

Serbia's President Gets Death Threats

Serbian President Boris Tadic has received death threats for "betraying the Serb people" by seeking closer ties with the European Union despite its support for Kosovo's secession, officials said on Monday.

Tadic, also the leader of the main pro-Western party, backed the signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement last week over the objections of nationalists, who said it amounted to a recognition of independence for Serbia's former province, Reuters reported.

"We are aware of the death threats President Tadic received," the state prosecutor's office said on Monday. "Relevant state institutions are taking all measures necessary to protect the president and identify the perpetrators."



nationalist Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, collapsed under the strain. Campaigning ahead of the May 11 election has largely focused on the EU vs Kosovo dilemma.

The president's office declined to comment on the threats. Serbian daily Blic quoted the text of a letter as saying Tadic would get a bullet in the head for betraying the country.

The secession of Kosovo, Serbia's medieval heartland, polarized Serbian society between hardliners who want to freeze ties with the EU and pro-Western liberals who think there is a way to move towards membership and still not give up Kosovo.

The government, a coalition of Tadic's Democrats with outgoing nationalist Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, collapsed under the strain. Campaigning ahead of the May 11 election has largely focused on the EU vs Kosovo dilemma.

US Accused of Forming Spy Ring

Belarus is accusing the United States of recruiting citizens into a spy ring aimed at undermining this ex-Soviet republic.

The statement comes amid escalating tensions between the two countries, AP reported. Most of the US embassy employees have been expelled in recent months.

KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayev told Belarusian television Monday that the US Embassy had hired 10 local citizens to take photographs of police officials, airports and villages near the state border.

The embassy has declined to comment.

The diplomats were expelled mainly after the US imposed sanctions on a state-controlled company and travel restrictions on President Alexander Lukashenko and top government officials.

Eleven US diplomats left Belarus Saturday after being expelled by the Minsk authorities, crossing the border into Lithuania just an hour before their deadline to leave expired.

The diplomatic spat is the latest in a series of incidents between the US and Belarus.

Morales Rejects Rich Autonomy Vote



Hundreds of peasants take part in a demonstration against Santa Cruz's autonomy referendum, in San Julian, some 150 km north from Santa Cruz on May 3.

Bolivia's largest and richest state voted amid scattered violence Sunday to seek greater autonomy from the government of leftist President Evo Morales, who dismissed the referendum as a failure, AP said.

The eastern lowland state of Santa Cruz, center of Bolivia's conservative opposition, had called the vote in hopes of separating the state's free-wheeling capitalism and mixed-blood heritage from Morales' push for a communal state ruled by Indian values.

In the face of local exit polls showing 85 percent of voters favoring the measure, Morales claimed that as many as half the ballots were invalid, quoting media reports.

"The referendum failed completely," he said in a nationally televised address.

But he ended his remarks with an invitation for more talks with autonomy leaders.

"Let's work together tomorrow for a true autonomy," he added.

"For the people, and not just certain groups—an autonomy that permits the people to decide their destiny."

Santa Cruz leaders want to keep a bigger slice of the state's key natural gas revenues and to shelter vast soy plantations and cattle ranches from Morales' plan to redistribute land to the poor.

> Decentralization

Morales, the country's first indigenous president, argues that he needs a strong central government to spread Santa Cruz's wealth to the rest of Bolivia, South America's poorest country.

Results will not be available for days. But Santa Cruz leaders declared Sunday night that voters

embraced a growing tide of decentralization that could cripple Morales' populist agenda.

"This is not the end of the process," said Santa Cruz Gov. Ruben Costas, addressing supporters gathered under the palm trees in the central plaza of the state's namesake capital city. "With your vote, we have begun the most transcendental reform in national memory."

This is while UPI reported that Morales called for dialogue with opposition governors pushing for autonomy, after one of the territories held a referendum resulting in landslide support for the measure.

> Clashes

Minor clashes across Santa Cruz state injured at least 25 people during the vote, and relatives of a 70-year-old man said he was killed when police fired tear gas to break up one scuffle. The death could not be confirmed by authorities.

At least 20 people were hurt in clashes in the eastern province of Santa Cruz between autonomy supporters and opponents, according to officials. Morales congratulated protesters for trying to block the vote.

"I want to express my respect for the people of Santa Cruz for their resistance against this separatist referendum," Morales said. "The people are wise to defend legality, constitutionality and the struggle for equality between Bolivians."

Three other eastern states—Beni, Pando and Tarija—hold autonomy votes next month.

No one is clear exactly how autonomy would alter Bolivia's heavily centralized government, under which state governors were appointed by the president until 2005. The statutes up for ap-

proval Sunday create local powers common in many countries, including a state legislature and police force.

But Morales particularly objects to ambitious clauses that bear the distinct ring of nationhood: control of the state's land distribution and the right to sign international treaties, among others.

Santa Cruz leaders insist that they have no intention of seceding. Secession would be an unlikely prospect for a right-wing state wedged between Morales' leftist allies in Brazil and Argentina and whose main trading partner would still be Bolivia's highland west.

Both sides have dismissed concerns by some international observers that the vote would drive a bitterly divided Bolivia into violence.

> Chavez Comments

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez accused the United States and a Bolivian "oligarchy" of fomenting violence at polling stations during Sunday's controversial autonomy referendum in the Bolivian province of Santa Cruz, according to AFP.

"The violence is the responsibility of the (US) empire and the aggressive oligarchy of groups that assume names such as civil society but are fascists that march around with sticks, nails, stones, and firearms, terrorizing the public," Chavez said.

"We and the entire continent are worried about this aggression against Bolivia that comes from outside," he said in his weekly radio and television program.

"It is the politics of the empire, it is a blow against Bolivia and a blow against South America."

In Case You Missed

Indian Leaders Condemn Bush Comment

Indian politicians, in a fit of nationalist pique, lambasted US President George W. Bush for saying the South Asian country's increasing prosperity is partly to blame for the rising price of food around the world.

The defense minister called Bush's comments a "cruel joke," a leading communist politician said Bush had "gone out of his mind," and the Hindu nationalist opposition, the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, threatened Monday to force a parliamentary debate on the matter.

That Bush was expressing a view held by many economists—and that he called India's growing prosperity "good"—wasn't addressed by the South Asian country's indignant politicians, AP reported.

They instead treated the US president's comments as an insult—and responded accordingly, underscoring the latent anti-Americanism that still prevails among India's political elite even though Washington and New Delhi are much closer today than when they sat on opposite sides of the Cold War divide.

Chechnya Bomb Kills 5 Police

Five police officers have been killed by a roadside bomb in Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, BBC cited officials as saying.

The officers were working on security ahead of the inauguration of Russia's president-elect Dmitry Medvedev.

Major fighting between Chechen rebels and Russian forces has died down in recent years but hit and run attacks on security forces have continued.

The attack, late on Sunday, is the most lethal in many months.

Police officials said the bomb was detonated by remote control at a police checkpoint.

"According to provisional information, the device was home-made, as nuts, bolts and ball bearings were found at the scene," Grozny police spokesman Ramzan Edilov told AFP news agency.

"The search for the criminals is under way, they will be found and liquidated," he said.

Brown Claims Party Recovery

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown voiced confidence Sunday that his Labour Party would recover from its worst local election defeat in 40 years and rejected suggestions he should resign, AFP said.

As commentators warned that Thursday's poll result could spell the end for the Labour government at national elections due by 2010, Brown admitted mistakes.

But he said the global economic slowdown was largely to blame for his party's performance.

Starting his post-election fight back with an interview on BBC television, he said: "Of course we can recover from this position and I will tell you how."

"First of all by sorting out the immediate problem with the economy and showing people we can come through, as we have in the past, very difficult economic times."

"Secondly by showing people we have a vision of the future that will carry the country—optimistically in my view—into its next phase."

"The test of the leadership is how you deal with adversity," Brown said.

Labour was putting "big building blocks" in place for the future, such as giving working families a fair deal and helping people buy their first home, he added.

He said he was looking forward to taking the fight to the main opposition Conservative Party, who were the big winners in the elections in England and Wales, capped by the victory of the eccentric Boris Johnson in the London mayor race.