

Yeltsin delivers overdue homage to Polish officers

15,000 massacred by Soviets in 1940

From Wire Reports

WARSAW, Poland — Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin paid long-awaited homage yesterday to 15,000 Polish officers murdered during World War II by Soviet secret police.

In a private conversation, he asked the victims' relatives to "please forgive."

Earlier, Mr. Yeltsin announced that his country's last troops in Poland would leave by Oct. 1, three months ahead of schedule. Standing beside Polish President Lech Walesa, Mr. Yeltsin also suggested that Russia wouldn't object if Poland decides to join NATO, something strongly opposed by Russian nationalists.

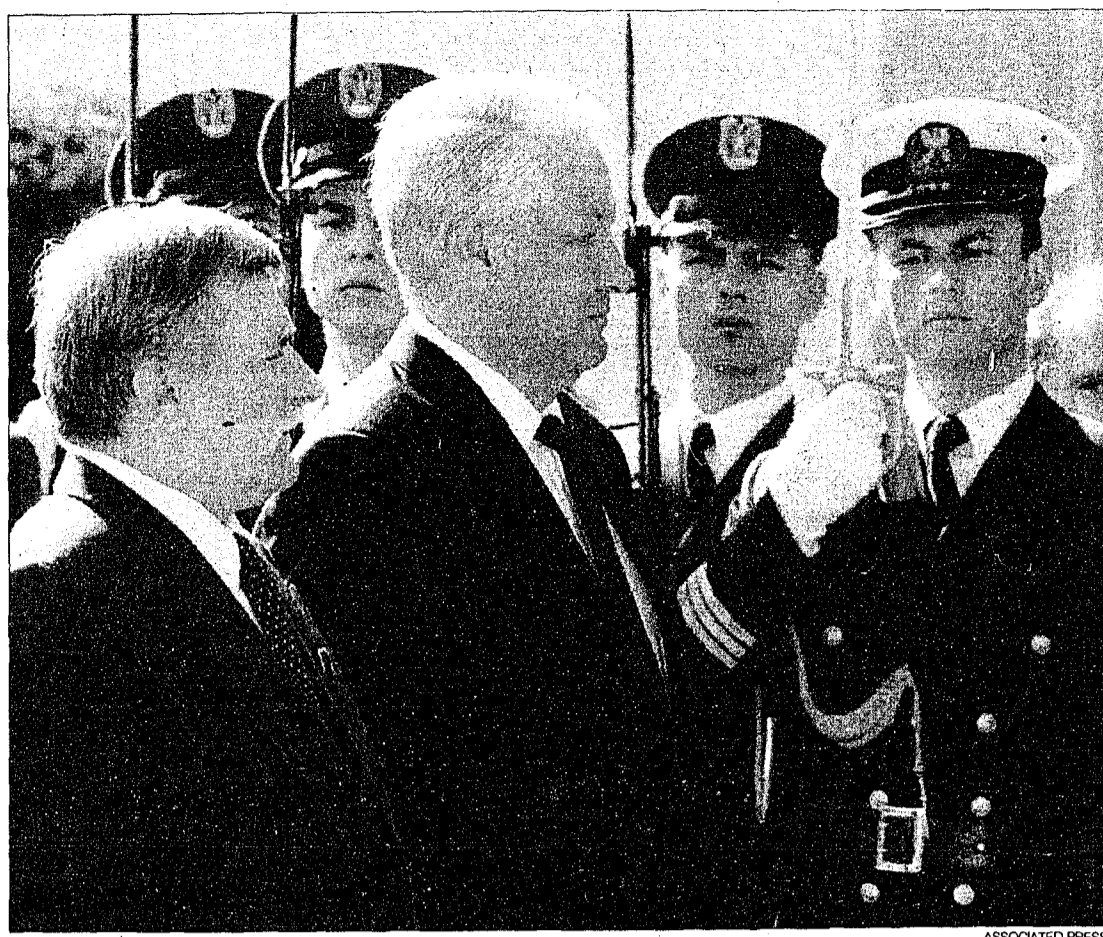
"The times when Polish leaders sought advice in Moscow, or when Russian leaders came to Warsaw to tell them what to do, are over," he said. "Times have changed. Now there are two sovereign states. We must respect this."

Mr. Yeltsin laid a wreath of red flowers at the white granite cross in the Powazki Cemetery that commemorates the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre. Until April 1990, when it acknowledged the killings, Moscow had tried to blame the Nazis for the crime.

During 44 years of Communist rule, Poles were forbidden to talk about the Katyn massacre, named after the forest in western Russia where the first graves were uncovered in 1943.

Mr. Yeltsin's visit was a solemn and moving moment for some 20 relatives of the murdered officers.

"It is a great thing to us that dur-



Polish President Lech Walesa (left) and Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin walk past honor guard.

ing his first state visit the Russian president found time to come here and pay homage," said Jolanta Klimowicz, whose father died in the massacre.

The victims included the top of the Polish intelligentsia — doctors, scientists and lawyers — who had been called up to serve in the Polish Army at the start of World War II.

Mr. Yeltsin's statements on NATO contrasted with those of Rus-

sian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who was quoted by the Polish PAP news agency as saying that eastern European countries shouldn't join NATO.

NATO allies have been wary about agreeing to accept members from Eastern Europe for fear of offending Russia.

The decision to withdraw the last 1,000 Russian troops ahead of schedule was a token of good faith

toward the Poles, who have long resented the former Soviet army's presence.

"A certain epoch is ending," Mr. Yeltsin said. "I hope that this will be a farewell of friends."

The two leaders, who played historic roles in smashing communism and changing the face of eastern Europe, signed a major trade pact and a deal to build a giant gas pipeline across Russia and Poland to western Europe.

Armenian offensive spurs flood of refugees to Iran

Regional war threatens to expand

Los Angeles Times

MOSCOW — An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 Azerbaijanis, forced to flee their homes by a massive Armenian offensive in southwestern Azerbaijan, are heading toward the Iranian border as the ethnic war in Nagorno-Karabakh widens into a full-scale international conflict.

Up to 2,000 Azerbaijani refugees already have crossed into Iran, and thousands of other people are streaming toward the border, reported Mahmoud Said, the U.N. representative in Baku, the Azerbaijani capital.

So far, Iran has avoided interfering in the 5-year-old Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. But a sudden influx of refugees — and possibly retreating Azerbaijani soldiers — could destabilize the Iranian-Azerbaijani border and further complicate peace efforts, Russian and Western analysts said.

"Neither Iran nor we want to see these refugees cross the border, but this threat is quite real," said Rafael D. Guseinov, Azerbaijan's representative in Moscow.

"The Armenians are trying to drive refugees across the border on purpose, not only in order to gain more territory but also . . . to aggravate the situation in Azerbaijan," Mr. Guseinov charged.

Officials in Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan, say that the areas under attack have been used to launch attacks against their villages and that their only goal is to demilitarize them.

Armenians now control about one-fifth of Azerbaijani territory — a humiliating setback for the new Azerbaijani leadership that came to power in June promising to drive the Armenians out.

The war over Nagorno-Karabakh began after Armenian nationalists started demanding independence for Karabakh in 1988. The ensuing ethnic fighting has killed about 15,000 people and created nearly a million

refugees on both sides.

The 100,000 Karabakh Armenians have long been seen as the underdog in their battle against 7 million Azerbaijanis, but since February the war has turned sharply in their favor. After several offensives, Armenians captured the last major Azerbaijani-controlled town in Karabakh June 27.

Then they began to drive deep into Azerbaijan proper, apparently aiming to create a defensible buffer zone around Nagorno-Karabakh. So far, the main targets have been cities and mountaintops from which the Azerbaijanis have lobbed shells into Karabakh.

On July 23, the Karabakh forces captured Agdam, an Azerbaijani city of 60,000. Fizuli, with a prewar population of 40,000 and a strategic location about 15 miles from the Iranian border, fell Monday. By Tuesday, Armenian forces controlled 50 villages in the Fizuli region, Azerbaijan's defense ministry said.

Nagorno-Karabakh Foreign Minister Arkady Gukasyan, in a telephone interview Saturday, said his forces control the strategic heights around several cities and could easily capture them but that commanders had been ordered not to enter the cities.

"We had to put an end to the constant bombardment of our capital, Stepanakert, from these towns, and we did," Mr. Gukasyan said.

The Karabakh forces are estimated at about 40,000 troops — roughly one-third the size of the Azerbaijani army, but far better trained, disciplined and motivated.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's Mr. Guseinov said the Karabakh units are stretched too thin to control the territory they have captured. Instead, he charged, they are simply driving Azerbaijani civilians out by plundering and burning villages.

Analysts said the Azerbaijani army is demoralized, rife with corruption and factionalized among units loyal to a dozen different regional warlords.

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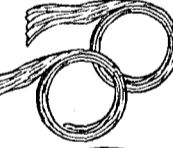
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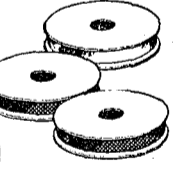
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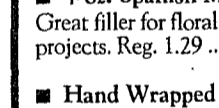
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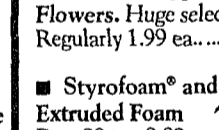
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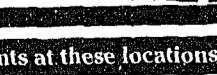
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