

## DEL PONTE SAYS Milosevic may have committed suicide

REUTERS, The Hague

Chief UN war crimes prosecutor Carla del Ponte said on Sunday she could not rule out that Slobodan Milosevic might have committed suicide but said she wanted to wait for the results of an autopsy.

"Of course it could be possible," she said, noting that the death of the former Yugoslav president on Saturday was the second within a week at the tribunal's detention centre after the suicide of former rebel Croatian Serb leader Milan Babic.

She added that she expected initial results of the autopsy on Milosevic later on Sunday or on Monday, although she noted that results of toxicology tests could take longer.

The death of former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic in a United Nations cell prompted widespread dismay that the "Butcher of the Balkans" had escaped justice.



Muslim women of Eastern Bosnian town of Tulza talk after gathering at their association office to watch Saturday the news relating the death of former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic.

## Milosevic death robs victims of justice

REUTERS, London

Foes of Slobodan Milosevic said on Saturday the unexpected death in prison of the man they blamed for the 1990s bloodshed in the Balkans meant justice had been cheated.

"The death of Slobodan Milosevic, a few weeks before the completion of his trial, will prevent justice to be done in his case," said Carla del Ponte, chief prosecutor at the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

"However, the crimes for which he was accused, including genocide, cannot be left unpunished."

The UN tribunal said Milosevic, 64, had been found dead in his cell in the Dutch city, shortly before his four-year-old trial for genocide and crimes against humanity during the violent break-up of old Yugoslavia was expected to conclude.

Milosevic -- once branded the "butcher of the Balkans" -- was widely seen in the West as the main culprit in Europe's worst conflicts since World War Two, which killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted millions

from their homes.

"What's important is that the region, and particularly the people in Serbia, now draw a line across Milosevic's past and his life, which was a malign influence ..." British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said.

There was widespread regret that Milosevic died before receiving the court's verdict.

"It is unfortunate and in many aspects unsatisfactory, given the countless victims of the Balkan wars, that justice now will not be able to run its course," Nato Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said in a statement.

Former Balkan envoy David Owen said "justice in a way has been cheated."

Milosevic was charged with 66 counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in complex indictments covering bloody conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo as Yugoslavia imploded in the 1990s. He had declined to enter a plea.

## US in talks to close Guantanamo camp

REUTERS, London

The United States is in discussions about how to send terrorism suspects held in Guantanamo Bay back to their home countries and close the detention camp, a senior US official said yesterday.

Asked if Washington was talking to Britain about how to repatriate prisoners and close the camp, US State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Colleen Graffy told BBC television: "There's continuous discussion about that."

"Hopefully, over the years, we will find a way to either release them to their country of origin or they will declare that they no longer want to kill us," she said.

About 490 foreign terrorism suspects, many of them suspected Islamist militants, are being held at the naval base in Cuba.

Most have been detained for three years or more and only 10 have been charged with a crime.

Organisations across the world have condemned Washington's use of indefinite detentions without charge and want Guantanamo to close as soon as possible.

The United States argues it has the right to hold people it describes as enemy combatants because it is effectively at war with al-Qaeda.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is under pressure at home to take a harder line with his Iraq war ally President George W. Bush over

Guantanamo.

But Blair will not publicly go beyond saying the detention camp is an "anomaly" which must at some point end.

The Independent on Sunday newspaper reported that US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, in London last week, asked British ministers about their attempts to deport terrorism suspects in the UK back to their home countries.

Britain is trying to sign agreements with countries in the Middle East and North Africa to obtain guarantees that anyone deported to those countries would not be tortured.

## Likud, Hamas square off over future relations

AFP, Jerusalem

Likud, the right-wing party trailing ahead of a March 28 Israeli election, rejected yesterday any Palestinian state led by Hamas, as the radical Islamic group continued its refusal to renounce violence.

Hamas, which won elections in January, unveiled a proposed government programme Saturday that does not renounce its commitment to destroying Israel but says recognition of it is "a decision for the Palestinian people".

Speaking to the Yediot Aharonot daily, which Sunday published an outline of the Likud campaign platform, party leader and former premier Benjamin Netanyahu asked: "Should I be talking about concessions when the Hamas government is in power?"

"At the moment there is nothing to be done and we need to fight Hamas. As long as Hamas is in control, we will not return any territory to them, we will not transfer any money to them and we will not allow Palestinian workers to work in Israel. Our platform will be revised according to circumstances."

In the same vein, the Likud platform argues that the internationally drafted roadmap peace plan, in which a Palestinian state would live alongside Israel in peace, is a dead letter.

"The continued outline of the roadmap is impossible in light of the absence of a legitimate partner," it said.

That was echoed by a senior official in the office of Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whose Kadima party is the favorite to win

the election.

"Unfortunately, Hamas is suppressing any hope of progress with respect to a negotiated settlement," he told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Israel, the United States and the European Union have all conditioned any dealings with a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority on its renouncing violence, recognising Israel and honouring past agreements with the Jewish state.

And so has moderate Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, whose Fatah party has as a result so far refused to agree to join a coalition government.

## Prosecutor for hanging Saddam promptly if found guilty

AFP, Baghdad

The trial of Saddam Hussein and seven co-defendants resumed yesterday with the chief prosecutor calling for the prompt hanging of any found guilty, while bombs and mortars exploded across Baghdad.

Saddam is on trial for crimes against humanity in connection with the killing of 148 villagers from Dujail, north of Baghdad, after he escaped an assassination attempt there in 1982.

As the trial resumed after an 11-day suspension, just one of the accused, Mizher Abdullah Kadam al-Roweed, a small-time former Baath party official from Dujail, was in court to offer testimony as to his role in the massacre.

All the defence lawyers also

attended the hearing, the 15th since the trial began in October.

Speaking just hours earlier on Iraqia state-television, the Iraqi High Tribunal's chief prosecutor, Jaafar Mussawi, said Saddam would hang immediately without undergoing further trials if found guilty and sentenced to death in the present case.

"If the court passes a death sentence on any of the defendants in the Dujail case, the law is clear, the sentence must be carried out within 30 days following the appeal," Mussawi said.

"As for other cases (in which they have been charged), the court will only judge living defendants as those executed cannot be tried," he added.

## Iran inciting Iraqi violence: Bush

REUTERS, Washington

President George W. Bush on Saturday suggested Iran was stirring up violence in neighbouring Iraq.

"If there's any kind of influence from a foreign country that is disruptive, any kind of influence -- if the Iranians are trying to influence the outcome of the political process, or the outcome of the security situation there, we're letting them know our

displeasure," he told reporters after a meeting on Iraq at the White House.

"Our call is for those in the neighbourhood to allow ... Iraq to develop a democracy. And that includes our call to Iran, as well as to Syria," Bush said.

Bush met with General Montgomery Meigs, who leads a task force to counter the improvised explosive devices that militants have used to cause many casualties

among US soldiers.

"We face an enemy that will use explosive devices in order to shake our will; in order to foment violence in Iraq; in order to try to convince the American people that we can't win in Iraq," Bush said.

"There were some people trying to, obviously, foment sectarian violence," he added. "Some have called it a civil war. But it didn't work."