

## International

# Y'slavs turn out for crucial vote amid fraud fears

Croatia ready to help Serbia's democratic changes

BELGRADE, Sept 24 : Yugoslavs voted today in crucial presidential and legislative elections which could see President Slobodan Milosevic ousted after a decade of wars and crippling international sanctions, reports AFP.

The watershed elections came amid Western fears that Milosevic, branded a pariah by the West, could try to hold on to power even if his opponent, the moderate nationalist Vojislav Kostunica, wins on Sunday.

The voting and its fallout in coming weeks could prove the toughest test for Milosevic -- indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal for atrocities in Kosovo -- after overseeing 10 years of disintegration and bloodshed in Yugoslavia.

NATO Secretary General George Robertson called Milosevic "the biggest destabilising factor that there is" in the region, in an interview with Roman public television.

And as the regime and opposition traded accusations of plans to rig the vote, western leaders backed opposition fears that Milosevic would not step down

even if the vote goes against him. Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, warned of massive electoral fraud, insisting the "Belgrade regime will stop at nothing to win the elections... using the most unscrupulous methods."

The West this week dangled the carrot of an end to years of devastating sanctions if Yugoslav voters oust Milosevic, but the offer was roundly condemned as outside interference by both the regime and the opposition.

Croatia, which fought a bloody war with Serbia as the former Yugoslavia fell apart, said Sunday it was ready to help its neighbour make the transition towards democracy if its citizens reject Milosevic's authoritarian regime, the ministry said.

An election that would lead to overall democratic changes would enable the international community and thus Croatia to invite the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the community of democracies," the foreign ministry said.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have banned western observers from monitoring the vote, on Saturday expelled foreign journalists amid announcements they

scuttled but not preventing the polls, voting got off to a sluggish start, despite the mounting tension.

In Podgorica, there was no sign of military police at voting centres a day after the federal army said it would assure security at the booths.

But in Kosovo, the southern province run by the United Nations since NATO chased Yugoslav troops out last year, Serbs in the main central enclave of Gracanica were out at daybreak, confident that just by voting they were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs are eligible to take part in the elections, which will go to a second round within two weeks if no candidate wins an outright majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have banned western observers from monitoring the vote, on Saturday expelled foreign journalists amid announcements they

had uncovered a "foreign-led plan to sabotage" the ballot.

They said the plot involved the "preparation of (false) voting papers for the presidential election to be placed, by the intermediary of its servants (the opposition), into ballot boxes," the state news agency Tanjug reported.

The Yugoslav foreign ministry also accused the opposition of planning to announce its victory at 10:00 p.m. Sunday, long before official results are announced.

Meanwhile, Croatia voiced its readiness to help neighbouring Serbia in its transition towards democracy if its citizens reject the authoritarian regime of President Slobodan Milosevic, the foreign ministry said.

An election that would lead to overall democratic changes would enable the international community and thus Croatia to invite the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the community of democracies," the foreign ministry said.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the

elections, which will go to a

second round within two weeks

if no candidate wins an outright

majority.

Polls show Kostunica, running on a ticket of 18 parties clustered in the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), leading Milosevic by between five and 18 points.

Yugoslav authorities, who have

banned western observers from

monitoring the vote, on Saturday

expelled foreign journalists

amid announcements they

were reaffirming Belgrade's claim on the province.

Almost eight million Yugoslavs

are eligible to take part in the