

## International

Pressure mounting on Berisha to quit

## Chaos destroying last semblance of order in Albania

TIRANA, Albania. Mar 14: One by one, anarchy spread Thursday to Albania's few tranquil towns, leaving ransacked armories, civilians navigating tanks, and children shouldering assault rifles. Helpless politicians asked for Western military involvement, reports AFP.

The chaos that has engulfed southern Albania for days spread north, east and west throughout the country, destroying the last semblance of order.

Responding to the increasing threat, US helicopters landed in Tirana to evacuate American citizens. Announcing the operation, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said in Washington that the flights could continue for several hours or even days.

He said the ambassador and core staff would remain in the capital for the time being. Italian helicopters also flew out hundreds of people, and other embassies made their own plans to get their nationals out.

In Tirana, guards deserted the central prison, allowing 600 prisoners including two prominent

leaders of the former Communists to flee. Then, the guards returned to loot the prison.

At least 12 people were reportedly killed throughout the country, many of them by random gunfire. Citizens were increasingly taking arms, not so much out of political protest, but to protect themselves.

Pressure was building on President Sali Berisha to quit—the one move that might help restore order. An opposition politician said Berisha had acknowledged in a meeting that he had lost control of the country.

Berisha accepted that he has no institutional control," said Skender Gjinushi of the Social Democrats. "He has no army, no police. Tirana is in total anarchy."

He said if a request were made, the organization could provide humanitarian aid, help evacuate people, or help separate forces.

In Brussels, NATO ambassadors met in special session to discuss the crisis.

The unrest threatens to engulf neighboring countries, particularly Italy and Greece, with another flood of refugees.

Albanians asking for his resignation.

The Social Democrats and the Forum for Democracy, a loose umbrella organization of opposition groups, also called on Berisha to quit.

The government asked for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council. State radio said Berisha and opposition political parties appealed to the Western European Union, the military arm of the European Community, for involvement.

It was not clear what kind of help they were seeking. WEU spokeswoman Myriam Sochaki said the organization had received a message from Albania indicating it was considering such a request, but did not actually have it yet.

She said if a request were made, the organization could provide humanitarian aid, help evacuate people, or help separate forces.

Political sources said that one of the first acts of the new prime minister, Bashir Fino, was to hand Berisha a petition from rebellious southern Al-

banians asking for his resignation.

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The problem in Albania appeared increasingly to be a total collapse of order rather than one in which opposing forces could be separated.

In Tirana, shopkeepers were boarding up store fronts to prepare for trouble.

State TV cut into children's programming for a special newscast, leading with the ominous announcement that 200 citizens had volunteered to help police restore order in Tirana. It said they warned Tirana residents to obey the law, or they would open fire.

There were unconfirmed reports of six dead in the capital, state radio said.

A guard at the central prison, reached by telephone, said Ramiz Alia, the last communist president, former Socialist Prime Minister Fatos Nano and hundreds of other inmates walked free when guards left their posts.

## Congress (I) meet Monday to discuss polls defeat

NEW DELHI, Mar 14: India's Congress (I) party will hold a special meeting on Monday to discuss its defeat in a string of elections, it was announced today, reports AFP.

The meeting, by parliament members of the 112-year-old party, follows a continuing tug of war between Congress President Sitaram Kesri and his disgraced predecessor, former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said Kesri agreed to convene the meeting in the wake of persistent demands by Rao loyalists, Suresh Kalmadi and SS Ahluwalia.

Rao, who has been accused of corruption by Indian detectives, stepped down as Congress chief last September after leading the party to a disastrous defeat in the general elections.

He was succeeded by Kesri, the party Treasurer, who until then was known as a Rao supporter. But after becoming party president, he began to sideline Rao sympathizers in the party.

Kesri's aides had earlier blamed Rao for the Congress' rout in the 1996 parliamentary elections. Rao supporters later turned the heat on Kesri after the party lost power in last month's polls in the state of Punjab.

It also suffered reverses in most by-elections to national parliament last month, and was trounced by Hindu nationalists in municipal elections in the western state of Maharashtra.

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