



City's Shahbag crossing clogged with traffic as Eid shoppers make a mad rush for the adjoining shopping areas. — Star photo

40 bodies of massacred villagers found

Attack on monitors in Kosovo condemned

PRISTINA, Jan 16: The first Kosovo shooting to wound an international monitor drew condemnation and concern from Britain, France and the United States after fresh fighting erupted in the Serbian province, reports AP.

International officials protested to Serbian authorities after their forces rained artillery shells on three southern Kosovo villages Friday, sending residents fleeing and reportedly killing at least 15 ethnic Albanian rebels.

But the unprecedented attack on members of the Kosovo Verification Mission in another corner of the province prompted special concern, reviving questions about the unarmed verifiers' safety.

A British monitor was shot in the shoulder and Serb translator for the mission also was shot and slightly wounded when unidentified gunmen fired on their three-vehicle convoy Friday afternoon near the western town of Decani.

Serb police said they were accompanying the verifiers on a joint patrol at the time, and blamed snipers firing from territory held by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which runs the monitoring mission, didn't make accusations but said the attack was deliberate.

In Washington, US State Department spokesman James P. Rubin called the shooting "unacceptable," and both Britain and France also issued harsh statements.

"We strongly condemn this

attack on unarmed verifiers and we continue to call on all sides to exercise restraint and refrain from violence," the British Defense Ministry said.

The French Foreign Ministry called it "all the more unacceptable given that it involved unarmed members of the KVM whose only mission is to ensure a peaceful settlement in Kosovo."

The two victims were taken to a Pristina hospital for their wounds, where the Serb translator was released. The Briton was subsequently taken to Skopje in neighbouring Macedonia for further treatment.

Between 1,000 and 2,000 people, mostly ethnic Albanians, have been killed since Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic launched an offensive last February to try to crush separatist militants and reinforce government control over the Albanian-majority province.

Milosevic agreed under the threat of NATO airstrikes last October to withdraw some forces, end the crackdown and allow as many as 2,000 international monitors to verify his pledges.

About 800 are now in Kosovo, including 110 Britons, working for the OSCE-led mission. While the October cease-fire hasn't yet collapsed as feared, the increasing clashes between Serb forces and the rebels have intensified the debate over the unarmed verifiers' role.

An 1,800-strong NATO force is stationed just over the border in Macedonia to rescue them if

needed.

Meanwhile, the bodies of as many as 40 men were found on a hillside in southern Kosovo on Saturday, many of them mutilated, the day after Serb forces launched a fierce assault on ethnic Albanian villages.

Reporters and international verifiers who were prevented from reaching the besieged area around the village of Racak the previous day saw the massacred bodies on Saturday lying scattered on a hillside and in ravines.

Some had their eyes gouged out or heads smashed in, and one man lay decapitated in the courtyard of his compound. The body of another man had a bullet wound in the neck. Many of the victims were older men.

International monitors initially counted at least 28 bodies lying heaped together near the crest of a hill, and ethnic Albanians told of many others lying nearby. The news agency launched by Kosovo Liberation Army rebels, Kosovo Press, reported 46 dead, eight of them KLA fighters.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which runs the Kosovo Verification Mission, declined to discuss the massacre until the mission chief, US diplomat William Walker, reached the scene himself.

"What we're trying to get now are the precise facts, which is why the ambassador is going down there," said OSCE spokesman Sandy Blyth. "We're in the business of gathering the precise facts of how many people died and how they died."

The question that automatically follows, will CEC's resignation solve the problem? As long as the attitude that 'Eid is fair if I win it, and rigged if I lose it' continues then no CEC in the world will be able to enjoy the confidence of both sides for long, for after all one side will have to lose. The present CEC was a consensus choice. What happened to him now, save the fact that BNP lost the last by poll? What will happen if, for argument's sake, the BNP should lose even under a new CEC? Will we have to change again because BNP will have lost confidence — again?

The ruling party's arrogant and perfunctory dismissal of the opposition's demands has not helped matters either. Of the four demands we definitely think that the ruling party could have seriously looked into the issue of political prisoners and harassment of political workers at the district, thana and union levels. We have repeatedly written that there is genuine ground to believe that police oppression of the opposition has taken place countrywide. Random issuance of warrants and physical assault and threat by ruling party thugs has made a mockery of political freedom at the village level.

Hundreds of court cases on one side and refusal by thana OCs to register cases that implicate ruling party workers have turned the law and order system into a farce. For all this the ruling party is to be blamed.

As the party in power it is AL's responsibility — and AL's alone — to maintain neutrality in the governance process. It should have taken the opposition's demand more seriously instead of rejecting it outright.

The net result of all this is that we face an uncertain political future with serious consequences upon our economic prospects. What an Eid 'gift' they are all planning for us. As we have not suffered enough.

We are amongst the poorest in the world with the most daunting development challenges faced by people anywhere. We have just suffered the most devastating flood in our history. All these facts seem to have had no impact on our leaders.

Otherwise how can they return to 'politics as usual' so soon after such a tragedy?

While the political 'dance of destruction' is all set to begin after Eid, we continue to breathe poison in our cities, face criminals on our streets, eat adulterated food in our restaurants, drink arsenic mixed water in our villages, pay bribe for almost every work that needs to be done, borrow public money from the banks and never return, and blame others for our faults. Our recipe for self-destruction is complete and we are moving full speed ahead in that direction.

Wang pledged at that time to visit Taiwan in 1999 while the two also agreed to strengthen dialogue in the future.

Taiwan wants talks to pick up where they left off on practical subjects such as fishing rights and repatriation of illegal aliens. But China insists that discussions include topics related to reunion between the sides since then.

Taiwan had hoped for a meeting between middle-ranking officials simply to prepare for the visit by Wang Daohan, the association's chairman, to reciprocate the one his Taiwanese counterpart Koo Chen-kuo made to Beijing last October.

"A visit to Taiwan by Mr Wang would be significant in itself," said Shi Hwei-yow, vice chairman of Straits Exchange Foundation, which handles exchanges with China.

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Commentary

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tion. There is no reason and no logic for what is likely to happen to our politics after the Eid. Like two wrestlers the two sides are flexing their muscles and doing their preparatory 'exercises' for the grand 'fight' after the Eid. We would have had no quarrel about their 'fight' save for the fact that the 'venue' they chose to fight in happens to be our factories, offices, markets, streets, hospitals, schools etc, that drive our civic and economic life.

The opposition parties have demanded that the CEC resign. And yet so far they are unable to show A SINGLE REASON why he should, and why WE THE PEOPLE should support such a demand. The argument is made that the CEC has lost the confidence of the opposition. If so, it is a major failure on the part of the CEC, because his post is not only constitutional but also moral. However the opposition's role is also constitutional and moral. Theirs is not simply to raise demands and call hawks to force it down the throat of the people. They must give proof and logic of their demand. Why has the CEC lost their confidence? What has he done wrong? If the opposition wants THE PEOPLE to support its cause then it must explain to us why Mr. Abu Hena should go.

The question that automatically follows, will CEC's resignation solve the problem? As long as the attitude that 'Eid is fair if I win it, and rigged if I lose it' continues then no CEC in the world will be able to enjoy the confidence of both sides for long, for after all one side will have to lose. The present CEC was a consensus choice. What happened to him now, save the fact that BNP lost the last by poll? What will happen if, for argument's sake, the BNP should lose even under a new CEC? Will we have to change again because BNP will have lost confidence — again?

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Imelda allows children to broker wealth deal with Manila govt

MANILA, Jan 16: President Joseph Estrada said Saturday that the widow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos has allowed her children to negotiate a deal with his government to share his husband's allegedly ill-gotten wealth, reports AP.

Speaking during his regular radio programme, Estrada said he spoke with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr on Friday on a possible negotiation.

"There is already permission to the Marcos children," Estrada said. "This is a good start."

It was his second meeting with Marcos' son this week. On Thursday Estrada said he was "on the verge" of completing informal talks with Marcos' son.

An aide of Mrs Marcos said she refuses to talk to reporters. Her son, who is governor of northern home province of Ilocos Norte, was unavailable for comment.

Since Marcos was ousted in a popular revolt in February 1986, succeeding administrations have sought to recover bil-

lions of dollars he allegedly amassed illegally during his 20-year administration.

The amount includes drs 570 million in Marcos' Swiss bank deposits which have been transferred to an escrow account in a Philippine bank.

Numerous civil and criminal charges have been filed against Mrs Marcos and her children to recover the wealth.

Estrada lamented that the legal process to recover the Marcos wealth has dragged on for more than 12 years.

"This is overdue process," he said. "We might as well negotiate so that our people can benefit from whatever money goes to the government."

The younger Marcos report-

edly wants a global settlement of all ill-gotten wealth charges against the Marcos family.

"What would be ideal is that

we must finish it in one fell swoop, not by piecemeal basis," he was quoted saying by The Philippine Star newspaper.

"We'd rather be left alone than

have the ill-gotten wealth cases drag on for 20 years or more."

Estrada said negotiations would start with a 75-25 sharing of the Marcos wealth in favour of the government. Such sharing was contained in an aborted 1993 agreement under then President Fidel Ramos that was kept secret until it was exposed two years later.

The Presidential Commission on Good Government, the agency in charge of recovering the Marcos wealth, said it did not implement the agreement because the Marcoses had not disclosed all their assets.

The defence ministry said the attack took place when the rebels fired mortar rounds at the troops as they strengthened positions near the town.

In other incidents, troops killed 13 Tamil Tigers at the northeastern town of Oddusudan on Friday and recovered a number of weapons.

Two more rebels were killed by soldiers near Vannivilankulam.

25 LTTE rebels killed in clashes with troops

COLOMBO, Jan 16: Sri Lanka's defence ministry said today 25 Tamil Tigers were killed in clashes and 12 troops wounded in heavy fighting in the region, reports AFP.

The ministry said in a statement that 10 guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed and 12 soldiers wounded in a major confrontation at the northern town of Mankulam on Friday.

The defence ministry said the attack took place when the rebels fired mortar rounds at the troops as they strengthened positions near the town.

In other incidents, troops killed 13 Tamil Tigers at the northeastern town of Oddusudan on Friday and recovered a number of weapons.

Two more rebels were killed by soldiers near Vannivilankulam.

Civilian killing 27 troops go on trial in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Jan 16: The first of 27 soldiers who allegedly tortured four civilians who died while in custody went on trial in the troubled Indonesian province of Aceh on Saturday, reports AP.

Troops raided a village there on Jan 9 and rounded up dozens of residents suspected of supporting Islamic separatists.

The civilians were later locked up in a building in the town of Lhokseumawe where they were attacked by troops.

As well as the four dead men, 40 other civilians were injured. Twenty-seven remain hospitalised.

Military chiefs, who have promised to clean up the armed forces' poor human rights record, have condemned the killings and beatings and have promised swift action against those responsible.

9 Mother-Child Welfare Centres to be set up

GOPALGANJ, Jan 16: Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yusuf today said the government will establish nine Mother-Child Welfare Centres (MCWC) in nine districts at a cost of Taka 18 crore in phases, reports BSS.

"The government is attaching maximum importance to the improvement of child health to reduce the rate of child mortality for making them as worthy citizens," he said while visiting the Kottalpara Health Complex in Gopalganj district.

Anti-Taliban forces to launch offensives after Eid

ISLAMABAD, Jan 16: Anti-Taliban commanders in eastern provinces of Afghanistan have decided to coincide their offensives against the Taliban with advances from the north after the Eid-ul-Fitr, reports Xinhua.

The decision was made at a summit of the former Mujahideen commanders, held somewhere in eastern Kunar province last week, Afghan sources based in Peshawar, capital of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, said Friday.

The meeting was attended by as many as 40 commanders from the three provinces in eastern Afghanistan. Unconfirmed reports said former governor of Nangarhar province of Afghanistan Haji Abdul Qadeer was also present.

The meeting decided to launch offensives against the Taliban militia in eastern provinces simultaneously with attacks by forces loyal to commander Ahmad Shah Masud from the north of the Afghan capital of Kabul.

Masud is reportedly planning to go ahead with a major offensive against the Taliban troops soon after the forthcoming Eid.

It was further learnt that the Kunar summit decided to arrange 500 troops each for Kunar and Nangarhar and another 750 for Lagman province. Several former Mujahideen commanders, including Haji Qadeer are to lead the anti-Taliban offensives in the eastern provinces.

Ice storm leaves 8 dead, 5 lakh without power in US states

BOSTON, Jan 16: From Michigan to Massachusetts, from Virginia to Maine, ice and snow on Friday left more than 500,000 Americans without power and caused eight deaths, reports Reuters.

A thick coating of ice shut down airports and delayed flights along the east coast, stranding thousands of travellers. It also forced school closures and prompted the federal government to offer its employees an 'unscheduled leave day.'

At its peak, the ice storm cut off electricity to more than 500,000 residents in Washington, DC and its suburbs in Virginia and Maryland, and in Baltimore, by Friday evening.

As the ice storm moved north, utilities reported scattered outages involving more than 130,000 customers in parts of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

Taiwanese official alleges China hampering improved ties

TAIPEI, Jan 16: A Taiwanese negotiator on Saturday accused China of hampering improved relations by trying to impose preconditions for the planned visit to Taiwan by a top Chinese negotiator, reports AP.

On Friday, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, the Chinese semi-official negotiating body, invited a middle ranking Taiwanese official to China to "exchange views and arrange for political and