

Armenian militants hold 38 Soviet troops hostage : 3 killed

MOSCOW, Aug 19: Three people, including two soldiers, were killed on Sunday in shooting in Soviet Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh territory where Armenian militants are holding 38 soldiers hostage, Azerbaijan authorities said, reports Reuter.

The Soviet Vremya evening news programme quoted the Azerbaijan Interior Minister (MVD) as saying a fierce gun-fight took place in the north of Nagorno-Karabakh, a largely Armenian-populated enclave ruled by Azerbaijan.

It gave no details but Tass news agency quoted the Azerbaijan Communist Party as saying Armenian militants opposed to Azeri rule attacked an Azeri village.

The Russian information agency said 20 armored vehicles had been drawn up around Aterk village, the focal point of the confrontation with

Armenian militants who have seized interior confrontation with Armenian militants who have seized Interior Ministry troops to force the release of Zhura Petrosyan, known to his followers as Napoleon, and other rebel leaders.

The MVD has warned it is ready to use force to free the hostages, but there was no sign of a major militarization to free the captives.

Negotiations by mediators from the Armenian government led to the release of three hostages last week, but talks at the weekend were deadlocked.

The republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia have been the scene of the Soviet Union's worst bloodshed over the last three years. Hundreds of people have been killed in clashes over the future of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Yanayev, career communist, assumes power with a bang

MOSCOW, Aug 19: Not many Soviets had heard of Gennady I. Yanayev, a career Communist, when he was elected Vice President of the country a year ago. They will now, reports AP.

The 53-year-old Yanayev took over as Soviet President on Monday on the grounds that Mikhail S Gorbachev could no longer perform his duty for health reasons, the Tass news agency said.

The bombshell announcement came only three weeks after US President Bush visited Moscow to sign with Gorbachev the historic Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to slash long range nuclear weapons.

Yanayev was one of the officials who greeted Bush when he arrived in late July.

Yanayev was a little-known

provincial party official before becoming Gorbachev's personal choice for the job of vice president. His nomination was approved by the Congress of People's Deputies in December.

Radical deputies immediately called fraud, but the vote was declared valid. Yanayev's election as vice president came during the same legislative session when former Foreign Minister Eduard A Shevardnadze resigned, warning of an impending dictatorship.

At the time, Yanayev disagreed with Shevardnadze that the country was heading toward dictatorship, and said the party had nothing to do with Shevardnadze's decision to resign.

Yanayev spent his eight

months as vice president primarily greeting foreign officials. He was only rarely seen on Soviet television and his comments were sporadically reported in the Soviet press.

An ethnic Russian, Yanayev is a member of the parliament and the national Supreme Soviet legislature. He also is a member of the Communist Party's ruling Politburo and its policy-setting Central Committee, and has a doctorate in history and a law degree.

Yanayev graduated in 1959 from the Gorky Agricultural Institute and obtained a law degree in 1967 from the All-Union Juridical Correspondence Institute, a law school.

After completing his studies, Yanayev worked as a mechanical engineer in Gorky before becoming a volunteer in

the Communist Party's youth organization, the Komsomol.

In the early 1970s he came to Moscow to become chairman of the USSR Committee of Youth Organizations, a group that deals with foreign youth movements. At the same time, he wrote his dissertation on international youth movements.

Yanayev later served for six years as deputy chairman of the Soviet Friendship Society, a group that maintains non-governmental contacts with foreigners, primarily in the development world.

He later worked as a Komsomol official and in 1989 became an official of the government-run trade union organization. He was elected to the Communist Party Politburo in July after a party shakeup.

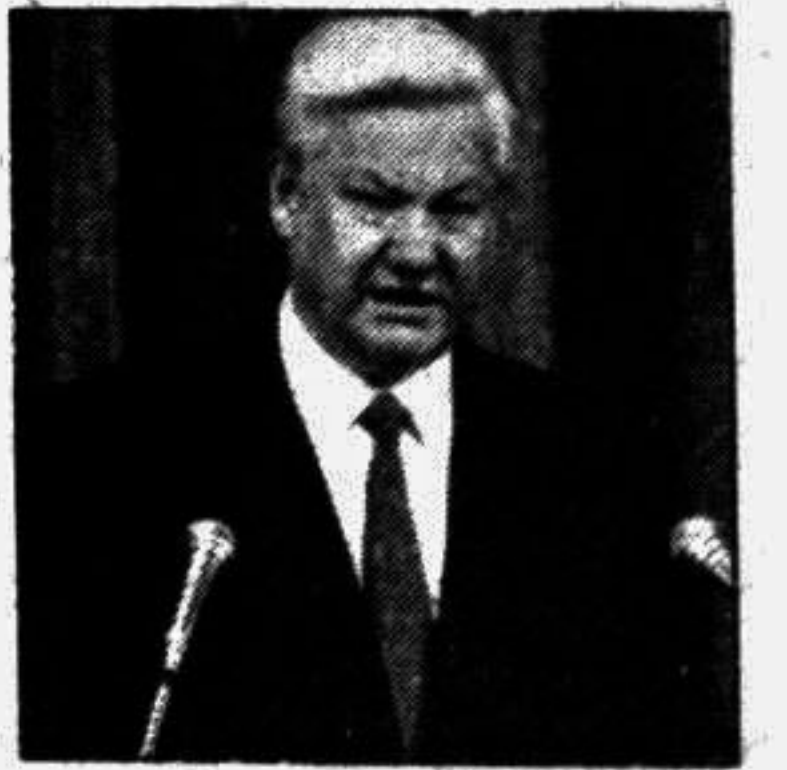
Off the Record

Buddhists pin great hopes on Yeltsin

MOSCOW: The Moscow representative office of the Central Spiritual Department of Buddhists of the USSR has asked Gavrill Popov, the Mayor of Moscow, to examine the possibility of allotting a plot of land within its boundaries to be used as a construction site for a Buddhist temple. Moscow Buddhists motivate their request by the growing scope of contacts with Buddhists in other countries and also numerous requests from the Buddhist community and head of diplomatic and trade missions of Asian countries who have no place of worship, reports IAN.

In his interview to Novosti, Leonid Verkhovsky, a staffer of the representative office, said that unlike other world religions, Buddhists are the only community who have no temple of their own in the Soviet capital.

Irrespective of the outcome of the official request, Verkhovsky noted, Moscow's Buddhists intend to discuss this problem and some other issues with Popov and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Buddhists pin great hopes on Yeltsin who previously helped them to obtain permission to lease a new building for office needs.



Sakhalin to host Korean festival

YUZHNO-SAKHALINSK: On August 17-18, the city will host a pioneer South and North Korean festival of performing arts — a joint initiative of the Sakhalin Korean Association and the Sakhalin Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea.

"These will be glorious days for our ethnic culture, timed to the anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese aggressors in World War II. We shall also debate issues of peaceful reunification. We hope the event will bring it closer," said Kim Mee Oon, Association President, reports IAN.

Both foreign delegations will discuss prospects for a Korean Cultural Centre in Sakhalin with association activists and regional officials.



YUGOSLAVIA: An unidentified old woman resident of Okuchani (Western Slovenia) cries near her destroyed house August 18. At least two people were killed yesterday after a grenade attack by Yugoslav army. — AFP/UNB photo

Japanese live longer

TOKYO: Japanese men and women have the world's highest life expectancy and the women can expect to outlive their male counterparts by six years, reports Reuter.

A Health Ministry report released Monday showed that the average life expectancy of Japanese women rose 0.05 years over the past 12 months to a new world record of 81.81 years.

The life expectancy of men declined by the same amount to 75.86.

It is the sixth successive year that Japanese women have held the world record for life expectancy, while men have held the record for five successive years.

World reacts with disbelief

LONDON, Aug 19: The world reacted with surprise Monday to the startling news that Mikhail S Gorbachev was no longer president of the Soviet Union, reports AP.

The official news agency Tass reported Monday that Vice President Gennady Yanayev had taken over and a state of emergency had been declared for six months in certain parts of the country.

"This has come totally out of the blue," said a spokeswoman for the British Foreign Office, speaking anonymously.

World financial markets plummeted, as the US dollar and gold bullion — considered safe investments in times of unrest — soared.

Stock markets in Sydney, Tokyo and Hong Kong plunged in chaotic trading.

The Tokyo Stock Exchange plummeted over 1,000 points, or 5.23 per cent, as the Nikkei Stock Average fell to 21,633.29 shortly after the afternoon session began.

Soviets outside their country were equally confused and anxious about the news.

"I don't know if this is good news or bad news," said Yuri Lysenko, spokesman for the Soviet Embassy in Beijing.

Rodney Kennedy-Minott, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, said he thinks Gorbachev was replaced in a coup by right-wingers.

"We've been apprehensive about that," he said. "For the past three or four weeks we've been getting in rumours from the liberals in the Soviet Union that a coup was possible."

British lawmakers warned that the Soviet Union faced great instability.

"Old-style hard-left repression cannot solve the problems of the USSR. Free world governments will have to co-ordinate a fast effective response," said Conservative Party lawmaker Peter Bottomley.

"Without direct interference we have to get the so-called strongmen in Moscow to realize that the apparent weakness of the ballot paper and arguments of democracy are more powerful than the dead hand of state socialism."

BRIEFLY

Hostages may be freed, says Iranian FM: Iran's Foreign Minister says after meeting for a second day with the leader of a group linked to hostage-holders in Lebanon he saw a "positive trend" in efforts to free prisoners in the Middle East, reports AP from Nicosia.

Alli Akbar Velayati's remarks Sunday, along with his session with Abbas Musawi, the head of Hezbollah, refocused attention on Tehran's high-profile role in the hostage crisis.

Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has called for the hostages to be freed, also attended the meeting with Musawi, Iranian radio said in a report monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp.

Tel Aviv for harder US stand against PLO: State television reports that Israel plans to ask the United States for stiffer guarantees it will keep the PLO away from a proposed Middle East peace conference, reports AP.

The report came from Jerusalem Sunday as Israel's attorney general was reported examining whether Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini should be tried for meeting in London with Palestinian officials.

It quoted the contents of a secret draft of an agreement being negotiated with the United States, which spells out Israel's conditions for participating in a peace conference scheduled for October.

US governors asked to activate GATT: President George Bush asked the governors of American's 50 states on Sunday to use their influence to help get stalled international trade negotiations going again, reports Reuter from Kennebunkport.

The effort to overhaul global trade rules in the so-called Uruguay round of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) has deadlocked on the issue of agricultural subsidies, which many European countries refuse to abandon.

8 Muslim militants shot dead in Kashmir: Indian troops shot dead eight Muslim militants as rebels killed an Indian security officer Sunday in stepped up attacks on paramilitary contingents in the northern state of Kashmir, reports AP.

A Kashmir government spokesman in Srinagar said Indian border guards in the Karan Sector ambushed and shot dead a group of armed militants when they tried to cross the border early Sunday and enter Pakistan.

12 crushed to death in Beijing train mishap

BEIJING, Aug 19: Twelve passengers were crushed to death when they leapt from their burning train compartment into the path of another train in southern China, the official New China News Agency said, reports Reuter.

The agency said another 20 passengers were injured when they fled the burning carriage and jumped onto the tracks in the path of the oncoming freight train.

The fire broke out shortly after midnight on Saturday as the train, bound from Wuchang to Canton in Guangdong province, passed through a tunnel.

Infant diarrhoea claims 1000 a month in Lima

LIMA (Peru), Aug 19: Infant diarrhoea kills more than 1,000 babies a month in Peru and the government could sharply reduce that number by giving the disease the same priority it gives to fighting the Cholera epidemic, a UNICEF official says, reports Reuter.

UNICEF Executive Director James Grant told reporters on Saturday at the end of his three-day visit here that there have been almost four times as many deaths from infant diarrhoea, a preventable disease, as there have been from the eight-month-old Cholera epidemic.

Gorbachev strikes sweeping political changes to see USSR in chaos

MOSCOW, Aug 19: Mikhail Gorbachev, who was replaced as President today, brought sweeping political change to the Soviet Union and revolutionised Kremlin foreign policy, only to see the country brought to the brink of economic collapse and political chaos, reports Reuter.

After six years of perestroika and new freedoms few could have dreamed of during decades of hardline dictatorship, his popularity has been battered by food shortages, ethnic strife and the struggle to drag the economy into the modern age.

The battle over the shift to a market economy has highlighted deep-set divisions between reformers and conservatives, and left Gorbachev sitting uncomfortably on the fence.

Internationally, Gorbachev has altered the superpower relationship, meeting repeatedly American Presidents. He has also boosted disarmament, pulled Soviet troops out of Afghanistan, and joined international condemnation of former close ally Iraq.

He has overseen the establishment of diplomatic ties with a number of ideologically alien states, including South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

In July in London, Gorbachev met the leaders of the Group of Seven leading in-

dustrial democracies but failed to persuade the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan to bail out his stricken economy.

US President George Bush visited Moscow in late July for a summit meeting that resulted in a major arms control agreement which Gorbachev said means the 'cold war' will never return.

Gorbachev paved the way for German unity by allowing a peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe in which hardline communist regimes were successively dismantled and the Warsaw Pact was all but dismantled.

Gorbachev has also presided over the abolition of the Communists' 72-year monopoly on power in the Soviet Union, arousing vociferous opposition among hard party Conservatives determined to preserve old-style communism.

In the streets, the population is increasingly unimpressed by his other achievements as long as food and basic goods are in short supply.

Strikes, unprecedented in the Soviet Union, now undermine industrial production. The Kremlin leadership was jeered during the 1990 annual May Day parade in Moscow's Red Square.

Nationalist ferment is bubbling in the country's fringe

republics.

His domestic political reforms included the creation of a multi-party system, and changing the constitution to give real power to the Parliaments in Moscow and the 15 republics.

After four years as

Communist Party Chief, a post he assumed on March 11, 1985, Gorbachev became President of his country in May 1989, providing himself with a solid legal basis and indirect popular mandate for his powers.

Four months later he

purged the ruling Politburo of hardliners after sweeping more than 100 old-timers from the policymaking party central committee.

He reinforced his authority in 1990 by being appointed Executive President, at the same time pushing the party slightly to one side in a bid to block any organised resistance to his reforms.

Having taken power at the age of 54, the youngest Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin, Gorbachev quickly impressed his countrymen and the outside world with his vigorous but informal style of leadership.

The result was a ferment unmatched in Soviet life since the times of Nikita Khrushchev, who denounced Stalin in 1956 and, like Gorbachev, encouraged a cultural thaw which led to the publication of outspoken books and more frankness in the press.

As the scale of Gorbachev's ambitions became clear, so did the extent to which his policies met resistance in the vast party and government bureaucracy and deep-rooted apathy among millions of Soviet people.

From the summer of 1988 on, he increasingly filled his speeches with attacks on his opponents and pledged no let-up in his drive for change.



MOSCOW: (FILES) Combo shows Soviet Premier Valentin Pavlov (l) (14 Jan 91 filer), and KGB president Vladimir Kryuchkov (r), two of the eight members of the state of emergency committee set up in Moscow 19 Aug following the ouster of Mikhail Gorbachev. —AFP photo

Man with mismatched heart critical

SEATTLE (Washington), Aug 19: A man who received a mismatched heart last week because of a hospital mix-up is in critical but stable condition after undergoing a second heart transplant operation on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The patient received the new heart in a four-and-a-half hour operation that began at 2:30 A.M. (0930 GMT). The surgeons say it is an excellent match.

Oregon Health Sciences University Hospital Spokeswoman Marcia Williams said.

State Committee formed to run Soviet Union

MOSCOW, Aug 19: The official Soviet news agency Tass, announcing the removal of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, said today a state committee had been formed to run the country, reports Reuter.

Tass listed the members of the committee as follows: O.D. Baklanov, First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Defence Council, V.A. Kryuchkov, Chairman of the KGB, V.S. Pavlov, Prime Minister of the USSR, B.K. Pugo, Interior Minister of the USSR, V.A. Starodubtsev, Chairman of the Farmers' Union of the USSR, A.I. Tsybakov, President of the Association of State Enterprises and Industrial, Construction, Transport and Communications facilities of the USSR, DT Yazov, Defence Minister of the USSR, GI Yanayev, Acting President of the USSR.



NOW ALL SMILES FADE: A file photo of Mikhail Gorbachev and President George Bush during their summit meeting in Moscow recently.

Bush awakened before midnight and told of Gorby's exit

KENNEBUNKPORT (Maine), Aug 19: President Bush was awakened shortly before midnight and told of the apparent ouster of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, a move that apparently took the White House by surprise, reports AP.

Bush was asleep, and was awakened by a phone call

and was given the news. "We are aware of the press reports concerning President Gorbachev. We have no details at this time," said a statement released by White House spokesman Roman Popadiuk. "We are continuing to seek details."

Officials said the news from Moscow caught the administration by surprise.

"This was unexpected," Popadiuk told reporters. He said Bush, at his seaside vacation home on Walker's Point, was informed of the news by his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft just before midnight.

"There's no specific presidential reaction, because we're waiting to see what the de-

tails are," Popadiuk told reporters. "We haven't been notified by the Soviet government."

He said there were no immediate scheduling changes for Bush, who was scheduled for an early morning round of golf despite stormy weather.

Popadiuk said the US Embassy in Moscow was trying to get

details. The outgoing ambassador, Jack Matlock, left his post last Saturday, and the new ambassador, Robert Strauss has not yet arrived. The Embassy is in the care of Charge d' Affaires Jim Collins.

A US Defense Department spokesman, Air Force Capt. Sam Grizzle, said the Defense Department was

"monitoring news reports" on the Soviet events but declined to comment on their possible military significance.

"We don't talk about alert status or such things — that's par for the course," he said. Maj. Dave Griffard, spokesman for the US Space Command and NORAD, the North

American Aerospace Defense Command near Colorado Springs which monitors US and Soviet nuclear forces, said late Sunday that American forces have not gone on increased military alert as a result of the shakeup in the Soviet Union.

"No, certainly not," Griffard

said, when asked if the command center was stepping up its alerts status as a result of the Soviet developments.

NORAD, located deep inside Cheyenne Mountain, uses satellite and other technology to monitor missile launches and air force movements around the world.