

Yeltsin battles hard-liners

Russian parliament seeks to limit ruler's emergency power

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW — Boris Yeltsin stood firm Monday against hard-liners' efforts to impeach him, and his foreign minister told reporters the Russian president was in a "fighting" mood.



Yeltsin

Yeltsin asserted control over the Russian media to safeguard news organizations from a takeover by his foes.

His spokesman accused the chief justice of prematurely supporting parliament's impeachment effort.

The Constitutional Court convened to weigh the legality of a decree by Yeltsin on Saturday declaring emergency rule and scheduling a referendum for April 25 on his leadership.

Before departing for talks in Washington, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said Yeltsin was in a "fighting" mood despite the death of his mother, Klavdia Yeltsin, over the weekend, the Interfax news agency reported.

Thousands of presidential supporters converged on a

movie theater in central Moscow for an upbeat rally with top presidential advisers. A steady stream of cold rain kept other rallies in the city small and short.

Russian coal miners said they would walk out if the court ruled against Yeltsin.

Mikhail Poltoranin, chief of the Federal Information Center, said the president would appeal directly to the working people if parliament tried to block the referendum.

In Washington, the Clinton administration again offered support for Yeltsin.

"Right now, President Yeltsin is the leader of the reform process," spokesman George Stephanopoulos said. "That is not to say there aren't other reformers in Russia as well."

Yeltsin released a decree placing the media under his protection and ordering the Interior Ministry to take "necessary measures" to defend information agencies.

At the end of an emergency session of the Congress of Peoples Deputies on March 13, speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov ordered lawmakers to prepare legislation to put the media under control of parliament.

Yeltsin also lashed out at chief justice Valery Zorkin for

publicly opposing Yeltsin's speech before the Constitutional Court began to formally review the case Monday.

Kostikov said Zorkin's position was "hasty and unilateral" and "contrary to legal ethics."

He praised the military for remaining above the political fray, and said support for Yeltsin was growing.

After hours of deliberation Monday, the court failed to rule on the constitutionality of Yeltsin's address. A court ruling declaring Yeltsin's actions unconstitutional would be a big step toward his impeachment.

Zorkin said the court would continue its deliberations this week and expressed hope "the president would revise his attitude to the Constitutional Court and the Congress of People's Deputies."

He said that "the road toward a compromise has not been exhausted."

When the road to compromise is exhausted, then war begins," Zorkin also proclaimed his impartiality.

The Court convened after a vote by the Supreme Soviet legislature Sunday asking it to review the legality of Yeltsin's actions, which Zorkin earlier had characterized as an attempted coup.

Serbs to allow refugees to flee town

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — The leader of the Bosnian Serbs promised to open air and land corridors on Tuesday to allow thousands of desperate refugees to flee the eastern town of Srebrenica.

The leader, Radovan Karadzic, also told the U.N. Security Council that it was not his goal to capture the town, one of the few remaining Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia.

A representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees who just returned from Srebrenica said he feared Serbs were indeed planning a takeover.

Interviewed in Sarajevo, UN-HCR representative Larry Hollingworth said:

"Maybe they'll open a corridor and say, 'Everybody out, or we'll flatten you.' There's nothing to stop them."

"I hope to God the Serbs do not go in," Hollingworth added. "There are 20,000 refugees there, and very few fighters. . . . They will kill thousands of innocent people. It's a tragedy that can be prevented."

Despite Karadzic's assurances that Serbs are only trying to halt a Muslim offensive in eastern Bosnia, Hollingworth said Serb attacks are likely part of a strategy worked out by Bosnian Serb leaders.

Unconfirmed ham radio reports from Srebrenica on Monday said Serb forces had advanced

two and a half miles from the south and cut off a dozen villages, surrounding 10,000 to 15,000 people.

Murat Efendic, a Sarajevo-based Srebrenica official, appealed for U.N. peacekeepers to go to the area.

At the United Nations, peace talks stalled again and a vote was delayed in the Security Council over authorizing military action to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia.

"Maybe they'll open a corridor and say, 'Everybody out, or we'll flatten you.' There's nothing to stop them."

-Larry Hollingworth, U.N. official

Russia was reluctant to authorize action against fellow Slavs.

Enforcement of the zone would be intended primarily to ground Serbian aircraft and prevent aerial attacks on Muslim villages.

Bosnian Serbs strongly hinted they would walk out of the talks if the council calls for military action to ground their aircraft.

"The feeling is that time is running out on the talks," Fred Eckhard, a spokesman for mediators Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance, said at a U.N. briefing.

The Bosnian Serb news agency

SRNA, quoted by Yugoslavian Tanjug agency, said Karadzic ordered a corridor two and a half miles wide to be opened for five days, beginning Tuesday. It quoted him as saying relief officials could ask for more time.

It said he also ordered his forces to allow U.N. helicopters to reach Srebrenica with "all humanitarian cargoes."

The U.N. commander in Bosnia, Gen. Philippe Morillon has been seeking to open corridors to Srebrenica. He also has taken up a Serb request for evacuation of 272 Serbs from the government-held town of Tuzla, 45 miles northwest of Srebrenica.

Serbs had made such an evacuation a condition for allowing further evacuations from Srebrenica.

Morillon rejected suggestions that the move could be seen as the start of more "ethnic cleansing" to create homogenous regions in eastern Bosnia.

Karadzic said civilians were free to stay in Srebrenica or be evacuated, and that in either case his forces would protect them.

Overnight, U.S. planes dropped 43 tons of food and other supplies in the Srebrenica area.

UNHCR officials said they had set up a soup kitchen in Srebrenica to provide 2,000 meals a day.

In Sarajevo, shelling around the airport subsided Monday. The airport road, closed because of heavy fighting involving tanks in the nearby suburb of Stup, was reopened. The airlift of relief supplies remained suspended.



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