

Crackdown in Russia leads to ban of political parties

From Los Angeles Times and AP Dispatches

MOSCOW — The Justice Ministry banned two of Russia's most popular opposition parties yesterday as President Boris Yeltsin's sweeping political crackdown continued.

The suspension of the centrist Free Russia People's Party and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation raised further serious questions about whether parliamentary elections Yeltsin has called for December will be truly democratic.

"The legal opposition has been effectively eliminated," Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, told reporters yesterday before he knew his party was being banned.

Yeltsin has assured world leaders that the December elections will be fully democratic and foreign observers are welcome to monitor them.

But Yeltsin's chief of staff, Sergei Filatov, maintained that no group that sided actively with defiant lawmakers against Yeltsin in the bloody conflict that left nearly 200 dead this week should be allowed to take part in the balloting.

"Our country has had enough of this craziness," he said. "Enough."

If prosecutors decide to pursue a hard line, the seven main leaders of parliament's battle against Yeltsin — including former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and former parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov — may be charged with treason, a crime punishable by death, the Itar-Tass news agency reported yesterday, citing investigators.

Yeltsin argues that he failed once by losing the momentum of his victory against the reactionary coup attempt in August 1991, and he does not want to repeat his mistake. Now is the moment for him to push forward with his plans for reform, he

says — even if it involves riding roughshod over democratic norms.

Filatov said Yeltsin may make such quick progress that a new constitution, Yeltsin's political priority, may be rammed through in time to be presented to voters at the December elections.

Moscow authorities said it was likely that emergency rule in the Russian capital, which was supposed to end tomorrow, will be extended for at least another week as police and troops continue to round up militants who fought government troops and common criminals. An 11 p.m. curfew remained in force; from Thursday night through yesterday morning, 4,385 people were detained for breaking curfew and 3,362 for other violations of emergency rule.

The commandant of Moscow warned any opposition protesters contemplating marches this weekend that they would be "decisively stopped with the use of all available means and forces."

An independent telephone poll among Muscovites found them overwhelmingly receptive to the clampdown, with 85 percent agree-



Alexander Rutskoi, left, and Ruslan Khasbulatov may face a death sentence for their role in the revolt in Russia.

ing that "the Russian government must take emergency measures to restore order," Itar-Tass reported.

Georgia joins CIS

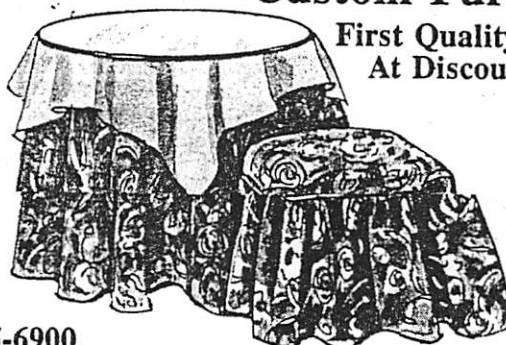
Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze, hoping to bring his war-torn country closer to Russia, announced yesterday that Georgia is joining the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, meanwhile, agreed to seek a peaceful end to their countries' 5-year-old war, to help refugees and to protect railroads — but did not put their promises on paper.

The announcements came at the end of a one-day summit among Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Shevardnadze, Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian and Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliev.

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