

News Digest

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Russian agreement falls through

Communists say they won't accept deal, but aren't ruling out talks

MOSCOW (AP) — A tentative agreement to approve a new government under Boris Yeltsin to tackle Russia's economic crisis appeared to collapse within hours Sunday after the Communists said they would not accept the deal.

The Communist turnabout came just after the government and the opposition said they had reached a deal following days of tough behind-the-scenes bargaining to call a political truce to win quick confirmation of Yeltsin's choice for prime minister.

Communist leader Gennady Zuzanov said the proposed pact was rejected by a meeting of his party leadership because there was no firm guarantee Yeltsin would abide by its provisions. He did not rule out further talks.

The proposed three-page agreement would have given the State Duma, parliament's lower house, more say in Cabinet appointments, but leave

Yeltsin with substantial power, despite earlier opposition calls for his removal.

In particular, the president would have retained control of the security forces with the right to fill three key posts — the defense, foreign and interior ministries. In exchange, Yeltsin would have agreed to Duma approval of most Cabinet appointments for the first time, according to lawmakers and media reports.

The Communists' surprise rejection of the deal could be a prelude to more bargaining as the opposition seeks further concessions. Russia may face weeks of political uncertainty if the opposition blocks Chernomyrdin's confirmation and Yeltsin refuses to withdraw it.

Chernomyrdin said earlier that swift formation of a new government was vital to tackle the nation's economic crisis.

"We must resolve financial problems. The

ruble is hanging by a thread," he said.

Russia plunged into political and economic crisis when financial markets and the currency collapsed as the government defaulted on its debts and the country was hit by the global furor in developing markets. Ordinary Russians fear they face yet more hardships after years of upheaval.

The ruble appeared to gain Sunday and exchange points across Moscow were buying U.S. dollars at an average 8 rubles to the dollar, down from an average of 8½ rubles to the dollar the day before. The rate had been 6 rubles to the dollar before the collapse.

There was no word on an economic plan that had been discussed with the opposition to handle the crisis. It called for imposing some Soviet-style economic controls, but Chernomyrdin said Saturday there was no question of restoring the Soviet system.

Diana memorialized by family in private

CRATHIE, Scotland (AP) — Princess Diana's sons, in Scotland on the eve of the anniversary of her death, spent Sunday in private with their father, far from the strangers who brought bouquets by the hundreds to the gates of her London palace.

"Hear our prayers for those grieving the loss of a loved one in circumstances known to the world but only experienced by a few," said the Rev. Robert Sloan, presiding at the morning service at Crathie church, near Balmoral Castle.

Diana's sons, Prince William, 16, and Prince Harry, 13, sat in the front pew on either side of their father, Prince Charles.

The boys were at Balmoral last year when they learned that Diana had been killed in a car crash in Paris. The royal family traditionally spends August in the Scottish Highlands.

In London, admirers of the princess again brought flowers to her old home of Kensington Palace, a fragrant echo of the mourning and the weeklong vigil that followed the princess' death on Aug. 31, 1997.

"I thought there would be more flowers and more people here," said Liegh O'Malley, 50, who came from suburban Essex county. "But it is wonderful to see everyone coming from all over the world to remember."

Scores of well-wishers, strung along the tree-shaded approach to Crathie church, waited quietly in the late summer sun for the limousines to move slowly past, waving at Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, the Queen Mother Elizabeth and two younger generations, who smiled and waved back.

At St. James' Palace in London, where Harry and William now live with Charles, Diana's former employees and other members of the royal household will take part on Monday in a service of remembrance. Diana's body lay at St. James' Palace before the funeral at Westminster Abbey.

Quiet dignity and privacy are very much the mood of family memorial plans — and as far removed as could be from the massive funeral televised to millions around the world last Sept. 6.

The royal family will meet again Monday at Crathie church for private prayers, joined by the prime minister and his wife.

Diana's brother and sisters and their families will mark the anniversary even more privately, nearly 500 miles south at the lake where the princess is buried on an island at Althorp, the Spencers' ancestral home.

U.S. discusses Serb attack

Secretary of State Albright says the offensive in Kosovo can't be tolerated much longer.

BIJELJINA, Bosnia (AP) — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will meet on Monday with the NATO commander Gen. Wesley Clark to accelerate contingency plans for an attack on Serb forces in the embattled Yugoslav province of Kosovo, she said Sunday.

Renewing an old warning, Albright said "there is beginning to be identification of the forces" that would be used in an attempt to halt a Serb offensive that has claimed a high civilian toll and left tens of thousands of people homeless refugees.

"Neither the United States nor the European allies can tolerate this much longer," she said on a busy day in the Balkans.

Albright met with leaders who are credited with trying to implement the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, which ended 3½ years of ethnic warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"You should be very proud. It's a great message to run on," she told

Biljana Plavsic, the president of the Serb republic, who broke from war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic and will seek election in nationwide elections in two weeks.

By the end of the year, Albright said, the United States will have provided \$100 million in aid to the Bosnian republic and \$240 million to all of Bosnia. "The election will be a chance to tell us what kind of country Bosnia will be," she said.

"We have no interest in subsidizing intolerance," Albright said. "Whatever the outcome of the vote, we will provide support only to those communities that meet their responsibility to implement Dayton by welcoming refugees, making joint institutions work, by upholding justice and the law."

"Albright has been criticized in some quarters for leveling threats — against the Serbs in Kosovo and against Iraq for defying U.N. weapons inspectors — without implementing them. But she renewed her warning to the Serbs Sunday while also stressing that the top U.S. priority in Kosovo was finding a diplomatic solution to the struggle between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians who are seeking independence.

GOP leader: Keep House open until Clinton action completed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite November's elections, the House's third-ranked Republican wants Congress to stay in session until it completes action on Kenneth Starr's report expected soon about President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

Meanwhile, a Democratic House member who spent time with Clinton in Massachusetts said Sunday the president regretted the way he explained the affair to the American people and wished he'd had more time to reflect before making his nationally televised speech.

House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said the House should take up the Lewinsky matter as soon as Starr submits a report and should not go home for the year until it has reached a conclusion on impeachment.

"If the president is going to put us through this trauma, then we need

to get it over with as soon as possible," DeLay said on "Fox News Sunday." "We need to stay in session for as long as it takes to get this behind us."

DeLay, a leading conservative, repeated his position that Clinton should resign. "This president no longer has the moral authority to lead either here at home or in the world," the Texan said.

The House returns from summer vacation after Labor Day and plans to be in session for only a month before going home for the midterm elections.

California, said on CBS' "Face the Nation" that DeLay was saying if Starr has not indicated when he will submit his report or whether it will go beyond the president's admitted sexual relationship with the former White House intern and associated allegations of obstruction of justice, perjury or suborning perjury.



Strike causes cancellation of 1,700 Northwest flights

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Travelers grounded by the Northwest Airlines pilots' strike dealt with long waits and alternative plans this weekend.

Northwest canceled all of its 1,700 daily flights through Tuesday.

The airline and the pilots union said they were willing to resume negotiations that broke off shortly before the 6,100 pilots went on strike, but there was no indication when that would happen.

The union rejected a last-minute company offer shortly before their strike deadline of 11:01 a.m. Saturday.

"I'm not going to play games about who's going to call who, but clearly these guys walked out," Northwest spokesman Jon Austin said.

"They have to walk back in." "It kind of takes two to dance," said Paul Omodt, a spokesman for the Air Line Pilots Association.

The union had said tentative agreements were reached on most contract issues, but not on job security and compensation.

Northwest pilots say they earn an average salary of about \$120,000 per year.

The airline says the average salary is \$133,000.

Cuban plane crashes, investigators seek causes

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — Investigators searched through wreckage of a Cuban airliner Sunday for clues to the crash that killed 79 people Saturday.

The aircraft, owned by Cubana de Aviacion, burst into flames Saturday during takeoff, clipping through two homes and an auto mechanic's shop before slamming into the field near a runway at Quito's international airport.

The plane, en route first to the coastal city of Guayaquil before continuing on to Havana, was carrying 76 passengers and 14 crew members.

At least 21 passengers reportedly survived the crash. Rescue workers found another charred body Sunday, bringing the death toll to 79.

At least 10 people on the ground were killed.

Survivors said they heard loud noises before the crash, and an aviation official said it appeared that one of the engines stalled before the crash.

Police cordoned off the crash site while investigators searched for the plane's black box and a local resident missing since the crash.

It was not immediately clear if the body found Sunday was that of the missing neighbor.

None of the crew members survived the crash.

Two stewardesses helped passengers escape from the burning plane, only to be consumed by the fire, survivors told local newspapers.

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