

Yeltsin addresses nation, defends Chechnya assault

MOSCOW — In a dark and defensive address to the nation, President Boris Yeltsin berated his military leaders for big losses and human rights abuses in Chechnya but insisted Russia must use force to defend its unity.

Looking somber but steady, Yeltsin stood throughout his 61-minute speech to a rare joint session of parliament, winning only mild applause from the lawmakers when he finished.

Following his unsteady arrival at a meeting of fellow leaders in Kazakhstan last week, all eyes were on Yeltsin for signs he might be unwell or had been drinking.

Yeltsin looked confident as he strode to the microphone to deliver his address. He closely followed his prepared text, rarely looking up at the lawmakers. At one point, he paused briefly, apparently losing his place.

There was little of the old vigor or great sense of drama.

In addition to Chechnya, most of the issues he raised were gloomy: the rise of fascism in Russia, renewed inflation, a weakening ruble,

a huge budget deficit, rampant crime, corruption and an ineffective judiciary.

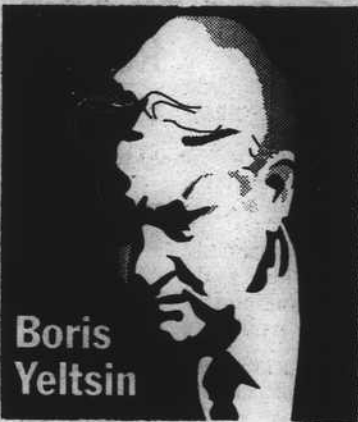
At the opening of his speech, Yeltsin asked lawmakers to observe a moment of silence for the victims of the fighting in Chechnya. Members of the State Duma and the Federation Council then stood in the Kremlin's Marble Hall.

Yeltsin admitted "failures, setbacks and mistakes" in Chechnya by the Russian armed forces, which demonstrated the need to accelerate military reform. However, he was adamant about the right to use force.

"Such blisters like the Medellin cartel in Colombia, the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia and the criminal dictatorship in Chechnya do not disappear by themselves," he said. "To preserve the sovereignty and integrity the state can and must use the force of power."

Sergei Stankevich, a lawmaker and former Yeltsin adviser, said he was disappointed because the speech offered "no ideas, no breakthroughs."

"The Russian president's ad-



Boris Yeltsin

dress ... does not contain a single new word," Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party, said.

The speech was Yeltsin's first major address since he sent 40,000 soldiers into Chechnya on Dec. 11 to force the republic to renounce its 3-year-old independence drive.

Yeltsin said Russia had to remove the "cancerous tumor of the Grozny regime" in Chechnya, and said the republic's leaders had turned their homeland into a nest of criminals.

Four Army Rangers die during exhaustive training

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. — Four soldiers died of exposure after struggling through chilly, chest-deep swamp waters in the last days of a two-month effort to become Army Rangers.

The soldiers, training to be among the Army's elite warriors, had already undergone stressful testing in the forest, desert and mountains to prepare them for extreme conditions faced in warfare.

They had been out in the swampy grounds of Eglin Air Force Base in the Florida Panhandle since Saturday, and eight began suffering from hypothermia Wednesday. Hypothermia is caused by severe loss of body heat, leading to extreme fatigue, drowsiness, disorientation, and sometimes death.

Seven were taken to a clinic, where three of them died late Wednesday. The rescue effort was hampered by foggy weather. The body of the eighth was found at about daybreak Thursday.

"Ranger training is ... one of the most difficult courses the Army offers," said Al Blanchard, a former Ranger and a spokesman at Fort Benning, Ga., Ranger headquarters.

"The whole course is designed to push the individual. There is very little sleep involved, a lot of stress. It's not unusual for the individual to keep going on sheer guts."

Blanchard said he didn't know what the water temperature was, but "it doesn't have to be particularly cold to suffer from hypothermia."

The Florida Panhandle had just warmed up this week after a cold snap with highs in the 40s and lows at or below freezing. The National Weather Service estimated that water temperatures for this time of year range in the mid to upper 50s.

The soldiers began boat training Wednesday morning and were pa-

"Ranger training is ... one of the most difficult courses the Army offers."

AL BLANCHARD
Ranger spokesman

trolling in the swamps by mid-afternoon. They began building rope bridges as they moved into deeper waters.

At about 5:30 p.m., instructors noticed one student was showing signs of hypothermia, and by the time a helicopter arrived, several others started showing symptoms and were taken to a clinic, said officials at the 724-square-mile base.

Three of the survivors were in good condition and the fourth was listed as stable and in intensive care.

Names and home units of the soldiers were not released pending notification of relatives.

The deaths were being investigated by the Army Safety Office out of Fort Rucker, Ala.

Ranger school, which is based at Fort Benning and has camps in Dahlonga, Ga.; Fort Bliss, Texas; and Eglin, trains about 3,000 soldiers in leadership and small-unit skills each year. The last casualty at the Florida camp was a drowning that occurred in 1985. The soldiers come to Fort Benning near Columbus, Ga., from bases all over the world.

Monica Manganaro, a spokeswoman at Fort Benning, said candidates are physically tested during a week of screening before Ranger school begins.

"They have to be in good physical condition and even better mental condition," she said.

Rabin, Arafat break deadlock

EREZ JUNCTION, Gaza Strip — Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chief Yasser Arafat broke a deadlock Thursday and agreed to step up talks on expanding self-rule in the West Bank.

Rabin promised to ease a travel ban and permit 15,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to return to jobs in Israel next week. The move came after Arafat arrested militant opponents of the peace talks and created a military court to try those suspected of attacking Israel.

Rabin also proposed that Arafat's self-rule government take over the running of the West Bank city of Jenin. But Palestinians were cool to the idea because he suggested this be done without Israeli troops pulling out.

Rabin told reporters both sides were committed to implementing the second stage of the Israel-PLO autonomy accord — troop withdrawal from Palestinian towns in the West Bank and Palestinian elections.

Arafat did not speak to reporters,

but Palestinian Economics Minister Ahmed Qureia confirmed the two sides agreed to step up negotiations.

"The result of the meeting was less than we expected, but I think it broke the ice and ended a crisis," Qureia said.

Rabin and Arafat agreed to meet again in three weeks, then a week after that.

Under the autonomy accord, Israel was to have completed a troop pullout from West Bank towns by July 1994 so Palestinians could hold general elections. Rabin delayed withdrawal after Islamic militants carried out attacks, most of them suicide bombings, which have killed 56 Israelis since October.

Just before the summit, Arafat named five judges to a special military court that will try suspected assailants. Palestinian police rounded up eight followers of Islamic Jihad, the group responsible for a Jan. 22 bombing that killed 21 Israelis.

But Rabin said he still wasn't satisfied with the performance of the

Palestinian police and would keep pushing Arafat to do more to foil attacks on Israelis.

Meanwhile, he said, Israel is willing in every respect but one to give Arafat immediate administrative control of Jenin, a Palestinian town of 50,000 in the northern West Bank where there has been relatively little unrest in recent years.

"Let's take Jenin, and let the Palestinian authority run it as far as municipal and economic matters are concerned ... but with our full control over security," Rabin told reporters.

Palestinians want Israeli troops to transfer security to Palestinians as they did in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, the two areas Arafat controls.

However, Palestinians said they would accept a gradual pullout from West Bank towns that would begin with relatively quiet cities and leave troublespots to the end, as long as withdrawal was completed within three months.

Tornado hits Alabama trailer park

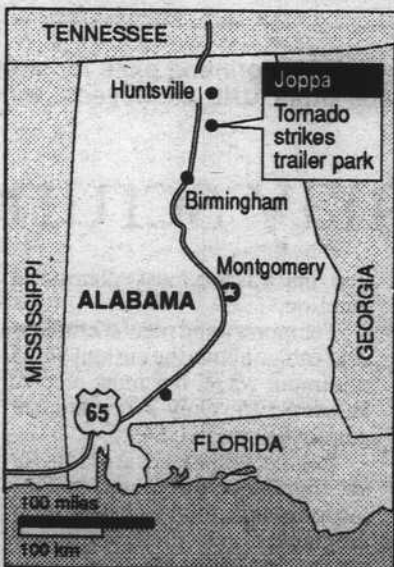
ARAB, Ala. — A tornado ripped across northern Alabama before dawn Thursday, killing at least three people and injuring more than 100. Teams looking for more victims in the rubble found a baby unharmed beneath two wrecked trailers.

The dead included a 4-year-old girl, the coroner said.

About an hour before the tornado hit, lightning struck the office of the National Weather Service in Huntsville. The service's Birmingham office was able to issue a warning at 5 a.m., minutes before the twister raced through Arab, but police didn't have time to warn everyone.

"Normally they give us a siren warning, but they didn't this morning," Arab resident Karen Berry said. "There was nothing."

There was just the howl of the wind in the dark — sending debris smashing through windows, tearing off roofs, pulling trees from the soil and demolishing trailers, homes and lives.



AP/Wm. J. Castello

from trees and yet more wind shook cars creeping over littered roads.

No more victims were found — just one small miracle.

"We found a 1-year-old baby under two trailers," fireman Robert Reynolds said. "He was sitting there, not making a sound."

The last deadly funnel cloud that struck Alabama hit on Palm Sunday a year ago, killing 22 people, most in a church about 60 miles from Arab.

When the Huntsville weather service office went down, Birmingham took over watching the radar and the weather service said there was no delay in picking up the tornado and issuing a warning.

Police got the warning through deputies in a nearby county and were in the process of sending out siren vehicles to alert residents when the tornado hit. Lt. Danny Harvell said.

In Washington, Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Ala., called for a complete accounting from the weather service.

News... in a Minute

Women smokers want to quit

ATLANTA — About three-quarters of women who smoke say they want to quit but can't, federal health officials said Thursday.

In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study involving more than 7,000 female smokers, about 73 percent said they wanted to quit and 75 percent reported at least one sign of addiction.

Of those who said they had tried to stop smoking in the past year, 80 percent said they failed. Only 2.5 percent of all smokers successfully quit each year, and the rates are about the same for women and men.

About 22 million of the nation's 48 million adult smokers are women.

"Quitting smoking may be the most important thing women can do to improve their health," said Dr. Wanda Jones, acting director of the CDC's Office of Women's Health.

To determine addiction, the CDC asked women whether they needed or were dependent on cigarettes; needed to smoke more to get the same effect; felt unable to cut back even though they've tried, and got sick when they did so.

A third of the women smokers said they felt sick and suffered withdrawal symptoms when they tried to cut back or quit.

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