

INTERNATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Yeltsin calls halt to Chechnya combat

■ **PEACE:** The Russian president's statement was met with skepticism from both politicians and military leaders

MOSCOW (AP) — Desperate to show voters he will stop the war that is sinking his presidency, Boris Yeltsin announced on Sunday a halt to combat operations in Chechnya, limited troop withdrawals and a willingness to hold indirect talks with the rebels' leader.

But his long-promised peace plan stopped short of pledging an end to the fighting and left scant hope for an imminent settlement.

Yeltsin refused to budge on the separatists' two main demands — full withdrawal of Russian troops and independence for Chechnya — and his tone was more tough than conciliatory.

"Without doubt, we will not put up with terrorist acts and we will respond to them adequately," Yeltsin said in taped remarks broadcast on television Sunday night.

The announcement came just 11 weeks before Russia's presidential election, with the unpopular Yeltsin trailing Communist Gennady Zyuganov and voters demanding an end to the bloodshed in Chechnya.

It also capped a month of withering air and ground attacks on Chechen strongholds, apparently intended to push the rebels into the southern mountains before the plan was announced.

Thousands of troops were reportedly continuing large-scale operations Sunday in eight sealed-off mountain villages of southeastern Chechnya,

and Yeltsin's open-ended statement left it unclear what would become of troops in these hot spots.

The announcement was met with skepticism by politicians, analysts and even Russia's military commander in Chechnya, who cast doubt on the feasibility of the unilateral cease-fire, which Yeltsin said would begin within hours.

"It's unlikely that combat operations will be stopped right after the president's statement," Gen. Vyacheslav Tikhomirov told NTV Independent Television from Chechnya. "You understand, it's impossible."

A series of broken promises and defied orders throughout the 16-month-old war have raised serious questions both about Yeltsin's intentions and about his control of the army.

His Security Council declared the military operation in Chechnya to be effectively completed as of Jan. 25, 1995. But fighting has raged on for another 14 months and the death toll is now estimated at over 30,000. Most of those killed were civilians.

Reading a statement at his desk, a Russian flag at his side, Yeltsin declared a unilateral cease-fire in Chechnya starting at midnight Sunday, along with unspecified, phased withdrawals "from the tranquil areas of Chechnya to its administrative borders."

He said democratic elections for a new Chechen parliament would be held, and he was prepared to hold talks with those loyal to rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev "through go-betweens."

Talks last year with rebel officials failed, and the Kremlin has refused to negotiate with Dudayev.

Protesters blame police for student's death in rally

■ **DEMONSTRATION:** An autopsy reports that the student had a heart attack

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Demonstrators blamed police Sunday for a student's death during a violent protest, rejecting autopsy findings that the protester died of a heart attack.

About 1,500 students packed a rally at Yonsei University, shouting, "Government take responsibility for the death!"

Yonsei sophomore Roh Su-sok, 20, collapsed Friday during a 10,000-student protest against tuition increases and alleged government corruption. Police beat many demonstrators with clubs and dragged them on the pavement.

A hospital declared Roh dead on arrival. Five doctors appointed by both sides performed his autopsy Sunday, while 20 student activists, relatives, police, lawyers and reporters looked on.

The autopsy showed that Roh suffered only slight external injuries in the demonstration, the National Medical Center said. He apparently died of cardiac arrest, the center said, although a final medical report is not due for several days.

Students contend police force and tear gas contributed to the death.

Activists say they will continue their protests, which demand tuition increases and accuse President Kim Young-sam of accepting questionable contributions in his 1992 campaign.

The student's death and the resurgence of anti-government protests are likely to hurt the ruling party in April 11 parliamentary elections.

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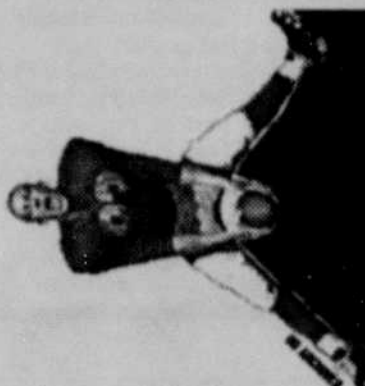
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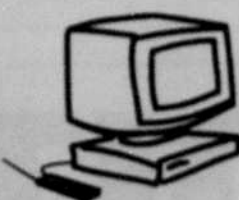


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