

Netanyahu seeks approval of Palestinian peace accord

By Laurie Copans
The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu easily survived a no-confidence motion in parliament today in his battle for political acceptance of his new peace deal with the Palestinians.

Earlier in the day, the prime minister lost an initial political fight in the Knesset, with lawmakers deciding to present an early elections bill to parliament for a vote.

In the West Bank town of Hebron today, an Israeli security guard was shot three times and his body was dumped in a street in an apparent attack by Palestin-

ian militants. Hours later, an anonymous caller directed police to the body of a Palestinian man. The caller said the Palestinian was slain to avenge the killing in Hebron.

It was not immediately clear whether the violence would endanger the implementation of the peace agreement, under which Israel is to withdraw from 13 percent of the West Bank over a 12-week period in exchange for a Palestinian crackdown on Islamic militants.

In a first step toward toppling the Netanyahu government, parliament's Law Committee voted 9-7 to hold a first reading on a bill

to disperse parliament and hold new elections within 100 days. The suggested date for the elections was March 16.

The bill was supported both by coalition hard-liners opposed to the West Bank withdrawal and by dovish opposition legislators hoping to bring down the prime minister.

Committee chairman Hanan Porat said the first reading of the bill could be held within two weeks. A bill needs to be approved in three readings before it becomes law.

The early elections bill will need to be backed by a special majority of 60 of the 120 legisla-

tors. Supporters of the bill said they were confident they could pass the legislation.

Opposition leader Ehud Barak said he was trying to topple Netanyahu without hurting the implementation of the peace agreement.

As a result, Barak said his Labor Party would not back a motion of no-confidence submitted by the far-right opposition party Moledet.

With Labor's help, Netanyahu easily defeated the no-confidence motion with eight votes in favor, 21 against and 15 abstentions. A majority of the legislators, including Netanyahu, did not show up

for the vote.

Labor will also back the government when parliament votes on the peace agreement at the end of a two-day debate starting Nov. 3.

"We will give Mr. Netanyahu an ad hoc safety net for the vote on the agreement. There is no connection between implementation of the peace process and early elections," Barak told Associated Press Television News.

However, today's slaying of an Israeli security guard in Hebron — and the death of a Palestinian in an apparent revenge attack — raised questions about how much violence the new West Bank deal can withstand.

President Yeltsin cancels Austria visit because of poor health

By Greg Myre
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Boris Yeltsin, reduced to a part-time president in recent months, was ailing again Monday and canceled yet another foreign trip, this time to recuperate from high-blood pressure and extreme fatigue.

Yeltsin's fragile health is a source of daily speculation, and a growing chorus of critics questions his fitness to guide Russia through its worst economic crisis in the post-Soviet era.

His doctors ordered Yeltsin not to make a one-day trip to Austria on Tuesday because he was suffering from an "asthenic condition," the president's office said. Asthenia refers to a lack of physical strength.

Yeltsin's blood pressure was also unstable, presidential spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin said, adding that doctors recommended a vacation for the president.

"I think everything will be

fine" with Yeltsin, Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov told Associated Press Television on Monday. Primakov will travel to Vienna for talks with the European Union instead.

Yeltsin aide Oleg Sysuyev said the 67-year-old president would likely start a vacation Wednesday and would probably stay near Moscow.

"The president is not ill enough to be considered incapable of working," Sysuyev said on the Russian TV program "Hero of the Day."

Sysuyev said it was difficult for Yeltsin to cancel the Austria visit. "This is perhaps the first time recently when the president has listened to his doctors' advice."

If Yeltsin were to resign — and he insists he won't — he would be replaced temporarily by Primakov, who would be required to call new elections within three months.

Primakov has been prime minister for only six weeks and has

yet to produce his own blueprint to deal with the country's deep-rooted economic problems. But he is widely respected by all political factions and is seen as a stabilizing influence at a time when Yeltsin has receded into the background.

In Washington, President Clinton's spokesman expressed confidence Monday that Yeltsin's latest health setback would not delay efforts to resolve Russia's economic crisis.

"We wish him a speedy recovery," White House press secretary Joe Lockhart said.

For several months now, Yeltsin has rarely put in full days at the Kremlin, spending most of his time at a secluded country home in the woods west of Moscow.

Yeltsin has been weakened by recurring health problems, including heart bypass surgery in 1996. The president and his doctors insist that he'll serve out the rest of his term, set to end in the

summer of 2000, and they deny he has crippling health problems.

Still, Yeltsin clearly lacks the energy he displayed in his early years in office. He visits the Kremlin two or three times a week, and usually only for a few hours at a time.

Public appearances and foreign trips have become rare, and potential candidates in the 2000 presidential race have already begun an informal campaign to replace Yeltsin.

The leading contenders include Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and Alexander Lebed, a former general and now governor of a vast Siberian region.

Russian newspapers have speculated that Yeltsin is afflicted with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, but their reports are based simply on his public appearances, not on medical examinations.

Yeltsin cannot point to any major accomplishments since he was re-elected in 1996. His critics say

he lacks the political and physical strength to take on any major projects and should quit.

But others say his resignation would trigger a political crisis on top of Russia's economic turmoil.

Yeltsin was forced to cut short a trip to Central Asia earlier this month because of a respiratory infection. Doctors said last week he had recovered.

Yet Monday, Yakushkin said a committee of doctors that usually meets before Yeltsin travels voted unanimously for canceling the Austria trip. There were no plans to hospitalize Yeltsin, Yakushkin said.

In Vienna, Yeltsin had been scheduled to discuss security issues and Russia's economy with Austrian Chancellor Viktor Klima, holder of the rotating European Union chairmanship.

Yeltsin has already canceled a visit to Malaysia that was planned for next month, but a visit to India in December was still on his schedule.

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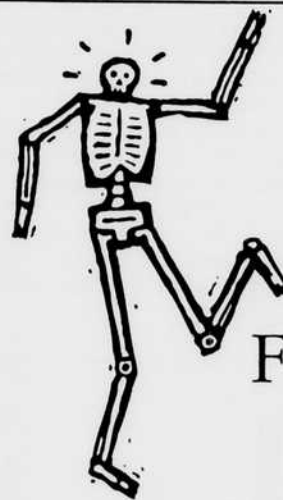
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