Poland's cabinet in crisis as budget falls

From Patricia Clough in Warsaw

POLAND'S two-month-old minority government will decide whether to resign today after its attempt at economic change was rejected last night by parliament.

The government's economic policy, which had been billed by the Prime Minister, Jan Olszewski, as a "life-giving change of course" and feared by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as a recipe for runaway inflation, was unexpectedly voted down by 171 votes to 138 with 38 abstentions.

The government had been prepared to relax the severe monetary discipline of the past two years to help industry out of the recession which is fuelling unemployment. Members said afterwards that many had been alarmed by Andrzej Olechowski, the Finance Minister, who indicated that the government may not be able to control inflation and keep the budget deficit below the promised 5 per cent.

Both the right-wing Confederation for an Independent Poland and the former Communists reportedly switched sides after his warning that Poland was seen as a high risk by the international financial world. The programme had been opposed both by the Liberal Democrats and the left-wing Democratic Union which felt it would destroy what had been achieved so far without dispelling the recession; and by right-wing groups which maintained it did not go far enough.

It is now doubtful whether the uneasy, three-party centre right coalition can carry on. The third government since the collapse of Communism, it has survived thanks to outside support in the fragmented, 29-party Sejm (lower house) – not least because there is no alternative in sight. But if it does survive it faces an even grimmer battle: the 1992 budget in which pressure to increase government spending is immense.

Mr Eysymontt, head of the central planning office, said that the government would continue work on the budget. But Marcin Guguliski, the government spokesman, had remarked earlier in the day that if the programme were rejected the government would "consider whether there were grounds to continue its mission". Its decision is likely to be helped by President Lech Wecasa who, mistrustful of the government's economic aims, has opposed it all along. But its departure could bring other attempts to form a minority government, fresh elections or even an authoritarian or "presidential" takeover.

Armenians 'hold Azeris hostage'

From Helen Womack in Agdam, Azerbaijan

AZERI officials say as many as 600 civilians may have survived last week's massacre in the mountains of Nagorny Karabakh and are trying to negotiate their release from Armenian captivity.

Yesterday the prosecutor in the Azeri border town of Agdam interviewed a woman who was among five Azeri hostages swapped on Wednesday for the same number of Armenians held in custody here. His office was trying to arrange further exchanges yesterday.

Durdana Agaeva, 20, a telephonist from the Azeri settlement of Khojali which was captured by the Armenians last week, said she had been held in a cell with about 30 other women in the police station of the Armenian town of Askeran. She said she had been taken there when Armenian fighters, who she says shot scores if not hundreds of her neighbours from Khojali, found her hiding in the woods around the town.

Her brother, two other girls and a child were released with her yesterday, but they were too seriously hurt to be questioned immediately and were sent to hospital in Baku. Miss Agaeva, who wore a warm black coat given to her since she arrived in Agdam, hobbled into the prosecutor's office with a bullet wound in her foot.

The prosecutor, Zahid Tagiev, said the five had been exchanged for Armenians in jail for ordinary crimes they committed on Azeri territory before the present conflict. He denied reports that the Azeris were planning to recover more of their people – and the bodies of the dead still scattered on the mountainside – by paying the Armenians in petrol, although he admitted that individuals had got relatives back this way in the past.

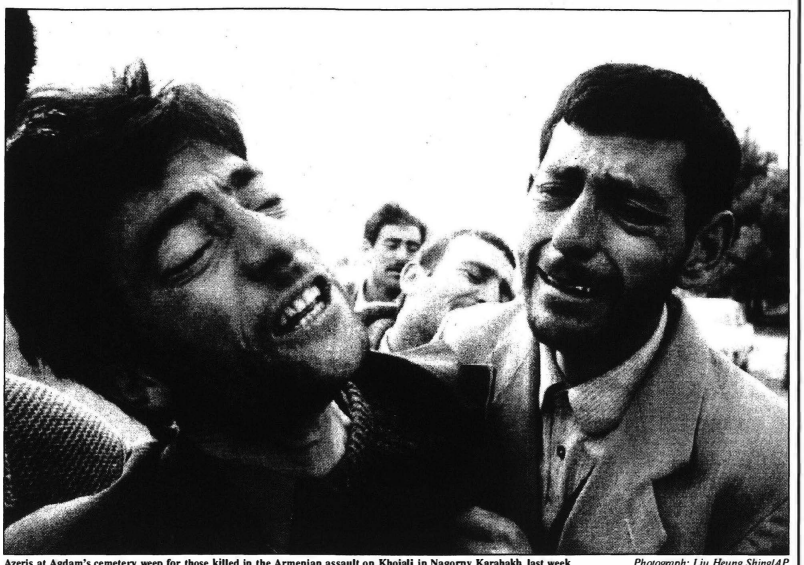
Since the fall of Khojali, Armenians virtually control Nagorny Karabakh with the exception of the town of Shusha.

Emotional crowds in Agdam say the Armenians want the hostages so they can force them to lie down in the road to stop a convoy of former Soviet forces from leaving Stepanakert. But the prosecutor said he had no evidence of this and he did not believe the Armenians would be so inhuman as to do it.

Miss Agaeva said she and others held in Askeran had been beaten and the Armenians had subjected her to mental torture. "One said he was going to cut off my head. He was not joking. But then another calmed him down and said it was better to swap me. I refused to go unless Elshat [her brother] came with me."

The prosecutor showed an Azeri television film of the dead from Khojali scattered all over the mountains. The Muslim Azeris, who accuse the Western press of having favoured Christian Armenia in the four-year conflict, want reporters to tell the world that they have suffered genocide. This is an exaggeration, but there is no doubt the Armenians killed considerable numbers of helpless women, children and elderly people fleeing Khojali. The prosecutor said 200 bodies had been recovered and up to 1,500 might still be lying out on the frozen mountains.

President Boris Yeltsin of Russia has announced new plans to mediate in the conflict, but there seems little chance he or any other outsiders can achieve anything. After Khojali, the Azeris want revenge. Even if the politicians in Baku urge restraint, the fighting men on the ground will almost certainly ignore them – men such as the former sculptor, Jagub Rzaev, the bearded commander of an autonomous defence unit called the Hawks of Karabakh. He lost his son at Khojali but said that was the normal price of war. What enraged him was seeing women and children killed by the Armenians. They would receive an answer to that soon. "The Armenians know me and they know I'll never forgive them," he said. "As long as I live they will never live in Karabakh."



Azeris at Agdam's cemetery weep for those killed in the Armenian assault on Khojali in Nagorny Karabakh last week *Photograph: Liu Heung Shing/AP*

■ MOSCOW – At least 57 people were killed in clashes between Azeri and Armenian forces yesterday in Nagorny Karabakh, according to a toll compiled by several news agencies, **AFP reports**.

The Russian Information Agency said 25 people were killed in a fierce battle for control of the Armenian settlement of Kazanchi, while Interfax reported 15 Armenians and seven Azeris were killed during fighting in the village of Mardakert, and 10 died in an Armenian rocket attack.

Rescuers seal mine in Turkey

Kozlu, Turkey (AP) – Officials sealed off the Incirharmani coal mine yesterday, ending hope for 148 miners trapped after a methane gas explosion. Officials said 122 bodies have been recovered in Turkey's worst mine disaster.

Rescue teams called off the search for survivors because of underground fires ignited by the blast on Tuesday and an accumulation of poisonous gas that made it dangerous to enter the mine. "No one down there is alive," said a doctor, as a truck dumped tons of dirt on the steel-covered pit.

Wanted man

Bonn (AP) – The government yesterday formally demanded that Chile turn over Erich Honecker, the ousted East German leader, for trial in Germany on manslaughter charges. The German ambassador in Santiago was ordered to deliver a *démarche* to the Chilean Foreign Minister, saying that since Mr Honecker's medical condition was not critical, Bonn expected Santiago to turn him out of Chile's embassy in Moscow.

Baltic meeting

Copenhagen (Reuter) – Ten nations agreed yesterday to set up a Council of Baltic Sea States to help the region's democratic and economic development and strengthen ties with the EC. Through the council, the 10 will co-ordinate bilateral aid and new projects in areas including environment, energy, communications and training.

Ukraine's plea

Moscow (AFP) – President Leonid Kravchuk of the Ukraine proposed to parliament yesterday that a "state of economic emergency" be declared for 1992, the Interfax news agency said. Mr Kravchuk proposed that a permanent joint commission of deputies and government officials draw up a list of laws whose application should be suspended during the state of emergency.

Sind official dies

Karachi (Reuter) – The chief minister of Sind province, Jam Sadiq Ali, 56, died yesterday. Political manoeuvrings began to find a new leader in the troubled region of Pakistan.

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Somali violence

Nairobi (AFP) – Shelling in Somalia's capital yesterday, in violation of a new ceasefire, prevented a UN ship from bringing Mogadishu its first big consignment of food aid in months, UN officials said.

Virus strikes

New York (Reuter) – The Michelangelo computer virus struck early, destroying data stored in personal computers at more than 12 US companies, a computer monitoring group said. The virus was designed to activate on 6 March, but it struck early on machines with the wrong date.

Soweto 'Buskaid'

Almost 100 British professional classical musicians will busk today in the main London railway stations and elsewhere to raise money for South Africa's first black orchestra, whose plight was highlighted recently in *The Independent on Sunday*.

The African Youth Ensemble of Soweto, founded by a British-trained violinist, Kolwane Mantu, is desperately short of instruments and sheet music for classical works.

Cossacks mount 'holy mission' in Moldova

From Susan Viets in Chisinau, Moldova

CIVIL WAR threatens to erupt in Moldova after gunfire earlier this week in and around the Dnestr city of Dubossary, leaving sixdead and several wounded.

Barricades 200 yards apart on the bridge over the Dnester river at Dubossary separate ethnic Romanian Moldovans from ethnic Russians and Ukrainians sealed in their self-proclaimed Dnestr republic, once a part of Moldova but independent since the inhabitants voted to go it alone in last December's referendum

"The trouble began two years ago with the language law, when Romanian became the official language of Moldova." said a 23-year-old Ukrainian medic, Valentina Zubkova. "We understand Romanian in the Cyrillic alphabet but now they've decided to be like Romania and print it in the Latin alphabet. We can't read anything." The Romanian flag flies over many buildings in Moldova and there is mounting concern among Dnestrians that the immediate political agenda of the government in Chisinau is reunification with Romania.

Angered by the Moldovan killing on Sunday of a Dnestr militia chief, Igor Sipchenko, and a 23-year-old Russian Cossack, many in the Dnestr republic feel the time for political solutions has passed. "The war has already begun," said Katya Yastrebchak, a 35-year-old Russian teacher.

Soldiers armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles stand alongside armoured personnel carriers at the Moldovan end of the bridge and complain bitterly over the Dnestr minority's refusal to accept the language and culture of the ethnic Romanian majority.

Peering through binoculars at smouldering remains of burnt rubber tyres and shattered glass blocking motor traffic, the Moldovans' main concern is to establish how many Russian Cossack reinforcements are coming to help with the defence of the Dnestr republic.

An estimated 150 Cossacks from the Russian Don region and from Siberia, are already camping in a drivers' training school in Dubossary.

One of their commanders, Nikolai Boyko, wore the green Cossack uniform with red stripes down the sides of the trousers. "Cossacks originally helped to gather the Russian lands. Now Russia's falling apart but we'll help to pull it together again," said the 42-year-old commander.

His colleague, an Afghan war veteran, emphasised the Cossack principles of brotherhood and devotion to the orthodox faith. "It's a holy duty to protect Mother Russia," he said.

With Slavic nationalism on the rise on both banks of the Dnestr, reconciliation seems increasingly unlikely.

China escapes condemnation

By Raymond Whitaker
Asia Editor

CHINA was crowing yesterday while Western diplomats and human rights activists argued over who was to blame for allowing Peking to escape censure at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

The US and European Community nations were among those backing a motion condemning China for violating human rights, especially in Tibet, but on Wednesday Peking's Third World allies voted overwhelmingly for a Pakistani proposal to shelve it. China had lobbied fiercely against the draft resolution, which would have been the first time it had been censured in the commission's 47-year history.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Wu Jiannin, said the rejection was "only natural". What he called "the attempt by some people to interfere in China's internal affairs under the pretext of the so-called human rights issue" had been foiled.

While it was accepted that Third World votes would probably have defeated any resolution, the West was accusedof failing to take a united stand. The EC had backed the motion originally proposed by a sub-committee of experts, focusing exclusively on Tibet, but this ran into objections from the US. American diplomats said the EC had not kept them informed, and insisted that the resolution should cover abuses in the whole of China, rather than singling out Tibet.

Critics said the US, a strong supporter of "engagement" with China, was seeking to stall any attack on Peking, and that its main concern was to avoid the appearance of accepting Tibet as a separate entity. A State Department source agreed that the US did not want to challenge China's sovereignty over Tibet, adding: "If there had been any implication of that in the motion, it would have been even more heavily defeated."

A human rights activist who had been lobbying delegates said the Europeans were angered by Washington's late intervention, but Britain had persuaded other EC countries to adopt the American approach. "The US argued that the original draft could have raised false hopes in Tibet, possibly leading to fresh unrest there, and we agreed to some extent," said a Foreign Office source.

Screen stardom beckons Gorbachev

OUT OF RUSSIA
Peter Pringle

MOSCOW – Mikhail Gorbachev pops up everywhere. Last Saturday he was a guest at the one-year anniversary party of the popular Moscow newspaper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. It was the nearest thing yet to Moscow chic, with many Russians remarking they couldn't remember so many celebrities in one place at one time.

The guests included several members of the Yeltsin government – the Vice-President, Alexander Rutskoi, and the young deputy prime minister in charge of the economy, Yegor Gaidar; the commander-in-chief of the Commonwealth of Independent States' armed forces, Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, and a host of actors and artists, authors and journalists.

Even so, Mr Gorbachev and his wife Raisa were the stars of the show. They sat in the second row and watched an elaborate stage display in which the usual folk dancers and the Soviet Army Ensemble (it's still called that), were spiced up with a jazz quartet and speeches by famous people. One of them was the writer Andrei Sinyavsky, jailed for seven years with Yuly Daniel in 1965 for publishing books of fiction under pseudonyms. Mini-skirted girls handed out carnations with the programmes and in the interval the drinks flowed. In case anyone thought hard times were here for ever, 12,000 oysters were flown in from Paris – an unexplained, and somewhat excessive donation of the oyster fishermen of France.

But everything was put in the shade by Mr Gorbachev's performance. He looked fit and hearty and was cracking jokes all the way through the show, according to those who sat close to him. When a local Moscow politician gave a jolly speech about freedom and independence, Mr Gorbachev commented: "That's what democracy does for people: he's making a speech that everyone can understand."

Mr Gorbachev roared with laughter, as did the audience, when Mr Sinyavsky declined to make his own speech after his wife had given a rather elongated introduction of him. "You don't keep a dog and bark yourself," Mr Sinyavsky remarked rudely, and walked off. A dissident of his stature can get away with anything, of course.

Mr Gorbachev even flashed a quick smile when a film clip was shown of the notorious gang of eight conspirators who tried to overthrow him. Raisa was more restrained. She clearly still bears the scars of her emotional ordeal during the coup last August.

At the invitation of the newspaper's editor, Vitaly Tretyakov, Mr Gorbachev bounced up to the stage and said how great it was to be there, and how he had noticed how clean Moscow streets had become on his way to the theatre. It was a joke. The streets are much dirtier and have more potholes than last year. He hoped the paper would become rich as well as famous, he said.

One of the few Russians with a chance of becoming rich soon is Mr Gorbachev himself – although in a recent ITN interview he complained he couldn't live on his government pension. Two months after leaving office and disappearing into what seems to be retirement from active politics, his literary works have been appearing in several Russian papers, and in the West, too. He has a regular column in the former Communist Party youth paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and one in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, which is syndicated in several more publications in the West.

So far, the columns have been replaying Mr Gorbachev's successes. In this week's *La Stampa* article, he praised Pope John Paul for playing a leading role in the fall of Communism. "All that has happened in East Europe over these last few years would not have been possible without the presence of the Pope," he wrote.

Now Mr Gorbachev is in Germany, where "Gorbymania" began. Although a private citizen, Mr Gorbachev is being welcomed virtually as a state visitor, reflecting Bonn's gratitude to him for making possible the reunification of Germany. In his earlier visits in 1989 he was mobbed like a pop star.

It must be a welcome change from the unrelieved gloom of Moscow, where he is not expected to make a political comeback. Offering Mr Gorbachev advice in his new job, one German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, said: "Dear Gorby, not bad for a beginner, but please follow the example of Helmut Schmidt and Henry Kissinger, who made the transition to becoming hacks very elegantly."

Mr Gorbachev's not terribly interesting early life – unless he's been hiding something – is due for an airing. He has signed a contract with a British television company to make a $4m (£2.3m) four-hour programme about himself. His fee is not disclosed and will be paid to the Gorbachev Foundation, a Moscow research group founded by him.

He opened the institute on Tuesday with a party for 200 prominent Muscovites. Invitations had gone out to television, not to newspapers. I asked Mr Gorbachev's interpreter, Pavel Palashenko – whose face, bald head and moustache became almost as famous as Mr Gorbachev in the West – why this was so. He smiled. "Television makes the news these days."

If the column doesn't work, watch out for the *Gorby Hour* – after the news, naturally.

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