

Winter renewal

Velvet revolution in Georgia

It is a pity that President Eduard Shevardnadze, once Gorbachev's right-hand man credited for doing his bit in bringing the Cold War to an end, had to leave like this. After having ruled Georgia for 11 years he was literally driven out of the country's parliament by opposition protesters and has announced his resignation since. Protests had been continuous and mounting since the holding of parliamentary elections on 2 November, which were rigged by the government, as admitted later by Tedo Dzhaparidze, Shevardnadze's own security chief. Opposition had mobilised around the issue of official corruption and the persistence of mass poverty in a region that was once among the most prosperous in the USSR. But it is praiseworthy that the transfer of power has gone so far without bloodshed, which had once appeared likely when Shevardnadze spoke of an "armed coup".

Washington has extended a cautious welcome to the current acting president, opposition politician Nino Burdzhanadze, while Moscow sent an envoy, Georgian-born foreign minister Igor Ivanov, to negotiate the transition. Both powers have interests in Georgia, whose location is strategic, on the new pipeline being built from Baku in oil-rich Azerbaijan to Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. If the Middle East becomes unstable this is where Washington hopes alternative energy supplies will come from, making it the second largest recipient per capita of Washington's largesse after Israel. If despite this aid and its past prosperity more than half of Georgia's population is currently below the poverty line, that does speak poorly of Shevardnadze's economic management. Mikhail Saakashvili, the main opposition leader, has played few cards wrong so far. He was the principal organiser of the protests but has called for calm following Shevardnadze's resignation. If he is elected President, perhaps he can succeed where Shevardnadze failed.

THE STATESMAN

8 DEC 2003

Georgia faces collapse, says rebel leader

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Moscow, Dec. 3 (Reuters): The leader of one of Georgia's restive regions said today the former Soviet republic faced collapse if its new leaders failed to give up some of their "stolen" power to the provinces.

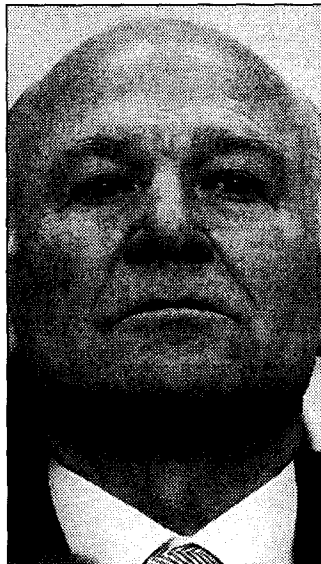
Aslan Abashidze, the leader of Georgia's Black Sea Adzhara region, said the planned new Georgian elections since mass protests toppled President Eduard Shevardnadze last month were a farce.

During a visit to Moscow, the former Shevardnadze ally who runs his region as a personal fiefdom said he would not take part as he had no time to prepare.

"If we want peace we have to return to what went before. Georgia was created from separate, independent governments, from historical regions — Abkhazia, Adzhara, Ossetia," Abashidze told a news conference.

"And we must return to that formula... if we do not change the policies all will end like it did before," he said, referring to wars that shattered the country in the early 1990s.

Georgia is scheduled to hold presidential elections on Janu-



Leader of Georgia's autonomous Adzhara region Aslan Abashidze. (AFP)

ary 4. A date for new parliamentary elections has not been set.

"No one is ready for these elections, the timing is too quick... If we want to create a new farce, then do it... They want (an election) as quickly as possible to legitimise their power,"

Abashidze said. "What took place was a coup under the threat of force. It was not a revolution, neither velvet nor rose."

Abashidze's prolonged visit to Russia has raised eyebrows among Georgia's new leaders, who have accused Moscow of encouraging the three regions to grab full independence.

Yesterday, the US issued a thinly veiled warning to Russia not to back the breakaway regions and to support Georgia's territorial integrity.

The west hopes for stability to ensure construction of a \$2.5 billion oil pipeline to take Caspian oil to the Mediterranean, while Russia hopes to reassert its dominance in the strategic region.

Georgia said yesterday it did not expect to join Nato before the end of the decade because it would take at least that long to repair the country's crippled economy and carry out military reforms.

Defence minister David Tevzadze said Tbilisi would nevertheless pursue its partnership with the alliance and maintain its contribution of troops to Nato's peacekeeping operations.

U.S. role in Georgia 'coup' seen

2/12

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, DEC. 1. The United States enacted a Yugoslav scenario in Georgia to remove from power its President, Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Russian security chief said here.

"The Georgian game was played well according to a scenario written for Yugoslavia three years ago," said Nikolai Kovalyov, former head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), successor to the Soviet-era KGB.

The Georgian leader resigned on Nov. 23 in the face of mass demonstrations organised by his political opponents to protest against what they called was massive rigging of par-

liamentary elections. Mr. Kovalyov told Russia's RTR state television on Sunday that the "coup d'etat in Georgia had been carefully prepared according to the Yugoslav scenario". The Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevic, stepped down in 2000 amid public protests over alleged vote counting fraud.

Mr. Kovalyov, who is now deputy head of the security committee in the Russian lower House, the State Duma, said he had information that Georgian Opposition leaders, including the united Opposition candidate in coming presidential elections, Mikhail Saakashvili, had been trained in Serbia in training camps financed mainly by the

United States. He drew attention to the fact that the current U.S. envoy to Georgia, Richard Miles, was American ambassador in Yugoslavia when Mr. Milosevic was overthrown, and earlier served in Azerbaijan during a coup d'etat there that brought Mr. Heydar Aliyev to power. Mr. Kovalyov said he was particularly concerned that nationals of six other former Soviet republics had undergone training in U.S.-run camps in Serbia along with Georgian Opposition leaders. "Representatives of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and some other countries, who had been trained here, took part in the November events in Georgia," Mr. Kovalyov said.

Beware of coups, leader tells Georgians

'West betrayed me'

Tbilisi, Nov. 27 (Reuters): The Georgian with the best chance of succeeding toppled President Eduard Shevardnadze urged his countrymen yesterday to guard against a military coup.

Mikhail Saakashvili, 35, was the driving force in the "people power" revolution that brought down the veteran leader, 75, at the weekend. Hours after Georgia's new leaders set aside rival ambitions to nominate Saakashvili as their candidate for a January 4 presidential election, he told Mze television: "There is always the possibility of counter-revolution and even of interference by external forces."

Saakashvili urged security forces to guard against attempts at a coup.

"There are one or two officials in the army who are now saying... that a military junta should be established in Georgia and are planning something similar to a coup," he told Rustavi-2 television without elaborating.

"I would certainly advise these people against not only doing it but even continuing such talk. They are wrong if they think that we will be weak and tolerant of such things."



People plant flowers near the Georgian parliament in Tbilisi. (AFP)

The three main figures who brought down Shevardnadze divided up key roles in their drive to spare the ex-Soviet republic in the heart of the Caucasus more economic hardship and turmoil.

Saakashvili was backed at a news conference in parliament by the two other main figures — acting President Nino Burdzhanadze and prominent Shevardnadze opponent Zurab Zhvania.

"I am ready for our victory in the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections," Saakashvili declared — a view shared by most commentators.

He seemed confident of winning against any rival. "The revolution continues and will be over only when Georgia becomes happy, successful and fully formed," he said, referring to separatist tensions that have riven Georgia since the 1980s.

Burdzhanadze had earlier held fence-mending talks with the IMF country representative. The IMF had halted loans to the previous government pending moves on corruption and tax evasion. Sources close to the Paris Club of state creditors said Georgia would have to patch up relations with the IMF before it has any chance of debt relief. It has \$1.78 billion in foreign debt including some \$600 million owed to the Paris Club.

Saakashvili said experts from the IMF, World Bank and the US would arrive next Tuesday to discuss "elementary needs".

In Washington, US National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack said President George W. Bush telephoned Burdzhanadze from his Texas ranch, telling her he supported "Georgia's programme of democratic and free-market reforms."

Speaking at his home outside Tbilisi, Shevardnadze advised the team led by Saakashvili to avoid rash changes. "I would give him this piece of advice — to behave more calmly, to be fair, and not to allow any chaos in the country... don't be in a hurry to make any personnel changes."

Tbilisi, Nov. 27: Eduard Shevardnadze, the deposed Georgian President and an embittered, broken man, told *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday that he had "rescued the world" from the brink of nuclear catastrophe by ending the Cold War, only to be betrayed by the west.

Speaking at his official residence on a hill overlooking Tbilisi, the man who was once one of the world's most feted politicians said he had been let down. "If the Cold War had not stopped there would have been a Third World War," he said. "We rescued the world. I'm not saying that I did it alone but I played one of the most important roles."

"There were 40,000 Soviet tanks in Europe and hundreds of thousands of guns. Within 24 hours they could have been on the Atlantic coast [of France] but we didn't do that even when the hotheads want-

to use force in Berlin and crush Solidarity in Poland."

But Shevardnadze now believes that the US helped to orchestrate his downfall. Upset by what he saw as a gross betrayal by his friends, the 75-year-old strongman vented his sense of hurt, particularly at the role of Richard Miles, the American ambassador, whom he alleged was instrumental in the Opposition's success in unseating him, as well as local ac-

tivists backed with American money. "I was one of the biggest supporters of the US policy," he said. "When they needed my support on Iraq I gave it. What happened here, this I cannot explain."

Shevardnadze sat surrounded by the mementoes of three decades of high authority. On one wall there were framed photographs of him with George Bush Sr, Javier Solana, President Jacques Chirac, James Baker and even Ray Charles, the singer.

Tucked into the side of the black leather blotter on his ornate desk was the business card of the President of the United States of America, with telephone numbers scribbled on the back in pencil.

But the ageing man sitting on the black leather sofa appeared tired and a little bewildered. His voice was low and hoarse and his delivery slow.

In the past two weeks, he has visibly aged.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH



Shevardnadze

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Georgia Opposition united for presidential polls

Associated Press

TBILISI, Nov. 26. — Mr Mikhail Saakashvili, the main leader of the protests that led to the ouster of longtime President Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, will represent the united Georgian Opposition in the next presidential election, acting President Ms Nino Burdzhanadze said today.

“We will head into the presiden-

tial and parliamentary elections as a united bloc,” Ms Burdzhanadze said, flanked by Mr Saakashvili and another leader of the Opposition troika, Mr Zurab Zhvania. “We are sure that the presidential vote will result in our victory.”

Mr Saakashvili said Ms Burdzhanadze, the Speaker of the legislature elected in 1999, would top the Opposition’s list for parliamentary elections, and that the coalition would work to provide a better

life for the impoverished country, “so that every family, every citizen of Georgia can live normally”.

Mr Saakashvili also pledged that the vote would be clean. “We will do everything so that not a single vote is lost,” he said, and promised to follow the free-and-fair voting guidelines of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and US recommendations that had been given to Georgian authorities.

US team for Georgia

Following the resignation of Mr Shevardnadze, the USA is stepping in to help the transition government in Georgia, a country of enormous strategic value to Washington for its location on key oil lines, adds AFP from Washington. The USA is openly offering support to the new government, even at the risk of offending Russia, the regional power.

GEORGIAN FACADE

^{1910 2011}
It looks like the end of yet another communist epilogue. Mr Eduard Shevardnadze's exit from Georgia's presidentship was a mix of *déjà vu*, dignity and disgrace. The latest elections were shamelessly rigged, the culmination of years of patronage and clan loyalties that had accreted around this veteran communist potentate. But the coup was quite remarkably civilized, with Mr Shevardnadze pulling off a resignation that salvages a degree of self-respect — given his near-iconic status in Old Europe, particularly Germany. (Nobody could deny his contribution to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War). In eastern Europe and among the Transcaucasian republics, the transitions from communist, through democrat, to despot have been disconcertingly fluid. Mr Shevardnadze's fall encapsulates that familiar trajectory.

But the latest outbreak of democracy in Georgia will be closely monitored by both Washington and Moscow. In fact, a sort of Cold War is still being fought over this republic. At the heart of this double vigil is the combination of oil and terror. The Russians and the Americans are both terribly interested in the Caspian Sea oil pipeline, and the latter have been backing Georgia's governments and armed forces with men and money. The Russians also want to go on using Georgia as a base to fight the Chechens, and Russian "peacekeepers" are believed to provide active support to the separatists in Adzharia, whose opposition to the new regime could even mean civil war in Georgia. Russia seems never to have fully accepted Georgia's independence, whereas the Americans may be looking towards a regime change on the Serbian model. The latter back the opposition leader, Mr Mikhail Saakashvili, and the pro-Western parliamentarian, Ms Nino Burdzhaniadze. Steering between Russia and America, Georgia's newest leaders are determined to keep Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as cherished goals. Yet this republic remains one of the ten most corrupt countries in the world, quite desperately poor, and crippled by chronic power and water shortages. These are urgent enough reasons for Georgians to retain their faith in democracy.

Revolution's driving force to fight elections

Tbilisi, Nov. 26 (Reuters): Georgia's new leaders nominated Mikhail Saakashvili today as their sole candidate for presidential elections and the US-educated lawyer immediately said he expected to win.

The three main figures who brought down veteran leader Eduard Shevardnadze put aside personal rivalries to settle on a single candidate for the January 4 poll, as they strove to save the country from economic catastrophe and internal turmoil.

"We made a decision that in future presidential elections we'll have a single candidate... and this single candidate in the elections will be Mikhail Saakashvili," interim President Nino Burdzhanadze told a parliament news conference to loud applause.

The hugely popular

Saakashvili, driving force in the "people power" revolution that toppled Shevardnadze on Sunday night, immediately took the microphone to announce he was confident of victory.

"I am ready for our victory in the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections," he declared — a view shared by most commentators given his huge following.

Several other candidates were expected to stand, including some well-known fixtures on the Georgian political scene, commentators said.

But none enjoys anything like the mass approval of Saakashvili and the January 4 election was not expected to go to a run-off, they said.

"The revolution continues and will be over only when Georgia becomes happy, successful and fully formed," he said, a ref-

erence to separatist tensions that plague the country. Earlier the IMF brought hope to Georgia, promising to be "helpful" to its new leaders as they struggle to avert economic chaos and get political life moving.

The west has been watching developments in Georgia closely because of plans to build a pipeline across its territory taking oil from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean Sea.

After fence-mending talks with Burdzhanadze, IMF country representative Jonathan Dunn said: "We look forward to working with the interim administration and the next administration. We will do our best to be helpful to Georgia in this period."

He did not spell out any details of what precise steps the fund might take to help the small former Soviet country of 4.5 mil-

lion people, with whom it fell out during the rule of former President Shevardnadze. The new leaders have made it clear they need western aid to help them turn round the fortunes of a country mired in poverty.

The IMF told the Shevardnadze administration it would not make loans to Georgia under a poverty reduction programme until it dealt with mass corruption and tax evasion.

Sources close to the Paris Club of state creditors said Georgia would have to patch up relations with the IMF before it has any chance of debt relief.

It has \$1.78 billion in foreign debt including some \$600 million owed to the Paris Club.

Given Saakashvili's overwhelming popularity, Burdzhanadze clearly decided against running against him.

As speaker of the outgoing

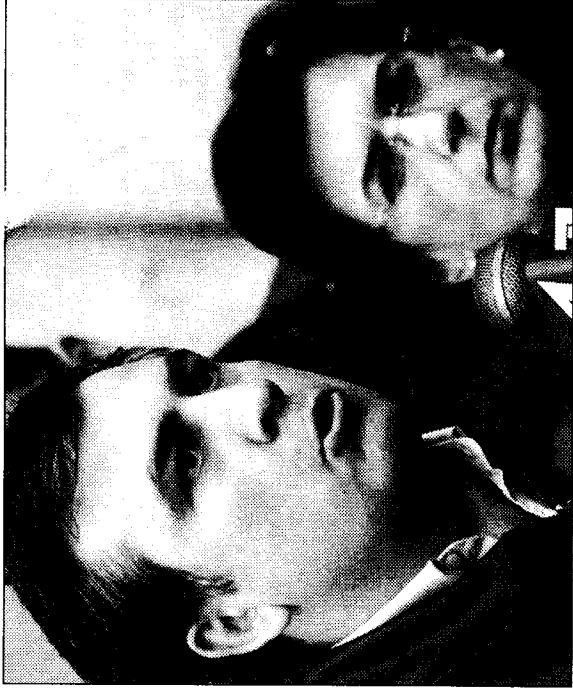
parliament, she took over automatically as acting President when Shevardnadze resigned and was every bit the public face of the revolution as Saakashvili, but simply cannot match his ratings.

The man he could replace, Shevardnadze, meanwhile, said nothing about whom he might back in the election.

"If I express any thoughts it would be bad. It's not worth me being a trouble-maker," he said as he cleared his personal effects from his old offices.

The January poll can be expected to be a tense affair with separatist and independent-minded regions boycotting.

These include Abkhazia, which unilaterally broke away in a bitter separatist war 10 years ago and South Ossetia, which has proclaimed itself a republic.



Georgian Opposition party leader Mikhail Saakashvili (left) and interim President Nino Burdzhanadze in Tbilisi. (AFP)

27 NOV 2003

THE

Georgia court invalidates 'fraudulent' ⁹⁵ ouster vote

Tbilisi (Georgia): Georgia's highest court on Tuesday invalidated a fraud-tainted parliamentary vote that sparked the peaceful ouster of President Eduard Shevardnadze.

The supreme court's decision means that the old parliament will remain in place until new elections are held. The parliament had already scheduled a session later on Tuesday to set the date for a new presidential election.

Parliamentary speaker Nino Burdzhnanadze, who is serving as Georgia's acting president, has said that the new election should be held within 45 days. Her statement came even as the West hailed and Russia frowned over the manner of change in the former Soviet Republic.



The interim Georgian president Nino Burdzhnanadze makes her first address to the nation in Tbilisi on Monday.

The European Commission, the European Union's executive branch, praised the bloodless nature of the protests that forced Mr Shevardnadze out from power.

In Tbilisi, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) official who oversaw the disputed vote met with Ms Burdzhnanadze to discuss upcoming polls.

"Georgia has arrived at a moment in history when it can move forward rapidly to become one of the major democratic nations in the region," Bruce George said after the meeting.

Ms Burdzhnanadze said the new leadership wanted to "keep to our foreign policy, to improve our relations with Russia and other neighbours and to keep the stability inside the country."

"Our goal is to be a member of the European family, a member of the Euro-Atlantic alliance. We would like to keep up our strategic partnership with the United States, which has done a lot for our country," she said. In a televised appearance, Ms Burdzhnanadze described the nation's situation in dire terms, and appealed for calm.

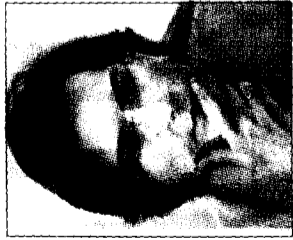
"It's important to maintain order and have the country work as usual," she said. We must hold elections without any excesses. The country is in a difficult situation. The economy is in crisis."

Another opposition leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, the US-educated lawyer who is seen as the most likely candidate to succeed Mr Shevardnadze, warned on Tuesday that there was still a potential for violence. Agencies

Georgian interim President pledges new polls in 45 days

Associated Press

TBILISI, Nov. 24. — In her first address to the nation as interim President, Georgian Opposition leader Ms Nino Burdzhanadze today pledged to hold elections in 45 days and she called on police and



IN THE HOT SEAT: Ms Nino Burdzhanadze

security services to restore order after a wave of protest swept longtime President Mr Eduard Shevardnadze out of power.

Ms Burdzhanadze appealed to Georgia's citizens to fulfil all the legal demands of law enforcement officials. "Order must be restored immediately

not only in Tbilisi but also in all the regions of the country," she said in a nationally televised speech. Life in Tbilisi appeared to be returning to normal today after a night of street parties.

Even as the USA recognised Ms Burdzhanadze as inter-

im President, interim minister Mr Koba Nartchemachvili said today he was stepping down.

Foreign ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States are to hold an emergency meeting in Kiev tomorrow to discuss the political crisis in Georgia.

Shevardnadze 'to stay' in Georgia

BERLIN, Nov. 24. — Mr Eduard Shevardnadze today said he was not going to leave his homeland, ending speculation that he was bound for Germany. "Although I like Germany a lot, my homeland is Georgia and I feel compelled to stay here," he told ZDF public TV Germany... although I am grateful for the invitation." Earlier, a German government spokesman said Mr Shevardnadze, who contributed to the German reunification, would be welcome to live here. — AFP



Mr Shevardnadze

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New leader for close ties with Russia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, NOV. 24. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, today voiced concern that the Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, had resigned under "strong pressure", even as anal-



The Georgian Interim President, Nino Burdzhanadze, in her Parliament office in Tbilisi on Monday. — AFP

ysts pointed to American hand in the events in the neighbouring ex-Soviet state in the Caucasus.

Saying that Mr. Shevardnadze was not a dictator, Mr. Putin said: "Therefore, we feel legitimate concern that the change of power in Georgia has taken place against the background of strong pressure of the use of force. Those who organise and encourage such actions will bear responsibility before the people of Georgia."

Russian politicians and analysts accused the U.S. of masterminding the ouster of the Georgian President. "America has reared and pestered the Opposition leaders," the head of the State Duma foreign relations committee, Dmitry Rogozin, told Russian television.

Analysts point out that the U.S. backed the Opposition's claim that the Nov. 2 Parliamentary poll in Georgia was rigged and was the first to recognise the interim leader, Nino Burdzhanadze, and offer eco-

nomic aid.

Ms. Burdzhanadze, Speaker of the outgoing Parliament, on Sunday took over as Acting President after Mr. Shevardnadze stepped down in the face of massive protests against the officially declared victory of a pro-government party in the vote. Under the Constitution, Presidential elections must be held within 45 days. The Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, left Georgia today after failing to mediate a compromise settlement of the crisis that would allow Mr. Shevardnadze to stay until the Presidential and new Parliamentary elections. Mr. Ivanov was, however, praised by all sides for facilitating a peaceful transfer of power in Georgia.

In her first official statement as Acting President, Ms. Burdzhanadze said Georgia would "continue its course of early integration into European and Atlantic structures," while at the same time trying to maintain "good relations" with Russia.

Commenting on the ouster of Mr. Shevardnadze, the Russian President said it had not come to him as a surprise. "The change of power in Georgia is a logical result of a series of grave mistakes in domestic, foreign and economic policy of the former leadership," Mr. Putin told a Cabinet meeting on Monday. He issued a veiled warning to Georgia's new leadership not to repeat Mr. Shevardnadze's mistakes in taking his country towards the West and away from Russia.

"Georgia's foreign policy had been conducted without due regard for the deep cultural and historic roots of the Georgian people and without reference to geopolitical realities," Mr. Putin said.

Noting that relations between Russia and Georgia have been 'difficult' recently, he called on Georgia's new leaders to "do everything possible to restore the tradition of friendship between our countries".

Shevardnadze resigns



AN ERA ENDS: A boy waves as he sits on a fence in front of a huge Opposition flag hanging on Mr Eduard Shevardnadze's residence in Tbilisi on Sunday. — AFP

Agence France Presse

TBILISI, Nov. 23. — Georgia's veteran President Mr Eduard Shevardnadze resigned tonight to scenes of wild jubilation in the streets of Tbilisi, as the man who helped end the Cold War was forced to step down after weeks of angry protests.

A senior Opposition figure also announced tonight that a presidential election will be held in Georgia in 45 days.

"Under the constitution, a presidential election should be held within 45 days," Mr Zurab Zhvaniya, a former Speaker of parliament, said in televised comments.

Mr Shevardnadze handed over power to former parliament Speaker Ms Nino Burjanadze in the climax to mounting protests after a disputed 2 November parliamentary poll that tapped into widespread dissatisfaction with his rule.

As thousands of protesters shouted, cheered and danced to celebrate

the news, Georgian television reported the presidential plane was waiting at the tarmac of the capital's airport.

"President Shevardnadze has resigned," Opposition leader Mr Mikhail Saakashvili said on Rustavi-2 television as he announced Ms Burjanadze's appointment as acting President. "He has taken a manly step by leaving office without spilling any blood."

Just before, inside his residence outside Tbilisi where Mr Shevardnadze had agreed to resign after meeting the Opposition leaders along with Russian foreign minister Mr Igor Ivanov, he cut a lonely figure.

Asked by reporters who he was handing power over to, the 75-year-old Mr Shevardnadze, who was once the darling of the West, replied: "That is no longer any of my concern." "I am leaving. I have never betrayed my people and that's why I think that as President I should submit my resignation," he said.

Asked by reporters where he

would go, he replied "Home." Mr Shevardnadze, who was forced to flee to his residence outside Tbilisi yesterday after angry protestors stormed the parliament, had sought to defuse the crisis today by promising talks on new parliamentary and presidential elections.

But Mr Saakashvili said the country's army and security forces had already abandoned Mr Shevardnadze, who was due to end his second term in 2005, and called on him to step down immediately and go into exile.

The Opposition has charged that the parliamentary elections which returned Mr Shevardnadze's government to power were rigged, and alleged that the President had allowed corruption to flourish unchecked.

The EU, the Russian and US governments coordinated international efforts to end the political crisis in Georgia peacefully, as Russia's foreign minister Mr Ivan Ivanov shuttled between Mr Shevardnadze and the Opposition tonight.

At one point the Opposition threatened to march on his residence outside the capital.

World leaders tonight called for a peaceful handover of power in Georgia as Mr Shevardnadze stepped down as President.

"We wanted this crisis to be solved peacefully and it seems that the situation has gone in that direction," EU spokeswoman Ms Cristina Gallach said.

"We want a non-violent handover, to be done in a negotiated manner," she added, warning "the situation remains extremely volatile".

Britain called for "calm" and "dialogue" while the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose grouping of former Soviet republics, was critical, perhaps fearing a ripple effect from Mr Shevardnadze's resignation.

GEORGIA / SHEVARDNADZE BOWS TO OPPOSITION PROTESTERS

'Burdzhanadze to take over in Georgia'

TBILISI, NOV. 23. Georgia's Opposition leaders said today Nino Burdzhnanadze, Speaker of the outgoing parliament, would become acting head of state following the resignation of veteran President, Eduard Shevardnadze.

Ms. Burdzhnanadze would "replace" the 75-year-old leader, the Opposition leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, said when he emerged from Mr. Shevardnadze's residence tonight.

Earlier, Mr. Shevardnadze announced that he had quit, bowing to Opposition protesters who stormed parliament declaring a "velvet revolution" and demanding his resignation.

Speaking on television, Mr. Shevardnadze said: "I am going home." When asked who would be the next president of Georgia, he said: "It is not my business."

His resignation followed talks with the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, Mr. Saakashvili and fellow Opposition activist, Zurab Zhvania, at his suburban residence.

A presidential plane was waiting on the tarmac at Tbilisi airport, local television said.

Tens of thousands of Opposition supporters massed outside parliament exploded in rapturous celebrations at the news Mr. Shevardnadze had quit.

Mr. Saakashvili had called on supporters to march on to Mr. Shevardnadze's residence to force him to resign, after a three-week protest campaign against alleged fraud in a November 2 parliamentary election.

Mr. Shevardnadze had said earlier in the day he was ready to discuss key Opposition demands, including an early presi-



Interior Ministry servicemen greet Opposition leaders in the Parliament yard in Tbilisi on Sunday. — Reuters

dential poll, but opponents said it was too late for talks.

His resignation occurred amid signs that some of the security forces were moving over to the Opposition side.

Mr. Saakashvili, when asked whether he was ready for talks, said: "It's too late."

It was Opposition charges that Mr. Shevardnadze rigged the parliamentary election that set off the protests threatening to end 11 years of his increasingly unpopular rule.

Mr. Shevardnadze, who officially had 18 months left in office, had been widely blamed for the country's grinding poverty. Protesters seized the par-

liament building yesterday. As with the "people power" protests that swept Eastern Europe in 1989, the military stood aside. Mr. Shevardnadze was forced to flee.

"Shevardnadze's regime is bankrupt. His time has been exhausted," said Mr. Saakashvili, a 35-year-old U.S.-trained lawyer groomed by Mr. Shevardnadze, 75.

Mr. Shevardnadze looked exhausted and nervous when he faced the cameras on Sunday to meet Mr. Ivanov. The President's own inner circle looked divided.

Groups of soldiers swore allegiance to the Opposition

throughout the day, but there was no way of knowing how widespread the defections were.

A group of up to 200 men and women, saying they were members of the National Guard, joined the Opposition supporters.

A National Guard commander said that 120 of his soldiers had pledged allegiance to the Opposition-appointed interim president. The independent Rustavi-2 television station broadcast footage of the troops, who are part of the Defence Ministry, joining the Opposition rally in front of the parliament. — AFP, Reuters, AP

Georgia Opp storms Parliament

Shevardnadze declares emergency, rival proclaims self interim president

Tbilisi, November 22

GEORGIA TEETERED on the brink of chaos on Saturday with President Eduard Shevardnadze declaring a state of emergency and an Opposition leader claiming the interim presidency.

"I am declaring a state of emergency," Shevardnadze said in live televised comments an hour after protesters demanding his resignation stormed Parliament. "We have to bring order to the country."

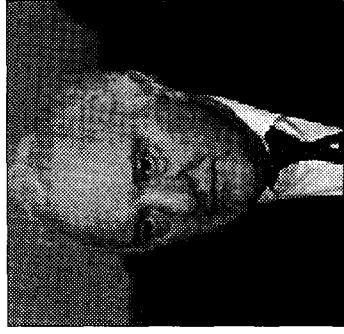
The demonstrators had forced the door of the Parliament, which was holding its first session since the elections, and marched in, waving red and white Opposition flags.

The Opposition members led Shevardnadze out of the Parliament chamber through a back entrance while he was delivering a televised speech, surrounded by a phalanx of bodyguards. They then declared Nino Burjanadze, speaker of Parliament before the disputed parliamentary election that has sparked weeks of protest, as interim President.

Outside, he again rejected the protesters' demands for his resignation. "I will not leave. We are all together," Shevardnadze told supporters outside the building before being whisked away under police escort.

The President's office denounced the Parliament takeover as a "coup d'etat".

Opposition supporters overran the entire Parliament building, running through offices, smashing windows and waving



Eduard Shevardnadze

Opposition flags from windows. Tens of thousands of flag-waving protesters also milled outside the building.

"Under the Constitution, Nino Burjanadze is the president of the country until new parliamentary elections and new presidential elections are held," Mikhail Saakashvili, who has orchestrated the nearly daily protests since the election, said at a news conference.

The Opposition says the election, which was declared won by Shevardnadze's party, was rigged. They have demanded Shevardnadze's resignation and called for new elections.

No major fighting was reported, despite the heavy police presence deployed in the city for a mass Opposition rally earlier in the day. The rally drew 30,000 anti-Shevardnadze protesters onto Tbilisi's main Freedom square.

Saakashvili told the 30,000 demonstrators that Shevardnadze should go. "We are giving

him 45 minutes to do that. After that we will go and get him," the Opposition leader said.

Tens of thousands of protesters chanting "resign, resign!" then broke through a police cordon and marched on Shevardnadze's office.

Police fired smoke canisters at them at the outset but then stood aside, many smiling and waving at the demonstrators as they marched down Tbilisi's main boulevard. Protesters hugged and kissed the officers, who were in full riot gear, as they made their way toward the presidential compound. They massed in front of the building but made no move to scale the gate surrounding it.

"Shevardnadze, get your plane ready to leave," Saakashvili shouted as he arrived at the gate. The initial response from the President, who was inside the parliament at the time, was one of defiance. "I am ready for dialogue with the Opposition but without any ultimatums," the 75-year-old leader of the former Soviet republic told the assembly in a televised address.

"Civil disobedience in Georgia is not acceptable."

There were warnings that the standoff could erupt into bloodshed and civil war but Saakashvili had vowed the protests would remain peaceful.

The former Soviet republic is in the grip of its worst political crisis since a civil war was fought out on the cobbled streets of Tbilisi more than a decade ago.




AFF A protester waves a flag in front of President Eduard Shevardnadze's residence on Saturday.

AFF

Opposition seizes Georgian Parliament

19-12
28-11

45 ✓



Handwritten numbers '19-12' and '28-11' are visible on the left side of the image. A handwritten number '45' with a checkmark is visible at the top of the image.

TBILISI (GEORGIA), NOV. 22. The Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, vowed not to resign on Saturday as he was hustled out of the Parliament building after Opposition supporters broke in and seized the Speaker's podium.

"I will not resign. I will resign when the presidential term expires, according to the Constitution," Mr. Shevardnadze said before he was driven away from Parliament, accompanied by armed guards in riot gear.

Mr. Shevardnadze was whisked away after the Opposition leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, led hundreds of his supporters as they shoved their way into the chamber, overturning desks and chairs and leaping onto the podium, just after the President officially convened the body. It was not immediately clear where he was taken.

"The velvet revolution has taken place in Georgia," Mr. Saakashvili said, as the hall applauded him. "We are against violence."

The move came as tens of thousands of Opposition protesters marched in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, waving flags and chanting "leave" and "enough."

They have pledged not to leave until Mr. Shevardnadze is

Protesters clash with riot police before storming the Parliament building in Tbilisi on Saturday. — Reuters

ousted. This poverty-stricken former Soviet republic had slid into its biggest political crisis in years after Nov. 2 parliamentary elections, which the Opposition and many foreign observers claimed were rigged.

Inside Parliament, fistfights broke out after Mr. Saakashvili ordered all pro-Government lawmakers to leave the building.

Mr. Saakashvili immediately handed over the podium to the

Opposition leader, Nino Burdzhanadze, who was the Speaker in the last Parliament. "We tried not to allow what has happened, but Shevardnadze has lost all chances for peaceful negotiations," she said. — AP

Shevardnadze declares Emergency, Speaker is acting President

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TBILISI, Nov. 22. — Opposition supporters broke into Georgia's parliament today, scuffling with lawmakers and forcing President Mr Eduard Shevardnadze to flee as thousands of protesters outside demanded his resignation.

Mr Shevardnadze said he was introducing a state of Emergency, and parliamentary Speaker Ms Nino Burdzhnashvili declared herself acting President.

"I will not resign. I will resign when the presidential term expires, according to the constitution," Mr

Shevardnadze said before his car, accompanied by armed guards in riot gear, pulled away from the parliament building. His office later called the Opposition's actions an "armed state coup."

Independent Rustavi-2 television said that the President was taken to the Kodzori special forces training centre of the defence ministry. Later other television stations said that the President went to a government residence in Krtsanisi on the outskirts of Tbilisi.

"I am now announcing a state of Emergency," Mr Shevardnadze said in a televised statement, apparently

broadcast from there. "Order will be restored and the criminals will be punished." He said that both the interior and defence ministry troops will be involved.

Mr Koba Narchemashvili, the Georgian interior minister, at Mr Shevardnadze's side, said on television that he would obey all the President's orders.

"The velvet revolution has taken place in Georgia," Mr Mikhail Saakashvili said, referring to the practically bloodless 1989 uprising which ousted the Communists from Czechoslovakia and brought dissident playwright Vaclav Havel to power.

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Stalemate continues in Georgia

TBILISI (GEORGIA), NOV. 19. Backers of a party opposing calls for the Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation gathered in front of Georgia's Parliament for a second day on Wednesday, while the leader of the anti-Shevardnadze camp reportedly tried to bring supporters from the provinces to the capital.

The Revival party has argued with Mr. Shevardnadze in the past but is even more at odds with the Opposition leader, Mikhail Saakashvili.

On Tuesday, it began its rally at Parliament, where anti-Shevardnadze groups had conducted daily protests the previous week.

On Wednesday, about 1,000 gathered outside the building and one of Revival's leaders said the party would continue its vigil in front of Parliament. "We are

against violence, extremism, civil disobedience," said Tsotne Bakuria, the head of Revival's Tbilisi cell.

Buses, apparently those which had brought Revival supporters to the capital from its heartland in the Black Sea province of Abkhazia, blocked the capital's main avenue in front of Parliament, provoking irritated horn blasts from drivers forced to make detours.

Aiming to avoid a clash with Revival, Mr. Saakashvili said he had asked opposition supporters to stay away from Parliament on Tuesday.

Irakli Tsereteli, the head of a smaller Opposition party, said on Wednesday that Mr. Saakashvili made a "big strategic mistake" by leaving the spot which had served as the main Opposition forum. — AP

Call for civil disobedience in Georgia

TBILISI, NOV. 15. A massive protest rally aimed at forcing the Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation, dispersed peacefully on Friday night, but an Opposition leader called on his followers to begin a campaign of civil disobedience to press their demands. Mr. Shevardnadze warned before the rally, which

brought about ¹⁰⁻¹² 15,000 people to Tbilisi, that the climate of confrontation "may develop into a civil war."

A prominent politician supporting him said the demonstrations this week bore a worrisome resemblance to the autumn of 1991, when tensions boiled over into violence that left more than 70 people

¹⁵ dead and sparked a coup against Mr. Shevardnadze's predecessor. Mikhail Saakashvili, the most visible of the Opposition figures, urged rally participants to avoid provocative actions, but as the gathering broke up, he declared, "We are announcing an action of overall civil disobedience until Shevardnadze resigns." — AP

Nation on brink of civil war, warns Shevardnadze

Tbilisi: Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze warned the country was in danger of slipping into civil war as thousands of protesters were due to converge on the capital, Tbilisi, on Friday to demand his resignation.

A week of protests, sparked by a parliamentary election which opposition parties claim was rigged, is expected to reach a climax late on Friday after an opposition leader called on all five million of his countrymen to join a demonstration in the capital, Tbilisi.

In an impassioned plea broadcast on national television, Mr Shevardnadze urged the people not to respond to the call. "I make this warning: Today there will be an action but it will not be some sort of theatrical presentation. It is all very serious. It is all leading to civil war. It could be the beginning of the end," he said. "I appeal to everyone: get on with your own affairs, stay calm, take yourself in hand, in the name of our homeland. Everyone is against confrontation. I am warning that this is very dangerous. I appeal to the other side and warn them: bad things could happen. While I am the lawful president of Georgia I will not allow a division of the people and civil war."

In the strongest indication yet that Mr Shevardnadze is ready to use force to keep order, Mr Shevardnadze said: "The military are

ready today to do everything to (defend) their homeland." Mr Shevardnadze, a former Soviet foreign minister, who has dominated political life in Georgia for nearly three decades, also dug in his heels over opposition demands for his resignation. "I will not resign," he said. "That would be irresponsible on my part. When the time comes I will go on my own accord but in this situation of uncertainty, it is not going to happen."



Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze gestures as he addresses the nation on Friday.

The protests have already left 75-year-old Shevardnadze—who is deeply unpopular because of widespread corruption and poverty in Georgia—fighting for his political survival. They have also revived uncomfortable memories of a civil war which wracked the turbulent republic in the early 1990s. Georgia's political turmoil is a headache for Western investors, who are building a pipeline to export Caspian Sea oil to world markets, via Georgia. AFP

Georgia edges closer to civil war

TBILISI (GEORGIA), NOV. 12. Georgia inched closer to civil war on Tuesday as Interior Ministry troops were ordered into the heart of the capital, Tbilisi, and Eduard Shevardnadze, the embattled President, denounced Opposition leaders.

Outside Parliament, thousands of angry protesters gathered for a fourth day, swearing defiance. Many were waving images of St George, their patron saint.

A source close to the President said: "Considering the hot mood around the country, it's possible there will be a second civil war." The country slipped into civil war in the early 1990s.

The latest crisis erupted after the Opposition accused the government of systematic vote-rigging in a parliamentary poll held on November 2. International monitors supported their claims.

Thousands of protesters, including many housewives and pensioners, blocked traffic on Tuesday on Tbilisi's main thoroughfare, Rustaveli Street.

"We came here because we've simply had enough," said Maya Kistauri, a 39-year-old housewife, who was among a group of six mothers huddled against the autumnal cold.

"I haven't had any child support since September and even then it was only 15 dollars. How can I feed three children on that?" Rusudan Kiknadze, a 46-year-old mother-of-five, said: "My husband died seven years ago and I survive by giving occasional language lessons to children. Look around you at the McDonalds restaurants, the cinemas and the cafes. They're not here for us. Not one of my children has ever been inside them. I'm from Tbilisi but I feel like a refugee."

Even if Mr Shevardnadze orders a crackdown, it is far from clear if it would succeed. The country's 14,000-strong army is disillusioned. On Monday, trains carrying soldiers from the north of the country towards the capital were blocked by villagers who laid logs across the tracks. —
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THE HINDU

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