

World News Roundup

Kosovo

'Illegal, anarchic'

MPs stage 2nd tear gas demo

PRISTINA, Oct 17, (Agencies): Kosovo's opposition disrupted parliament by throwing tear gas in the chamber for a second week running on Thursday, in protest at agreements made with Serbia.

Despite tight security at the entrance to prevent a repeat of last week's chaotic scenes, opposition MPs smuggled in tear gas canisters and set them off before the day's session could begin, said an AFP journalist at the scene.

Before the gas was released, protesting MPs had gathered around the podium to prevent any debate.

"The opposition has enough gas to block any session," **Glauk Konjufca** of the Self-Determination party, which leads the opposition bloc, told reporters outside parliament.

The dissenters are angry at EU-brokered dialogue and agreements with Serbia, particularly a plan to set up an association of Serb-run municipalities giving greater autonomy to Kosovo's Serb minority.

Divide

The government says this association will not hold executive powers, but the opposition believes the move will deepen the ethnic divide and increase Serbia's power in Kosovo.

It also rejects a border agreement reached with neighbouring Montenegro in Vienna in August, through which it says Kosovo is losing territory.

Kosovo, whose population is predominantly ethnic Albanian, declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade fiercely rejected the move and still considers the breakaway territory as its southern province.

About 100 protesters in Pristina gathered outside and cheered as MPs left the building after the parliament's president was forced to call off Thursday's session.

The government issued a statement condemning the "illegal and anarchic acts" of the opposition as "inconsistent with any code of ethics, morals and democratic practice".

Deals

But the protesters, who have also blown whistles and thrown eggs to disrupt recent sessions, have vowed to keep obstructing parliament until the government backs down from the contentious deals.

"Only the withdrawal from these agreements will bring back social and institutional normality in Kosovo," the parties of the opposition bloc said in a joint declaration.

The clouds of tear gas released in last week's protest caused two MPs to faint and the US embassy in Kosovo said some of its personnel who were in the chamber at the time had to seek medical treatment.

Albin Kurti, the founder of the Self-Determination party, could be seen opening a tear gas canister and kicking it around the chamber.

Kurti was taken for questioning at a police station in Pristina on Monday, leading about 200 of his supporters to gather outside, throwing stones and smashing windows. Police fought back with tear gas.

The public prosecutor's office said Thursday that it had started investigations against Kurti and fellow party member Albulena Haxhiu over allegations of causing danger and using weapons in relation to last week's incident.

Agron Bajrami, editor-in-chief of the daily Koha Ditore, said Kosovo's opposition had "remained marginalised" since the formation of a large ruling coalition following last year's elections.

The agreements reached with Serbia without consultation with the opposition or parliament "was the ideal opportunity to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the government", Bajrami told AFP.

Also:

PRISTINA: Kosovo's Prime Minister **Isa Mustafa** says his Cabinet is determined to continue the EU-mediated talks with Serbia despite violent opposition protests.

The opposition has used tear gas and thrown eggs at Mustafa during sessions in Parliament. It wants the government to withdraw from its deals with Serbia on giving more powers to the Serb-dominated areas in Kosovo and on border demarcation with Montenegro.

At a Cabinet meeting Friday, Mustafa called on the opposition to renounce "ultimatum demands" and join efforts in Kosovo's state-building process.

The premier assured that the deals were "in Kosovo's and its citizens' best interest" because the **European Union** and the **United States** are guarantors of the processes.



Konjufca



People walk in front of a mural on a Kiev building on Sept 19, 2015. In just a year, Kiev has exploded with dozens of street art projects created by both Ukrainian and international artists. (AFP)

Poland

Old rivalry plays out during election campaign

Absent powerbrokers pull strings

WARSAW, Oct 17, (RTRS): In a televised debate in Poland in 2007, centre-right leader Donald Tusk accused election rival Jaroslaw Kaczynski of once pulling a gun on him in a lift.

"Killing you would be as easy as spitting," Tusk, who is now president of the European Council, quoted Kaczynski as saying.

The conservative politician, the twin brother of late President Lech Kaczynski and the prime minister at the time, denied the accusation but lost the debate, widely seen as key to Tusk's Civic Platform (PO) winning the election.

The clash encapsulates the bitter rivalry between the two men which has shaped Polish politics for over a decade and continues to do so as the country of 38 million prepares for a parliamentary election on Oct 25.

Both have a low profile in the campaign, though Kaczynski is running for parliament, but are the powerbrokers behind the scenes in an election which opinion polls suggest Kaczynski's Law and Justice (PiS) party will win, with his nominee, Beata Szydlo, set to take over from PO's Ewa Kopacz as prime minister.

"Of course, today the candidates for prime minister are Ewa Kopacz and Beata Szydlo but the truth is, when we say Kopacz, we are thinking Tusk, and when we say Szydlo, we are thinking Kaczynski," said Rafal Chwedoruk, a

political scientist at Warsaw University. "We are still living in the shadow of these politicians, and I don't think this is likely to change after the election."

The rivalry between Tusk and Kaczynski also enshrines a battle for supremacy between the conservative Catholic values espoused by the eurosceptic, economically left-leaning PiS and the centre-right, pro-European course favoured by PO.

A PiS victory could end an unprecedented eight years of political and economic stability overseen by PO following the divisive and difficult transition from communist rule in Poland, which for over four decades was in the Moscow-led Soviet bloc.

It could also herald an increase in the state's role in the economy and deepen divisions in the European Union over migrants as PiS officials have suggested they would oppose the relocation in Poland of people fleeing Syria and Iraq if they win power.

Opinion polls suggest the public is ready for change, with one poll this month putting PiS on 34 percent support, 10 percentage points ahead of PO.

Supporters see the church-going Kaczynski, who loved singing patriotic songs about Poland's struggle for freedom in his childhood, as the embodiment of the conservative values which they say are threatened by PO.

Tusk, 58, is held up by his backers as

a perfect foil for his 66-year-old rival because of what they see as his poise, pragmatism and ability to keep his cool.

Their conspicuous absence from the campaign trail is for different reasons and has had contrasting consequences.

Wary of his polarising image, Kaczynski anointed Szydlo, 52, as the PiS candidate for prime minister as she is more restrained as well as a veteran party loyalist.

Opted

Tusk has been in Brussels since December. Following his appointment to the top EU job last year, he also opted for a woman he trusts when he named Kopacz, then the speaker of parliament, as his successor as prime minister.

"Ewa has never let Tusk down, she has always been loyal to him," a PO insider said. "When Tusk is in (Poland) they get in touch, often conferring with each other."

Political analysts say Tusk's departure for Brussels and his choice of a lower-profile successor has contributed to the PO's decline in the polls.

Kaczynski's official backseat role has, by contrast, helped tone down the conservatives' rhetoric which has in the past irked some voters, pollsters say.

In Szydlo, he also opted for a woman who has tasted success in elections before — she oversaw fellow PiS member Andrzej Duda's successful bid to

become president this year.

The public animosity between Tusk and Kaczynski goes back at least a decade though Tusk said in the televised debate in 2007 that the alleged incident with the gun, for which he gave no explanation, had happened nearly two decades earlier.

Tusk's centrists and Kaczynski's conservatives ran in the 2005 election expecting to be coalition partners, promising a moral and political renewal of Poland, at the time still hurting from its transformation from communism.

But the two parties turned against each other during a brutal campaign and failed to form a cabinet together.

Kaczynski became prime minister in 2006, when his brother was president, but lost the job to Tusk in a snap election after only 16 months in power. With Jaroslaw sidelined, Tusk feuded with his twin and political partner, Lech.

In a struggle for power, the two tussled over who would represent Warsaw at EU summits in Brussels in 2008, at the height of the global financial crisis, and argued over who should fly on the government's plane.

The conflict reached boiling point after a plane crash in Russia in 2010 in which Lech Kaczynski died alongside his wife and more than 90 others, including the central bank governor, top army commanders and other high-ranking officials.



This file picture taken on May 18, 2003 at St Peter's Square during a canonisation ceremony shows Pope John Paul II, the day of his 83rd birthday, waving to the faithful and pilgrims gathered at St Peter's Square for a canonisation ceremony on May 18, 2003. A vial containing Saint John Paul II's blood was installed in the Polish parliament's chapel for the veneration of devout Catholic lawmakers on Oct 16 in Warsaw. (AFP)



Putin



Merkel

Europe

CIS to defend borders: The leaders of ex-Soviet states, led by Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, responded to growing instability in Afghanistan on Friday by agreeing to create a joint task force to defend their bloc's external borders if a crisis arises.

The move could mean that Russian troops, as part of collective forces, will be deployed to Afghanistan's borders as the US-led coalition gradually withdraws from the country, leaving behind a power vacuum.

If Russian troops do move in, it would be a fresh sign of Putin's new military assertiveness, after his intervention in Syria. The Kremlin says Russia wants to stop the spread of Islamist militancy, but Western governments also see it as Russia trying to re-assert itself as a global power.

The leaders of ex-Soviet grouping the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) met at the Burabai resort near the Kazakh capital, Astana.

They agreed on the creation of what is described in a summit document as a "grouping of border (forces) and other institutions from CIS member states designed to resolve crisis situations on the external borders".

There were no details on the composition of the force or on where it would be deployed.

But Sergei Lebedev, the CIS executive secretary, mentioned Tajikistan, which has a border with Afghanistan, as the possible location for the deployment of joint forces. (RTRS)

2011-2012 anti-government protests, will lose his seat if a court finds him guilty. (AP)

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Driver throws pedestrian: Russian prosecutors on Friday opened an attempted murder probe after a businessman threw a pedestrian that touched his car into a canal in Saint Petersburg.

The pedestrian, who is reportedly handicapped, "accidentally touched the Audi of

the 30-year-old businessman with his foot", prosecutors said in a statement.

The furious driver "got out of his car and punched him in the face before throwing him over the railings into the canal," the statement said.

The victim, 44, managed to clamber out of the water and was hospitalised. The driver was later detained and faces 11 years in jail. (AFP)

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Russia 'kills' four Dagestan rebels

MOSCOW, Oct 17, (AFP): Russian security forces on Saturday killed four Islamist militants linked to the murder last month of a moderate imam in the volatile North Caucasus, the national anti-terror committee said.

The rebels were killed in a shootout with security forces in the Khasavyurt region of Dagestan bordering Chechnya, the committee said in a statement.

One FSB special forces officer was wounded in the shootout in woods near the village of Kurush, it said.

Those killed were identified as "involved in the September murder" of the village's 34-year-old imam Magomed Khidirov, who was shot by masked men as he went to morning prayers.

Merkel offers investment: German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** pressed Ukraine on Saturday to tackle corruption and roll back the influence of oligarchs, saying German businesses are investing there if the right conditions are in place.

Merkel made her remarks ahead of a visit to Berlin by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk next Friday, when the two leaders are due to open a German-Ukrainian economic conference at which investment opportunities will be explored.

Praising Ukraine for being on a "courageous path", Merkel said the country still had a lot to do to attract business and needed to put the right legal framework in place. (RTRS)

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'Vial' installed in parliament: A vial containing Pope John Paul II's blood was installed Friday in the Polish parliament's chapel for the veneration of devout Catholic lawmakers.

"This event is of a purely religious nature. We won't use it for political ends," said Kazimierz Jaworski, the right-wing senator who spearheaded the project.

Born Karol Wojtyla, the Polish pontiff began his papacy in 1978 and served until his death in 2005. Last year, he was made saint, to the joy of his large fanbase at home.

Jaworski told AFP that senators from both the majority and the opposition chipped in to buy a receptacle for the relic they received from Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, the pope's former secretary and current archbishop of Krakow. (AFP)



A rescuer carries a dog through a flooded street in Karlovac, western Croatia on Oct 16. Rain-swollen rivers have flooded hundreds of houses and are threatening many more in the western Croatian town as authorities struggle to contain the surging waters. (AP)