

NOTE

## Putin 'Wins'

Gautam Sarkar writes :

EVEN AFTER allegedly-massive state-managed elections to the Duma (December 2011), the ruling United Russia Party of Vladimir Putin could not garner a clear 50% vote. For the first time in the annals of presidential polls in Russia, the ruling elite faces the possibility of stepping down under public pressure and that means advantage to Communist Party of Russian Federation (KPRF). The rigging device used did not click as it became clear for the masses that came out in the thoroughfares demanding fair elections. Moreover, Putin's popularity further dipped thereafter. An internal survey estimated it at less than 30%. This is why the Putin-led bureaucracy tries its best to keep Putin in power.

As per the result declared by The Central Election Commission (CEC) Vladimir Putin received 63.75% of the votes while Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov received 17.19%, independent candidate Mikhail Prokhorov 7.82%, Liberal Democratic Party head Vladimir Zhirinovskiy 6.23% and 'A Just Russia' party leader Sergei Mironov 3.85%. As expected, most of the election observers and political analysts found the results not fair and they claimed that the whole election process starting from the campaigning stages until the end of counting of votes was fraudulent. The CEC chief, Vladimir Churov, denied the allegations and well-known film director Stanislav Govorukhin doubling as Putin's campaign manager, called the election the "cleanest in the history of the Russian elections". Interestingly all the defeated candidates apart from Zyuganov rushed to congratulate Putin. Just after the election result was declared, Zyuganov declared in a press conference that the result is illegitimate and people of Russia cannot accept Putin as the legitimate President of Russia. Although Putin himself declared that he would see the election related violations would be investigated. However, Churov, the chief of CEC rejected all the serious allegations of election violations without even studying the charges levelled by election watchdogs and opposition parties.

In the Duma elections, ballot boxes were physically stuffed in favour of United Russia(UR) and final figures manipulated to send the maximum number of UR deputies to Duma. This time around, Putin installed video cameras in almost all the polling stations, apparently to stop the stuffing of ballot boxes - which in the end turned out to be hogwash. Kremlin invented and employed newer methods to manipulate the results, particularly in the urban centres of European part of Russia. As per estimates Kremlin used 200000 buses to carry fake voters in and around Moscow from booth to booth and each of them voted 3 to 5 times. Russian media called this as Voting Carousel. About 100 new polling stations were set up in Moscow only, exclusively for Russian tourists visiting Moscow on the polling day. Thousands of fake voters were brought into Moscow in buses, trains and even by aeroplanes. They were provided with accommodation and food. As per Central Election Commission's office, 10% of Russian population became too ill on the voting day to turn up at polling stations to cast their votes.

Special arrangements were made so that they could cast their votes from their homes. In many places up to 20% of the population cast their votes from their homes on medical grounds. The manipulation in polls was evident as the population of Russia was much more—by few millions—on the polling day. For instance in Chechnya, 99.99% polling took place and all votes were cast for Putin. Dagestan, Mordovia, Ingushetia etc. saw more than 90% polling, almost wholly in favour of Putin. Earlier, Dagestan citizens had been made to vote at gunpoint during the Duma Elections.

As if this was not enough, when the final booth wise figures were announced by CEC, there was a mismatch between those figures and the total number of valid votes cast. Zyuganov's tally was reduced by several thousands of votes and these were shifted to Putin.

This is how the ex-KGB Chief Putin won election to become the President of Russia.

Nonetheless, legitimizing the presidency of Putin in the public consciousness is still a pipedream for the Russian establishment. Protests are mounting and Russians are coming out in the street in protest against the farcical elections. The protest rally in early May during the inauguration of Putin's new presidency is expected to be an all time high turnout.

The billion rouble question is—Will Putin be able to serve the full term? □□