousands of supporters of opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko rallied again, undaunted by freezing drizzle. Yushchenko told them talk of autonomy in eastern regions loyal to his opponent threatened national unity.

The formal winner of last week's election, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, told a rally of his supporters in the east of the country that the rowdy but so far peaceful protests had brought Ukraine to the edge of disaster.

"As Prime Minister, I say that today we are on the brink of catastrophe. There is one step to the edge," he told a packed hall in Severodonetsk.

"Do not take any radical steps. I repeat, none...When the first drop of blood is spilled, we will not be able to stop it."

Later in Severodonetsk, local leaders from eastern regions voted unanimously today in favour of holding a referendum on their "regional status", a euphemism for au-



Opposition leader Yushchenko and his daughter listen to the national anthem at a rally in Kiev on Sunday. (Reuters)

tonomy from the capital Kiev.

The leaders, delegates at a regional congress, all raised their hands in favour of "a referendum to be held in December this year to determine the status of the region".

Any move towards autonomy for the east is anathema to nationalists and liberals 13 years after the country won independence from the Soviet Union.

Passions rose following yesterday's symbolic parliamentary vote declaring a November 21 run-off election invalid. Parliament noted widespread fraud in the vote handing victory to Yanukovich.

Parliament cannot overturn the election result but it did boost Yushchenko's bid to force a fresh poll.

He says he was cheated of

victory a week ago by mass fraud. "The authorities ... are playing the dangerous card of separatism ... Those who are calling for separatism are committing crimes and will definitely receive severe punishment," Yushchenko said.

A Supreme Court hearing tomorrow will consider Yushchenko's complaints of poll irregularities. The court has banned publication of the count handing victory to Yanukovich, thus blocking his inauguration. Yushchenko, 50, has already said he stands for a new vote on December 12.

But Yanukovich, 54 and strongly backed by Russia, has yet to say whether he is ready for a re-run, as advocated by the European Union.

The crisis has dramatised a long-standing divide between Ukraine's nationalist west, supporting Yushchenko, and the industrial Russian-speaking east solidly behind the Premier. The Russian-speaking regions of the east provide the economic muscle of the country.

Romania poll

Romanians went to the polls today to decide who will lead the Balkan country through a series of tough reforms set by the European Union.

Voters trickled in at 17,000 polling stations from the snow-covered Carpathians to the Black Sea, to choose between the ruling Social Democrat Party and a centrist alliance of the Liberal and Democrat parties.

Today's twin election to replace veteran President Ion Iliescu and elect a new parliament is the most hotly contested vote since the 1989 collapse of communism, analysts say.

Fresh Ukraine election now likely

European Union, Russia regard potential repoll as 'ideal outcome' to settle crisis

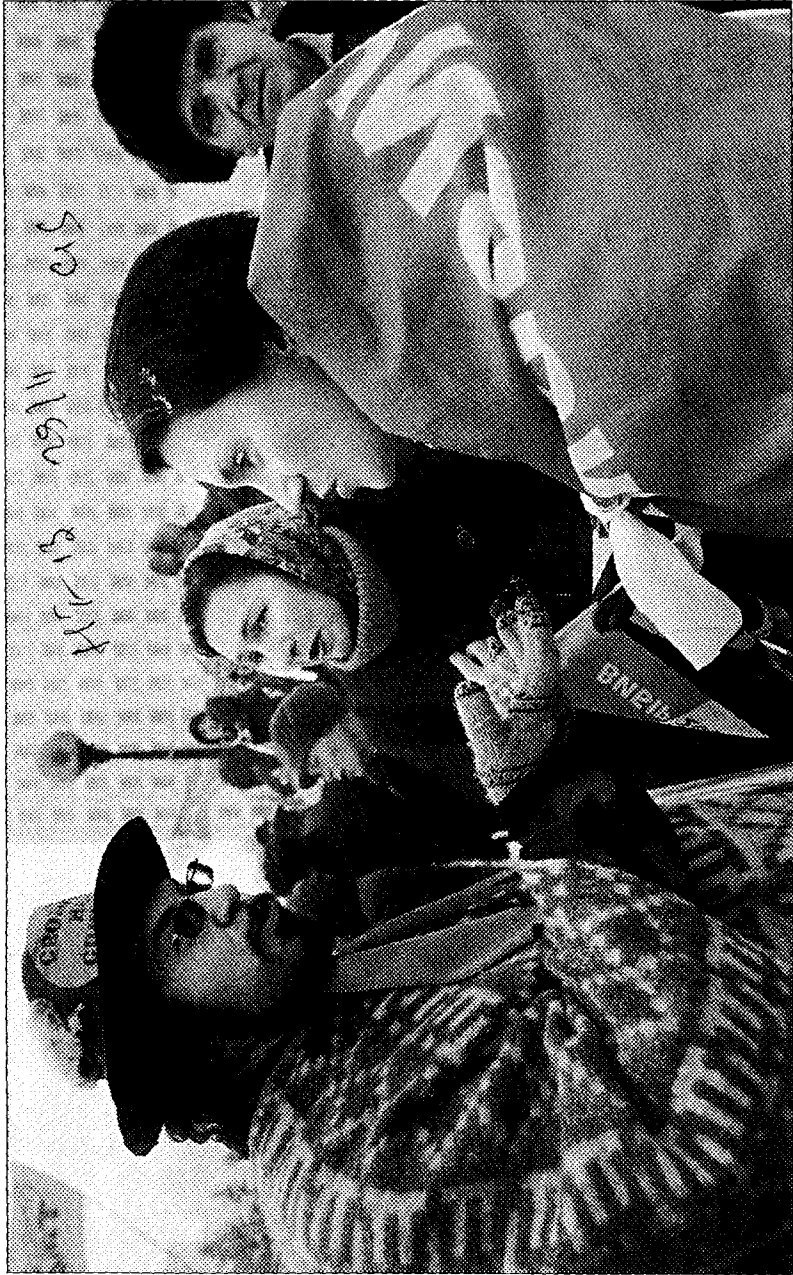
Associated Press
Kiev, November 28

REPRESENTATIVES OF the rival candidates in Ukraine's disputed presidential election met at the negotiating table again today, a day after the opposition's hopes for a new vote got a boost from national lawmakers, who called the election invalid.

Western-leaning opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko, who claims he was cheated out of victory in the November 21 run-off election, is demanding a new vote. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators have jammed downtown Kiev for a week to support him.

Yesterday's declaration by Parliament — approved by 255 of the 429 legislators present — was not legally binding, but it was a clear demonstration of rising dissatisfaction with an election international observers said was marred by fraud. The Parliament passed a vote of no-confidence in the Central Election Commission, which declared Russian-backed Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich the winner of the presidential runoff.

While representatives of both candidates prepared today for a second day of talks under a program worked out with European envoys, outgoing President Leonid Kuchma convened a meeting of his National Security Council outside of Kiev, his administration said. "It seems to me that the sides have the constructive wish to reach



DEBATABLE Supporters of Yushchenko and Yanukovich argue during a rally in central Kiev on Sunday. AFP

reasonable. In addition to the call for a revote, Yushchenko was also demanding that absentee balloting be prohibited, the candidates be given equal access to the media and that international observers participate. During yesterday's session, lawmakers also called for changes in election legislation to be considered next week.

Meanwhile, Yanukovich's Party of Regions brought together 3,500 delegates from 17 eastern and southern Ukrainian regions for an urgent session in the town of Severodonezk to discuss autonomy for much of eastern Ukraine. Yanukovich and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov were expected to attend.

The crisis has exacerbated the stark divide between the pro-Russian, heavily industrialised eastern half of Ukraine, where Yanukovich draws his support, and the west, Yushchenko's stronghold including the capital Kiev, which is a traditional centre of Ukrainian nationalism. It has also driven a wedge between Russia and the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin openly backed Yanukovich and congratulated him on his victory, while many Western nations, including the United States, say they don't recognise the vote results.

Yushchenko says he wants to push the country to greater integration with Western Europe. His critics worry he will alienate Ukraine from Russia, its key trade partner.

Street and Independence Square. Field kitchens distributed hot food and tea. A week in the open has taken its toll on many of the demonstrators, sparking long lines for cold pills and even some home remedies such as horseradish soaked in apple vinegar and honey.

Dutch foreign minister Ben Bot, speaking for the European Union, said that new elections were the "ideal out-

come" to settle Ukraine's political crisis. Russia also reportedly has said it would regard a revote favourably.

Prospects for a resolution of the crisis by a working group made up of four people from each campaign were unclear. Yushchenko's team had said on Friday that it would give the group two days to reach a decision — a time frame that Yanukovich's side said was not un-

ing, but said that "before such an emotional decision is taken, a commission must be created to analyse the work of the CEC."

That position would be unlikely to please the Yushchenko camp, which wants to keep the revote momentum going. Braving wet snow and sleet, thousands of protesters have gathered in a sprawling tent camp along Kiev's central Khreshchatyk

compromise," a Yushchenko spokesman said.

Yushchenko said he was seeking a revote on December 12 under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. He has also demanded that the current 15-person Central Election Commission be replaced. Election commission head Serhiy Kivalov said yesterday that he was not opposed to new vot-

Countdown in Kiev

The East European revolution continues

Those alleging irregularities in the Ukrainian presidential elections have received a shot in the arm from the verdict of the Supreme Court, which suspended publication of official results. In new democracies like the Ukraine the corrupt Soviet-era *nomenklatura* still hangs on to the old methods, creating these crises and such problems are expected to continue. In neighbouring Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, who represented the *nomenklatura*, was swept away last year by a "rose revolution" led by the overwhelmingly popular Mikhail Saakashvili. International observers have found manifold flaws in the Ukraine polls following which the EU, the US and Canada have stated they do not accept the results. The capital Kiev is seeing demonstrations, both pro and anti-government, and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko has called for civil disobedience and a general strike.

Yushchenko is for liberal economic reforms and integration of the Ukraine into the EU and Nato while erstwhile president Viktor Yanukovich is close to Moscow and wants to form an economic union with Russia and Belarus. Not surprisingly Cold War lines have reappeared, with the West supporting the pro-nationalist Yushchenko and Moscow rushing to embrace the Russia-leaning Yanukovich. The Ukraine was once the pride of the Soviet Union — industrialised, educated and contributing some of its best scientists — and President Putin would no doubt hate to see it transformed into a forward base for Nato. Also, Russia has been lurching away from democracy and liberal reforms recently, with the abolition of provincial elections and crackdowns on independent media and on Yukos, one of Russia's biggest private companies; it would perhaps like to see the Ukraine travel the same path. Those demonstrating for and against Yanukovich in Kiev break down into classic losers and gainers from globalisation. Ultimately Ukrainians must be left to make their own decisions, without either foreigners or oligarchic local institutions swaying the outcome:

2004

THE STATESMAN

Ukraine results 'invalid'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KIEV, Nov. 27. — Ukraine's parliament today declared invalid the disputed presidential election that led to a week of growing street protests. The legislators' move was not legally binding, but was a clear demonstration of rising dissatisfaction.

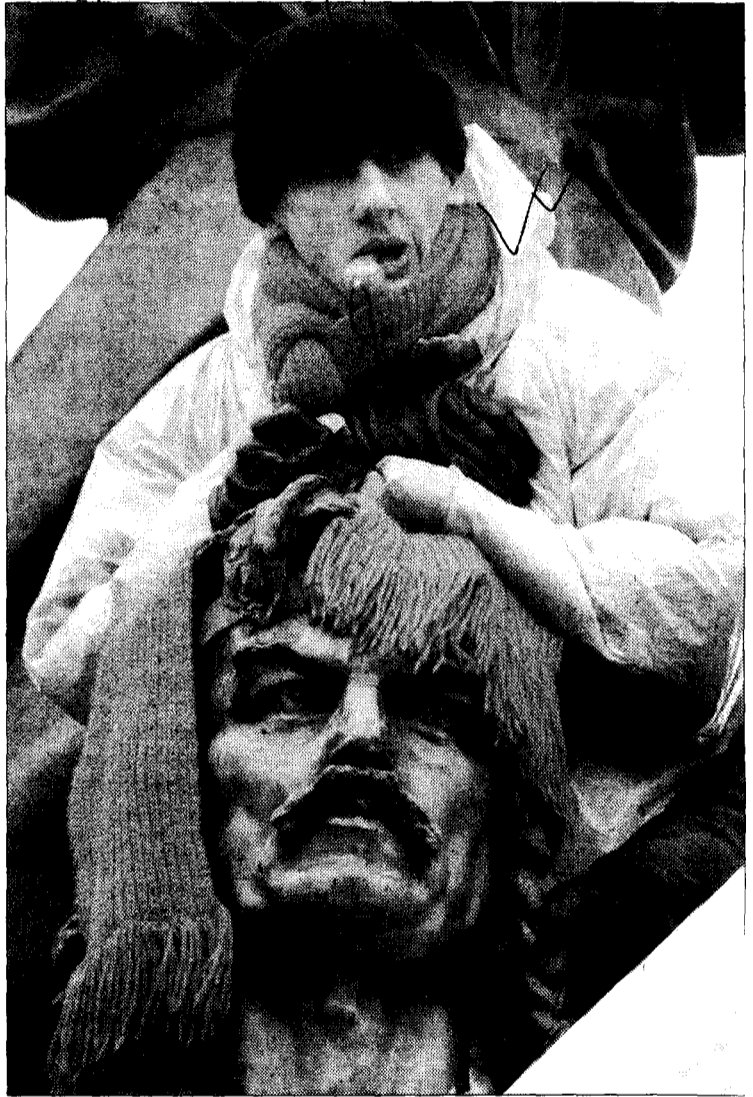
The parliament also passed a vote of no-confidence in the Central Elections Commission, which like the other vote is not legally binding.

The elections commission has said Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovich won the 21 November presidential election, but opponent Mr Viktor Yushchenko's supporters have streamed into the streets, claiming he was cheated out of victory.

Negotiators from both candidates' camps were expected to meet for talks in a format worked out in consultation with European envoys yesterday.

Earlier today, Dutch foreign minister Mr Ben Bot said new elections in Ukraine are the only possible solution to the standoff between rival presidential candidates, Dutch a report adds from The Hague.

Mr Bot, speaking to journalists on behalf of the EU, asserted that new elections were the "ideal outcome". He added: "It would need to be the will of the Ukrainian people. They need to come to the conclusion that fraud took place. We (the EU countries) have concluded that fraud took place..."



A protester rests on a statue overlooking Kiev's main square during an Opposition rally. — AFP

28 NOV 2001

THE STATESMAN

Kiev protesters block official buildings

Reuters
Kiev, November 26

THOUSANDS OF supporters of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko blockaded official buildings in the Ukrainian capital in a direct challenge to the Moscow-backed government's control of the country.

As foreign envoys arrived in Kiev on Friday for urgent talks with Ukraine's leaders to try to resolve the crisis over a contested election, protesters effectively took over Kiev city centre.

Meanwhile, the two rivals were to meet for the first time since the disputed poll with international mediators from the European Union and Russia. The crisis roundtable was to bring together Yushchenko and his presidential rival, pro-Russian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, as well as outgoing President Leonid Kuchma, the Polish embassy said on Friday.

Protesters barred entry to the main offices of the government, parliament and presidency, sealing off approach roads to traffic by blocking them with buses.

They turned away employees trying to enter the buildings, telling them: "There's a strike on." Outside the President's offices, crowds sang Ukrainian folk



REUTERS

Supporters of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko shout slogans during a rally in Kiev on Friday.

songs, waved banners in cross the lines of special supporters' action made a Yushchenko's orange cam- mockery of government

pany colours and rhythmi- control. Asked how long the Socialists leader Oleksan- supporters would keep up

der Moroz, a Yushchenko al- ly who was on the spot, said: "Vic- strators.

West mediation worries Moscow

Associated Press
Moscow, November 26

RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER Sergey Lavrov said on Friday that Moscow was concerned by the West's attempts to influence the situation in Ukraine, where allegations of vote fraud have sparked a roiling political crisis that has brought the rival candidates' supporters into the streets.

Western nations, including the US and European Union members, have called the election results fraudulent and expressed support for the Opposition led by Viktor Yushchenko.

"The attempt of some states to transfer the situation in Ukraine from the legal field provokes concern, especially when some European capitals say that they don't accept the elections and their next thesis is that Ukraine must be with the West," Lavrov said.

"The Ukrainian people must decide who Ukraine wants to be with, and such

statements make you think that somebody really wants to draw new dividing lines in Europe," he said. Lavrov noted that both candidates had filed legal complaints about the elections.

The Ukraine crisis has driven a wedge between Moscow and the West, casting their continuing post-Cold War rivalry for influence across Europe into harsh relief. Ukraine is vital to Moscow's attempts to shore up its geopolitical position by opening new oil and gas transport routes and extend its economic clout by forming a free-trade zone involving four former Soviet republics.

For the West, an unstable Ukraine on the edge of the EU could be a source of severe new headaches including a possible wave of immigrants. Although Ukraine has given up its nuclear arsenal, Western governments have expressed fears that it could play a role in proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Ukraine rivals sit for talks

Associated Press

KIEV, Nov. 26. — Ukrainian President Mr Leonid Kuchma and Opposition presidential candidate Mr Viktor Yushchenko sat down today for round-table talks in the presence of Prime Minister Mr Viktor Yanukovych.

The long-awaited talks came after six days of massive street protests in the Ukrainian capital against alleged election fraud, which the Opposition says robbed its candidate of victory in Sunday's presidential runoff. The West also criticised the vote as marred by fraud. Mr Kuchma's government certified Mr Yanukovych as the winner, but western-leaning Mr Yushchenko claims he was robbed of victory.

Earlier today, European envoys arrived in Kiev in an effort to help solve the political crisis that has engulfed this ex-Soviet republic.

The meeting will include European Union foreign policy chief Mr Javier Solana, Polish President Mr Aleksander Kwasniewski and Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, said Ms Cristina Gallach, Mr Solana's spokeswoman. The Interfax news agency said Mr Boris Gryzlov, Speaker of Russia's Lower House,

EUROPEAN ENVOYS ARRIVE TO MEDIATE IN POST-POLL CRISIS



A supporter of Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko at a protest rally in Kiev's main square on Friday. — AFP

and Mr Jan Kubis, the current head of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, would also take part.

Mr Kuchma thanked the European envoys for "making every effort so that these negotiations take place not on the street — which can never give a positive result — but around a negotiating

table", the Interfax news agency quoted him as saying after meeting Mr Solana and Mr Kwasniewski. "The situation is more than difficult," Mr Kwasniewski told journalists.

Also today, Mr Yanukovych rallied thousands of his supporters waving his blue-and-white campaign flags in front of Kiev's train station. Many

had apparently arrived in buses and trains from Ukraine's industrial east, Mr Yanukovych's main support base. "I don't need power at the cost of spilled blood," Mr Yanukovych said in remarks broadcast on the pro-Yanukovych TRK Ukraine television.

Mr Yanukovych could not enter his offices today as

thousands of cheering Opposition supporters revved up pressure on the state over a disputed election by blocking key state buildings. "The Prime Minister could not get into the government building today, and as a result he could not meet European ambassadors as planned," spokeswoman Ms Anna German said.

Ukraine verdict gets murkier

Associated Press

KIEV, Nov. 25. — Ukraine's Supreme Court said today that the country's presidential election results would not be published as official until it considers an appeal filed by the Opposition candidate, Mr. Viktor Yushchenko, who has claimed the vote was rigged.

Prime Minister Mr. Viktor Yanukovich, whom the authorities declared winner, cannot formally become President without the results being officially published.

S.F. 26/11
The decision bodsted supporters of Mr. Yushchenko, who have flooded the streets of Kiev since the Sunday run-off and won significant international backing.

But the court decision also foretells a continuation of tension for at least several days. The appeal will be considered on Monday, court spokeswoman Ms. Liana Shlyaposhnikova said.

Protesters have been saying that the ballot was rigged to allow Prime Minister Mr. Viktor Yanukovich to win.

US
They received a boost today from visiting Lech Walesa, the founder of the Polish Solidarity movement, who said he was "amazed" at their enthusiasm and predicted that their protest would succeed.

Official results released yesterday declared Mr. Yanukovich winner of the vote by about three percentage points.

The ballot was denounced as fraudulent by Western observers. The USA and the European Union said they couldn't accept the results as legitimate.



Former Polish President Lech Walesa (right) talks to opposition leader Mr. Viktor Yushchenko in Kiev on Thursday. — AFP

Court freezes Ukraine election result

Kiev, Nov. 25 (Reuters): Ukraine's highest court today blocked the installation as President of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, whose contested election has led to mass protests, and said it would examine a complaint by his liberal challenger.

The Supreme Court rejected the official publication of election results that showed Yanukovich had beaten Viktor Yushchenko in a run-off election last Sunday. In its ruling, the Supreme Court appeared to turn the tide of events in favour of Yushchenko, who has brought thousands of supporters on to the streets after alleging he was cheated out of the election.

A president cannot be sworn in without the result

being officially published.

"The court ruling bars the Central Election Commission from officially publishing the results of the election and proceeding with any other action connected with this," the court said in a statement. The court said it would examine Yushchenko's complaint that the election of the Moscow-backed prime minister had been engineered by mass cheating.

Yushchenko vowed no let-up in protests to overturn the election result and pressed forward with plans for a national strike to bring transport and industry to a halt.

But in the divided state's eastern regions, which account for most of Ukraine's economic muscle, coal miners

pledged support for Yanukovich and said they would not join any strike.

The strike, also intended to shut down schools and halt transit of goods, was not yet under way but Yushchenko's team said "decrees" launching it would be announced later.

Some activists had already started blocking highways in four widely separated regions of the former Soviet state.

Under the court ruling, outgoing President Leonid Kuchma, who endorsed Yanukovich only after long reflection, would stay on in power for now.

Kuchma yesterday warned Ukraine could plunge into civil war and urged the West to stay out of the country's affairs. In The Hague, Ukraine's

crisis dominated summit talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and the EU presidency, who are at odds on the issue.

Putin, who congratulated Yanukovich as the summit began, later said outsiders had no moral right to push Ukraine into "mayhem". Ukrainian courts, he said, should resolve any dispute.

Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski also said he would head for Ukraine within days to help mediate. Poland, a Nato and EU member, is Ukraine's main European sponsor.

The West has made clear to Ukraine it regards the election as fraudulent. Apart from sharp EU criticism, the US has warned Ukraine there could

be consequences for their ties.

Election officials, defying calls by the West and tens of thousands of demonstrators on the streets of Kiev, declared Yanukovich the winner in the run-off. "We will not leave this square until we secure victory," Yushchenko told at least 100,000 supporters crowded in to Kiev's Independence Square and spilling into adjacent streets. "My team and I will stay here even if there are only 15 of us left. We will stand here until our victory," he said.

As Ukraine seethed with turmoil for a fourth successive day, the central bank said it would support banks if they were hit by a run on deposits, sparked by political uncertainty.



A balloon placed by supporters of Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko near riot policemen guarding the presidential office in Kiev. (Reuters)

Kremlin's man wins polls, Ukraine in turmoil

Agencies
Kiev, November 24

UKRAINE'S ELECTION commission declared the Kremlin-backed Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, the winner of the country's bitterly disputed presidential election, sharpening a crisis sparked by the Opposition candidate's allegations that the vote was fraudulent.

Opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko has insisted he was the winner of the weekend run-off election, and tens of thousands of his supporters have been in the streets demanding the official results be overturned. Within minutes after the results were announced, thousands of them began heading from their encampment on Kiev's central avenue to the presidential administration building.

Prime Minister Yanukovich got 49.61



AP

Supporters of President-elect Viktor Yanukovich celebrate his victory in central Kiev on Wednesday.

per cent of Sunday's vote, against Yushchenko's 46.61 per cent, the commission said in giving its final results. Many Western election observers said the vote was seriously flawed and did not meet democratic standards, and exit polls showed a victory for Yushchenko, a Western reformer.

Meanwhile, thousands of opposition demonstrators braved freezing temperatures for a third straight day as tensions mounted in Ukraine's election crisis.

Ukraine's outgoing president offered to hold talks to end the crisis, but an ally of Yushchenko said the only thing to discuss was a transfer of power to the Opposition leader. "We are ready to negotiate only about the peaceful handing over of power to Yushchenko," Mykola Tomenko said.

President Leonid Kuchma called for negotiations late on Tuesday, saying the Opposition's actions amounted to a "political farce" that could lead to "serious consequences", according to news reports. Kuchma said authorities would not be the first to use force but would uphold law and order.

A Yushchenko spokesman said earlier the Opposition was prepared in theory to take part in talks. Yushchenko called the results "fraudulent" but promised there would be no violence from the thousands of demonstrators in Kiev's main square.

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Ukraine lurches to shutdown

Kiev, Nov. 24 (Reuters): Ukrainian Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko today called for a national strike that would halt transport and shut factories in protest at the declaration that his Moscow-backed rival had won election as president.

He said that naming Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich president, after an election marked by mass cheating, brought Ukraine to "the brink of civil conflict."

"We do not recognise the election result as officially declared," Yushchenko told tens of thousands of supporters massed in Kiev's main square as heavy snow fell.

Yanukovich himself appeared briefly on state television, saying he was president and proposing talks with rival Yushchenko. "We will look for

US Opposition calls strike

Powell said the US did not accept the results and added there could be "consequences for our relationship."

While Yushchenko allies called on supporters to refrain from radical action, he himself said the Opposition wanted a "political strike". Olexander Moroz, Socialist Party leader and a backer of Yushchenko, said the Opposition wanted action that would halt transport and close factories and schools.

But Moroz said the crisis

could still be resolved by holding new elections as Yushchenko had offered earlier. "People will have to look for truth in the streets in open struggle," Yushchenko declared. He said the strike would be "our answer to the lawlessness of (outgoing President Leonid) Kuchma and Yanukovich."

An earlier offer of Yushchenko to run in new elections under tighter rules appeared to offer the beleaguered authorities a way out of the crisis. A later statement by Yanukovich that he did not want a "fictitious victory" had strengthened the view that a compromise was in the making. Earlier in the day the US, the EU and the Nato military alliance all urged authorities to review the conduct of Sunday's run-off.

Kiev erupts in protest

Kremlin-backed candidate leads popular leader

Agencies
Kiev, November 23

AN ESTIMATED 100,000 supporters of Ukraine's pro-western opposition presidential candidate, Viktor Yuschenko, were today on the streets the capital, Kiev, as protests over alleged voter intimidation and electoral fraud continued.

The Ukrainian election commission yesterday announced that the Kremlin-backed prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich, held an unassailable lead over Mr Yuschenko. It followed a tense election that was condemned by international observers. The EU has called for an urgent review of the result.

An exit poll, funded by western embassies, had put Mr Yuschenko ahead by 11 per cent, but official figures gave Mr Yanukovich victory by around 3 per cent. The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, yesterday sent him a message of congratulations.

The commission announcement sparked anger and dismay among much of the former Soviet republic's 48 million population, and at least four municipal governments have rejected the result amid growing protests.

Thousands of Mr Yuschenko's supporters continued to fill Kiev's main streets and Independence square, bedecked in orange - the opposition candidate's campaign colour. Speakers rallied the crowd from a stage in the square, leading them in chants of "Yuschenko! Yuschenko!"

"We have to rise up from our knees," Lidiya Arnoldovna, an elderly woman wearing an orange armband, said. "These past few days, I have really lived. I couldn't just sit at home."

Government officials have deployed special forces near the



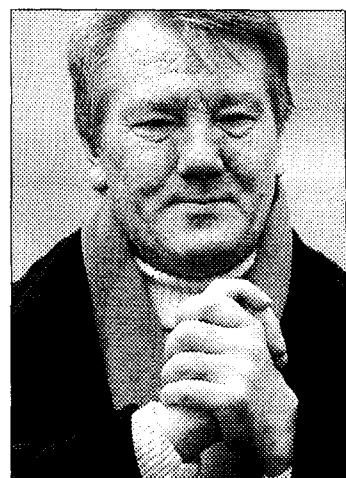
Protestors converge in central Kiev Viktor Yanukovich on Tuesday.

central election commission and other government buildings in Kiev, prompting fears of clashes, or even civil war, in the sharply divided nation.

The capital and the west of

Ukraine are opposition strongholds, while the Kremlin-backed government holds sway in the Russian-speaking eastern regions.

Opposition leaders today de-



Viktor Yuschenko in Kiev on Tuesday.

manded an emergency parliament session to annul the result, and want a no-confidence vote in the election commission. Although such a parliamentary decision would be of huge political significance, it would not be binding.

According to the Ukrainian constitution, a no-confidence vote must be initiated by the president in order for it to be considered binding. However, the country's outgoing president, Leonid Kuchma, has staunchly backed Mr Yanukovich. Yuliya Tymoshenko, an ally of Mr Yuschenko, today warned that "we will have no choice but to block roads, airports, and seize city halls" if parliament did not take action.

As international concern over the election grew, Senator Richard Lugar, the chairman of the US Senate's foreign relations committee, said there had been "a concerted and forceful programme of election day fraud and abuse".

He called on Mr Kuchma "to review all of this and take decisive action in the best interests of the country." The foreign secretary, Jack Straw, said he was "very concerned" over the outcome of the vote. Mr Straw said he wanted to study reports by international election monitors. "From where I stand now, it is very difficult to argue that this was a free and fair election," he said.

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FOREIGN POLICY / KUCHMA THROWS LOT WITH MOSCOW

Ukraine drops bid to join E.U., NATO

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JULY 27. Ukraine has formally abandoned its goal of joining NATO in a sign of its growing tilt towards Russia.

The Ukrainian President, Leonid Kuchma, signed a decree ordering changes in the country's defence doctrine to remove reference to membership in the European Union and NATO as the ultimate goal of Ukraine's foreign policy.

Henceforth, Ukraine will only strive to "deepen relations" with the two organisations.

Victory for Putin

The decree, made public a day before the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, flew to Ukraine for an informal bilateral summit with Mr. Kuchma, is

seen as a victory for Moscow in its tug-of-war with the West for influence in Ukraine.

New doctrine

The Ukrainian leader had just signed the new defence doctrine in June that stated the aim of joining NATO and the E.U. However, Mr. Kuchma badly needs Russia's crucial support for his bid to have his chosen heir, the Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, win a presidential election in October against the more popular pro-Western Opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko.

Mr. Putin has taken full advantage of his position as a king-maker to encourage a U-turn in Ukraine's foreign policy towards closer integration with Russia. Last September, Uk-

raine after repeated refusals, finally signed up to a Single Economic Zone pact with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The accord provides for a customs union, free movement of goods, capital and labour, and a common tax, monetary and foreign trade policy.

After his meeting with the Ukrainian leader on Monday, Mr. Putin issued a stern warning to the West not to get in the way of Russia and Ukraine forging closer ties.

"Their (Western nations') agents, both inside our countries and outside, are trying everything possible to compromise the integration between Russia and Ukraine," Mr. Putin said, speaking to businessmen from both countries.

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Georgia escalating tensions: Russia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JULY 13. Russia has blamed Georgia for the escalation of tension in its breakaway region of South Ossetia and warned Tbilisi of using force to normalise the situation.

The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, accused Georgia of violating its obligations under a peace-keeping agreement that allows Russia, Georgia and South Ossetia to maintain 500 troops in the re-

gion as part of a joint peace-keeping force.

Georgia has illegally pulled hundreds and even thousands of troops in South Ossetia, Mr. Lavrov told journalists as recurrent clashes were reported between Georgian and South Ossetian forces.

The Minister said Moscow would prefer a peaceful settlement but did not rule out using force. The (Russian) commander of the peace-keeping force is empowered to disarm illegal

armed groups and curb their infiltration into the zone of conflict, Mr. Lavrov said.

The Georgian President, Mikhail Saakashvili, warned that an armed conflict would escalate into a conflict between Georgia and Russia. Encouraged by his success in restoring control over another rebellious region, Adzharia, in May, Mr. Saakashvili has been stepping up pressure on South Ossetia to renounce its self-proclaimed independence. Amid an armed conflict

with Tbilisi in 1992, South Ossetia voted in a referendum to split away from Georgia and reunite with North Ossetia, which is part of Russia.

A ceasefire policed by a mixed peace-keeping force held until last week, when Georgia pulled more troops there and seized a convoy of trucks carrying arms and equipment for Russian peace-keepers.

About 80 per cent of South Ossetia's population of 70,000 have Russian passports.