

News**Yushchenko back in campaign after poison diagnosis**

Tom Warner in Kiev DECEMBER 12 2004

Viktor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian opposition leader, arrived back in Kiev on Sunday night for the final two weeks of campaigning for the re-run presidential election on December 26, after a weekend trip to Vienna where doctors confirmed that a disfiguring illness which struck him three months ago was caused by dioxin poisoning.

The revelation will further heighten tensions ahead of the re-run ordered by the Supreme Court after it found systematic violations during the original election on November 21, won by Viktor Yanukovich, prime minister.

It also prompted an immediate re-investigation of the case by Svyatoslav Piskun, interim prosecutor general. His predecessor as prosecutor general, Sergey Vasilyev, who resigned last week under pressure from Yushchenko supporters, had investigated the case and concluded that Mr Yushchenko had suffered a bad attack of herpes.

Mr Piskun's investigation is expected to focus on two meetings Mr Yushchenko held the night before he fell ill: a dinner at a restaurant with his close allies and a late-night meeting at a villa outside Kiev with the chief and deputy chief of the SBU secret police.

Dr Michael Zimpfer, president of the Rudolfinerhaus private clinic, where Mr Yushchenko was treated in September and October, said a fresh blood test had found concentrations of dioxin up to 1,000

times greater than normal. Dr Zimpfer said this left no doubt that Mr Yushchenko had been poisoned.

He indicated the poisoning was probably deliberate and suggested that dioxin might have been chosen because it is very difficult to isolate, which also explained why initial tests failed to find any poison.

Mr Yanukovich, who was campaigning in his political heartland of Donetsk at the weekend, said he knew nothing about Mr Yushchenko's illness but wished him a speedy recovery.

It is the east of the country regions where local officials have strongly supported Mr Yanukovich, including the Donetsk and Luhansk regions where Mr Yushchenko's political allies said his campaign would go next, in an attempt to unite the country. I think a time will come when people from the east will learn I am a son of the east," said Mr Yushchenko, a native of the north-eastern Sumy region. Meanwhile Mykola Azarov, the finance minister who is acting prime minister while Mr Yanukovich is on leave for the campaign, downgraded forecasts for next year's gross domestic product growth from 8.6 per cent to 6.5 per cent while raising the inflation forecast from 7.1 per cent to 8.7 per cent.

The downgrade will be grim news for parliament, which is expected to begin debate this week on a 2005 budget both candidates have promised big increases in social spending.

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