



Out of his hands... President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia gestures on his way in to Yugoslav peace talks in Geneva yesterday

Owen presses for quick agreement on Bosnia

Martin Woollacott and Edward Luce in Geneva

LORD OWEN is pushing the delegations to the Bosnian peace conference to reach a settlement in the next few days. He and his co-chairman, Thorvald Stoltenberg, have made it clear that they expect problems of territorial division that have defied solution in the past to be settled in a relatively short series of negotiating sessions involving Presidents Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and Franjo Tudjman of Croatia. Mr Milosevic said last night he thought an agreement was within reach: "I believe that we have all the elements we need for a final settlement."

Lord Owen was hoping that what are known as "problems of the map" — really the most vital questions of all — would be settled by tonight. It is believed that yesterday's talks settled the issue of Muslim access to the River Sava at the town of Brcko, while talks continue on other outstanding territorial questions. These include Muslim demands for a corridor to the Adriatic at the town of Neum, for special status for the town of Mostar, or for its division, and for territory connecting the three Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia to each other and to Sarajevo. The speed which Lord Owen and Mr Stoltenberg are trying to impose on the negotiators, and the bringing in of the Ser-

bian, Croatian and Montenegrin presidents, are deliberate tactics to increase the pressure to settle. So are the clear signals they have given to all delegations that any party which delays the talks or walks out on them, will be blamed internationally for the collapse of negotiations that many believe represent the last chance for any kind of settlement in Bosnia. This explains the reluctance of President Alija Izetbegovic to threaten withdrawal, despite his evident dissatisfaction with the Serbian failure to withdraw fully from Mount Igman. Mr Izetbegovic said yesterday afternoon that a number of "conditions" that he had listed as necessary for the "successful continuation of negotiations" were not to be seen as an ultimatum. They included the lifting of the siege of Sarajevo and the dispatch of international observers to Mostar and other areas of Croat-Muslim fighting. The most immediately important bilateral question may be the disposition of territory between Croats and Muslims. The Muslims, in a relatively strong military position in central Bosnia, seem interested in a trade-off which would give the Croats some territory back in north-central Bosnia in return for a division of Mostar, which the Croats had wanted as their capital, along the river which runs through it, and for a corridor of land to the sea at Neum, on the Adriatic. The pressure being exerted on all sides to reach a settle-

ment seems to have produced the first genuine give-and-take discussions for a long time. Three Bosnian evacuees who would have gone blind because of the lack of medical facilities in Sarajevo have been treated and will be discharged on Monday, a Moorfields Eye Hospital spokesman said in London yesterday. Irma Hadzimiratovic, the five-year-old whose plight prompted the rescue, was still critically ill in Bel Ormond Street Hospital. Belma Salaka, who has meningitis, was taken out of intensive care. Doctors at University College Hospital told Edhem Dedovic, aged 11, injured in a mortar attack, that beneath his bandages he no longer has a left eye.

Cover story, G2

Anniversary of coup marked by attack on parliament

Yeltsin rounds on former power base

Jonathan Steele in Moscow

TWO years after his triumph in the August coup, President Boris Yeltsin mounted an unusually fierce attack yesterday on the very Russian parliament and the White House which he had defended against hardline pro-Soviet putschists in 1991. "We can only regret the fact that the White House has become a bastion of revenge-seeking forces," he told a press conference. "The new Russia cannot have such a parliament." He accused MPs of routinely passing laws and amendments which not only halted reforms but torpedoed them. Parliament's activity has begun to take on an anti-people character. It has become increasingly a threat to Russia's security. This must be stopped. The hardline coup in 1991, supported by the then defence and interior ministers and the KGB chief, who took President Mikhail Gorbachev prisoner in his holiday villa and sent tanks into Moscow's streets, fizzled out after three days. Mr Yeltsin and the parliamentary chairman, Ruslan Khasbulatov, spent 72 hours in the building surrounded by crowds of Russians and defector groups from the armed forces who refused to obey the plotters.

Two days after his return to Moscow, Mr Gorbachev resigned from the Communist Party, and invited its central committee to disband. Mr Yeltsin issued a decree confiscating its property and suspending the party. From the first moments of yesterday's press conference, which he launched with a 15-minute address, Mr Yeltsin made it clear he would not use the anniversary for reconciliation with his one-time supporters. Instead, he saw them on the far side of the barricades. "We will not pretend things are prettier than they are. A reversal is still possible today. It's possible there could be a reactionary coup that would nullify all our efforts since August 1991," he said. "But I am firmly convinced that this time too Russia and its citizens will not allow it to succeed." Mr Yeltsin did not spell out what he had in mind beyond saying that he had a 10-week plan for ending his struggle with parliament. His strategy is always hard to gauge since he likes to issue threats which later turn out to be bluster when he backs down. He said last week that he would dissolve parliament this autumn, even though the constitution gives him no such right. He appeared yesterday to be backing off illegal activity. "It would be ideal to adopt a new constitution and hold elections

in the autumn, but let's be realistic," he said. "The problems confronting us cannot be resolved overnight... It is necessary to proceed with political reform gradually, with a simultaneous step-by-step adoption of the constitution." Mr Yeltsin said last week he planned to form a federation council with two members each from all 89 regions and republics. It is meant to be the prototype of a new upper house of a two-chamber parliament, and Mr Yeltsin hopes it will either adopt a new constitution or undermine the current parliament by boycotting its proceedings. The last Soviet parliament collapsed when Russian MPs walked out. But it is not certain the republican and regional leaders will accept this plan. They told Mr Yeltsin last week the new council must only be "consultative" rather than take decisions. Mr Yeltsin's only note of conciliation yesterday was a refusal to be drawn into new attacks on Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi who was subjected to vague accusations of corruption by a Kremlin committee on Wednesday. Pro- and anti-Yeltsin groups plan to demonstrate near the White House today at different times amid fears that there could be street clashes. But a rally by one anti-Yeltsin group today only produced a turnout in the hundreds.

Armenians push forward

Jonathan Steele in Moscow

DEFYING a United Nations security council call to withdraw from occupied territory, Armenian forces yesterday seized another Azerbaijani town and pushed on towards the frontier of Iran. Their onslaught will cut off a huge swath of Azeri land and prompt another refugee exodus if they go all the way to the border. The latest advance, after four months of continuous attacks on Azerbaijan by tanks and artillery, was strongly criticised in a statement read out by Madeleine Albright, the US chairman of the security council. It called for an "immediate, full and unconditional" withdrawal from the Fizuli district, Kelbajar, Agdam and other newly-occupied areas of Azerbaijan, and for an end to the supply of weapons. But the statement did not identify Armenia as the aggressor. Despite much evidence to the contrary, the Armenian government claims the fighting is being conducted purely by local Armenians from the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The UN statement "urged the Armenian government to use all its influence" to secure a withdrawal. An Azeri defence ministry statement yesterday said that Armenian forces captured Jebrail on Wednesday night after four days of fighting. The town of Fizuli was still in Azeri hands but Armenian forces had gone round it to the east and south-east. Armoured columns were pushing towards the village of Goradis and were only six miles from the Iranian border. Other Armenian forces were moving south from Lachin and had captured five villages. Attacks were also being launched due east of Kafan in Armenia. Armenia's strategy appears to be to seize the entire area south, north and west of Nagorno-Karabakh with the aim of annexing it. The Azerbaijani defence ministry yesterday denied reports from Armenia that Azeri planes had bombed the Armenian town of Kafan on Wednesday. It described the reports as "disinformation designed to distract world attention from Armenian aggression".



A sort of life for Tajik refugees

The strain of giving shelter to 45,000 war victims is beginning to tell on neighbouring Kunduz, reports John Rennie in northern Afghanistan

IF YOU seek death, go to Kunduz," an old Afghan saying gloomily proclaims. But for 45,000 men, women and children fleeing the civil war in neighbouring Tajikistan, Kunduz was an escape from death. Maulwi Abdul Zahir, governor of Kunduz province, which borders Tajikistan to the south, said he had set up two refugee camps, but 8,000 Tajiks were living in the city, mainly in government buildings. It is the Tajik women who first catch the eye. Some of the older men are begging, some of the younger studying in the local Hizbe Islami college of Islamic studies. But the Tajik women are distinctive. Living in a former Soviet republic, though the poorest and most backward of the defunct union, brought them into contact with more modern practices. They wear bright traditional Tajik clothes with discreet headscarves, but very rarely the full, drab veil. Although there are seven mohajidin groups operating in the province, the governor, a member of Jamaat Islami, claims relations between them are excellent and security is good because of the traditional shura (council) system that functions effectively here. But four of the six Kunduz city districts, including the centre, are firmly under the control of the strict Hizbe Islami. A prostitute was condemned to death by stoning some months ago after being denounced to the authorities by her husband, and almost all

local women, unlike the Tajiks, wear the full veil. The addition of 45,000 people to a province of 700,000 which is already suffering an influx of Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran is a severe burden for Kunduz. Although it is a rich agricultural province, "our main problem is food," said Commander Zahir. There had been some cases of cholera among the refugees, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had given only one month's aid, although Arab charities had also been helping. The Afghan authorities have been highly ambivalent about Western help, under pressure from Arab fundamentalists. In February, a vehicle of the French medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was attacked on its way from Mazar-e-Sharif, 100 miles to the west, and two of its occupants were wounded. The perpetrators were never identified. Another team bringing drugs and medical equipment to Kunduz was told to leave the supplies but not to come back, as they were not Muslims. "These incidents have dissuaded the UNHCR from setting up operations in Kunduz. But the city's Hizbe Islami chief, Commander Abdullah,

said UNHCR was considering a change of mind following his assurances that security had improved. This may still take some time, as the presence of Arabs in Kunduz has helped to foster reports that locals have been training and helping Tajik rebel refugees to cross the border and attack Russian forces in Tajikistan. Commander Abdullah dismissed such suggestions. "We only give refuge to the Tajik," he said. "They get no arms or ammunition from here. In fact they've captured plenty from the Tajik government and the Russians. It's all a question of the internal conflict in Tajikistan." Russian sources in Pakistan confirmed that they knew of 14

Mohammed Sharif Himatzade, said he welcomed Afghanistan's offer of mediation between the government and rebels, but wanted other countries to be involved as well. Mr Himatzade, who was recently asked to leave his exile in Pakistan for alleged involvement in political activities, said he favoured the installation of a neutral government in Tajikistan, whose sole task would be to hold new elections. He said he would negotiate only with the Russians, not the Tajik government, since they were at the heart of the dispute. The main objective would be their withdrawal. These views will be passed on to Russia and the present Tajik government in a report to be given to the United Nations today by the special UN representative for Tajikistan, Esmat Katani. Mr Katani, a retired Iraqi diplomat appointed three months ago by the UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, held talks with President Rabbani and Mr Himatzade yesterday. Last week's action by Tajik rebels operating from Afghanistan, who kidnapped four Russian soldiers and a Kazakh officer in Tajikistan and brought them back to this country, and the assassination of an Afghan embassy employee in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, suggest the Tajik conflict will plague Afghanistan for some time to come. But none of the border troubles have interrupted the electricity supply Tajikistan continues to sell to Kunduz, which as a result does not suffer the power cuts afflicting Kabul and other cities. "A protocol was signed for the supply and it has not been cut off," said the governor. Even severe fighting, it appears, cannot stop Afghans from buying and selling.

Militants admit attempt to kill Cairo minister

Reuters in Cairo

THE Muslim militant group al-Jihad (Holy Struggle), which killed the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981, yesterday claimed responsibility for the assassination attempt on the country's interior minister, Hassan al-Alfi. "The Jihad group in Egypt assumes its responsibility for the latest assault on Hassan al-Alfi, the interior minister of the Egyptian regime, which is fighting Islam and is implementing American and Israeli policy in the area," it said. "We call on all our brothers to raise their arms against the apostate regime until the Islamic state rises." Egyptian security forces have rounded up 20 Muslim militant suspects in the past 24 hours in connection with the attempt to blow up Mr al-Alfi. But the only one captured at the scene has died of bomb injuries, leaving the police groping for clues. Security officials said the man had been trained in Afghanistan and belonged to New Jihad, a revival of the group crushed after the assassination of Sadat.



Al-Alfi: militant target

Former Albanian leader in jail

Albania's former communist president Ramiz Alia, aged 68, who has been under house arrest for nearly a year on charges of abuse of power, was moved to prison yesterday. His son-in-law said. The move appeared to be linked to a widening investigation into allegations that former top officials squandered Italian aid money. — AP. Minister's IOU Italy's disgraced former health minister Francesco De Lorenzo is reportedly willing to repay money he received illegally to fund his tiny Liberal Party. "The illegal contributions amount to some 4 billion lire [\$2.5 million]. I will give them back, selling what I can," he told the Corriere della Sera in an interview published yesterday. — Reuters.

Fire destroys Goya

A painting by Francisco de Goya was among artworks and antique furniture destroyed in a blaze at Spanish consulate offices in the south-western French city of Bordeaux yesterday, officials said. — Reuters. Survivor charged Danish police charged a Russian yesterday with the murder of four countrymen and a German captain during a fire on a cargo boat off Denmark. The boat was found adrift in the North Sea on Wednesday. The survivor, a Russian national aged 28, was found in a lifeboat with a suitcase full of German marks. — AP. Kiwis hounded Dogs are threatening to wipe out New Zealand's national symbol, the flightless kiwi bird. Parliament is considering legislation allowing wildlife officers to trap and destroy dogs that kill kiwis. — AP.

Greece removes ex-king's escort

FORMER King Constantine said yesterday that the Greek government had agreed to withdraw two navy ships and an air force plane that had been escorting a yacht he had rented for a family holiday. He told BBC world service radio he has agreed to stay away from two towns in the Peloponnese peninsula where he claimed 20,000 people were waiting for him. In return the military would leave him alone. The Greek government confirmed earlier that it had ordered the escorts because the ex-king, who fled the country after a military coup in 1967, was disobeying orders to stay away from populated ports. He was warned to keep his visit "strictly private". — Reuters.

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