

Austerity Budget

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some points of contention.

"If it's just a matter of some money lacking here and there, that can be resolved in the process of discussion," Pankov said.

Even First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, known for his tough reformist views, told reporters he was not concerned that the budget may be buried.

"A healthy solution can always be found," he said.

See BUDGET, Page 2

Pickering Pledges to Investigate Visa System

By Charles Hecker
THE MOSCOW TIMES

In responding to bitter criticism from Russians seeking to visit the United States, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering has said the embassy would investigate accusations of rudeness by consular employees and improve the processing of visas.

In comments published Friday in the newspaper Izvestia, Pickering said the anticipated changes by the embassy's consular section would spare applicants what they have called a humiliating and degrading procedure.

Pickering told the newspaper he was planning to replace the face-to-face interview with a written questionnaire. He also said responses to applications would be sent by mail.

Currently, consular officials often interview a total of as many as 500 visa applicants a day.

Embassy officials declined comment, promising further details at a future press conference.

Pickering's remarks came after a meeting with Sergei Yushenkov, chairman of the State Duma's Defense Committee. After hearing a series of complaints about poor treatment of Russians at the U.S. Embassy, Yushenkov and other members of the Duma cancelled all trips to the United States in protest.

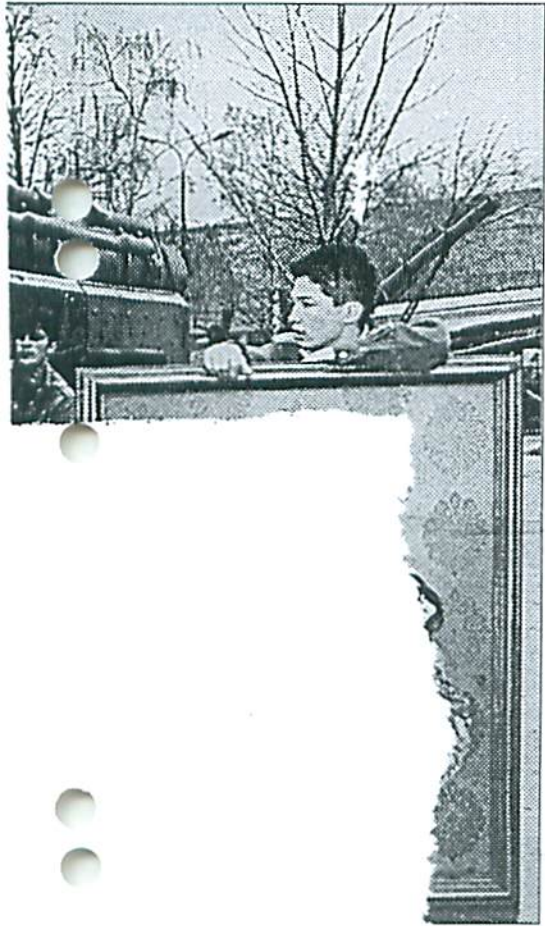
Other improvements mentioned in the Izvestia article include increasing the size of the embassy's consular section, in the hope of shrinking the lines of applicants that twist around the embassy building. Pickering blamed the Russian government's Diplomatic Corps Administration, known as UPDK, for failing to provide the consular section with greater space, but he said he had found support from Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov.

Yushenkov declared he was satisfied with his meeting with Pickering, and said he would no longer boycott travel to the United States.

Izvestia mentioned that conversely Americans have problems with the Russian consular service in Washington, usually over delays and requests for additional fees for speedier service.

But recently it has been the U.S. Embassy on the receiving end of the criticism, much of it carried in the Russian press. The onslaught began in mid-July with an article in Izvestia that accused

See EMBASSY, Page 2



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Continued from page 1

the consular section of discriminatory treatment of Russian visa applicants.

Interviewers often ask hopeful travelers about their income, family life and occupation — probing questions that many Russians consider demeaning, especially if they simply want to visit an ailing relative or attend a family function.

But the U.S. Embassy says it must consider every visa applicant a potential immigrant, and these questions help determine how likely a person is to overstay the time allotted in the United States by the visa.

Ire was piqued recently when the son of a well-known human rights activist was denied a visa to visit his ailing mother. In an earlier response to criticism, Pickering wrote a letter to Izvestia in which he said his employees "are stretched to the limit to conduct so many interviews a day." On the whole, Pickering said, about 20 to 25 percent of applicants are rejected.

To some extent, American fears of the immigrant disguised as a tourist are grounded in reality. Izvestia quoted Pickering as saying that as many as 15 to 20 percent of Russians granted visas to the United States do not return home. Embassy officials say 140,000 Russians entered the country last year.

But the embassy's behavior — rejecting visas for artists, for example, while granting one to extremist State Duma member Vladimir Zhirinovskiy — has confounded Russian diplomats and human rights activists.

The reluctance in granting visas, Russians say, also makes ironic the longstanding American complaints against

the former Soviet Union for not allowing its citizens to travel abroad.

"They all made a wonderful noise about the Iron Curtain, but now they are silent as an iron curtain is being made from the other side," Vasily Vinogradov, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's consular service, said in September.



Thomas Pickering, who is investigating accusations of rudeness by consular employees.

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y of the president of versial Chara bank, as large numbers of a rich and famous investors, was found he office of a central mpany Friday, Inter- l. The cause of death estigation. rse of Vladimir k, was taken to a ording to the report. which has between d 150 investors, nt of dividends begin- g, bla; the ruble's lunge. However ac- Central Bank records holdings "exceed by e times the amount 'repay clients." bank's announcement ve been demanding to has become of their a City Duma hearing the crisis.

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ciliatory spirit was belie- es Ministry's forecast, pub- official newspaper Rossi- ad of Saturday's meeting y. It d the proposed rejection of inflationary redit- over the deficit, omic stabilization. ities indicated, however, t be satisfied with vague cessions. Many, including n Budget Committee ail Zadornov, said some e bu- proposal were wrong. aid the current ruble ex- 3,200 to the dollar, on get relied, would be im- ntain through next year. the budget proposal did count more than 13 tril-) billion) in government ver from 1994. The gov- s to spend only about 70 ent budget by the end

Report: Russia Must Reform or Stagnate

By Oleg Shchedrov

REUTERS
Russia has reached the bottom of its bitter economic slump and must now choose whether to boost reform to climb out of the quagmire or sink into stagnation, the Ministry said in a report.

Excerpts from a report for a major economic conference chaired by President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin on Saturday, were published in the daily newspaper Izvestia. The report, which was carried in the newspaper's daily edition, stated there is no alternative to the reform of nuclear energy and accounting of nuclear materials. "The year 1995 will be a turning point for the Russian economy," the report said. "The question will end in a choice of the levers of economic policy will be activated."

ground for further progress in 1996 and 1997."

The report, a tough assessment of the economic choices facing the government, came just weeks after a major cabinet shakeup, which brought in several conservative ministers.

But Yeltsin may find it difficult to win support for his plans from powerful regional bosses, influential industrial managers and even some government officials, who insist that current reformist policies should be maintained.

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