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Serbian impasse continues

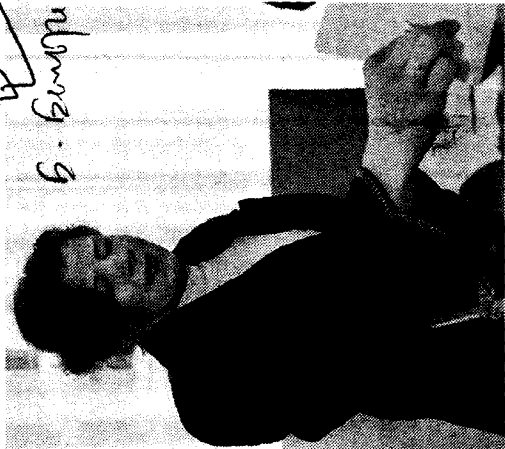
BELGRADE (SERBIA-MONTENEGRO), NOV. 17. The Serbian presidential elections failed for the third time in a year on Sunday because of low voter turnout, triggering a major political crisis in the Balkan republic.

An anti-Western ultranationalist with close ties to the former strongman, Slobodan Milosevic, led the ballot, underlining Serbians' discontent with the pro-Western Government that ousted the dictator in 2000 and the republic's drift back to Mr. Milosevic's nationalism that triggered the Balkan wars in the 1990s.

About 36 per cent of registered voters cast ballots, preliminary official results showed, less than the 50 per cent needed to validate the vote.

Tomislav Nikolic was ahead with 44 per cent of vote, the state electoral commission said. Dragoljub Micunovic, a pro-democracy candidate who led pre-election polls, trailed with only 38 per cent. Four other candidates shared the rest of the vote.

The failed election left Serbia in a power vacuum. Parliament was dissolved last week because the pro-Western Government lost parliamentary support, leaving



The Serbian Parliament Chairperson and Interim President, Natasa Mlicic, casting her ballot on Sunday. — AFP

28. The Deputy Prime Minister, Zarko Korac, described the election results as a "tragedy for Serbia." "We are entering a dangerous, dramatic, phase of our future," Mr. Korac said.

The Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Zivkovic, later sought to calm fears, saying his outgoing Government would lead the republic until the December elections.

Voters stayed away from the polls because of disillusionment with the leadership, which has failed to bring economic progress to Serbia following a decade of war that led to Yugoslavia's break-up and the ouster of Mr. Milosevic, he said.

The last two elections, at the end of last year, also foundered because low voter turnout.

The post of President has been vacant since a Milosevic ally, Milan Milutinovic, stepped down in January to face war crimes charges at a U.N. court in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Mr. Nikolic (51), of the pro-Milosevic Serbian Radical party, had been banking that disillusionment with democracy and the West would help his cause. — AP

no one to call a presidential new vote. New parliamentary elections were set for Dec.

Serbian PM's 'assassin' held

Associated Press

BELGRADE (Serbia-Montenegro), March 25. — Police have arrested a man they suspect was the sniper who killed Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, the slain Prime Minister's successor said today.

Prime Minister Mr Zoran Zivkovic identified the suspect in custody as Zvezdan Jovanovic, a former deputy commander of an elite unit of police troops formed under former President Slobodan Milosevic.

Mr Zivkovic said police had uncov-

ered a German-made sniper rifle that authorities suspect was used to assassinate Djindjic. He said another man, identified as Sasa Pejakovic and suspected of aiding the sniper during the killing, was also arrested.

Mr Dusan Maricic, the current commander of the elite police unit known as the Unit for Special Operations, was fired, Mr Zivkovic said.

A police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity said that the unit — still operational and based in the north of the republic — would be disbanded.

"Some of them will be arrested, others dismissed or transferred to other

police units," the officer said.

Djindjic, Serbia's leading pro-Western politician, was killed by a sniper on 12 March as he stepped out of an armoured car in front of government headquarters in downtown Belgrad.

Authorities accused a shadowy organised crime ring known as the Zemun Clan of plotting and carrying out the ambush slaying.

They imposed a state of emergency, launching a major hunt for leading crime figures and their associates in the judiciary, police and other state services.

26 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

MILOSEVIC'S GHOSTS

1575 51-8

Serbia's reformist premier falls victim

WITH the assassination in Belgrade of Serbian premier Zoran Djindjic Yugoslavia's old regime, which he had much to topple, may have struck back. Milosevic's intelligence chief has been hauled in for questioning and the prime suspect for plot mastermind happens to be Milorad Lukovic, who formerly headed the "Red Berets," a special police unit which fought for Milosevic, and who currently leads an organized crime group called the Zemun clan. Djindjic had been instrumental in deporting Milosevic to be tried for war crimes at The Hague. The Milosevic regime had intimate links with the Serbian mob, which it sometimes utilized for political assassinations; it was the same mafia that Djindjic had been trying to extirpate in recent times. Djindjic had dissented against Yugoslavia's communist regime and since 1995, taken on Milosevic's quasi-fascist regime as well. His vision was to integrate Serbia with Europe's liberal democracies, a direction in which he wanted to move too fast, perhaps, for many of his countrymen. But going by public expression of grief at his death, said to be second only to that elicited by Marshal Tito's death, he managed the difficult trick of being a popular politician without being populist.

His death may benefit his greatest political rival Vojislav Kostunica, who also dissented from the Milosevic regime but tends to be more nationalist and less friendly to market reforms. What the government must prevent at all costs, however, is a return to the kind of instability which will enable remnants of the old regime, allied to organized crime interests, to stage a comeback. For that the government must seek out and prosecute not just the gunmen who carried out the assassination but also the kingpins behind it. It would also require the European Union and other Western countries to stand solidly behind the reformist party and help out the country as it implements much needed political and economic reform.

THE STATESMAN

15 MAR 2003

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MAFIA HAND SUSPECTED

Serbian PM assassinated

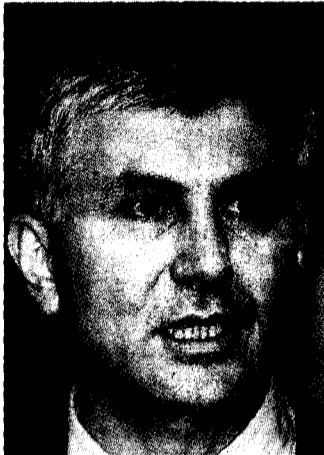
By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, MARCH 12. The Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic (50), who was instrumental in the downfall of the former Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic, was assassinated in Belgrade shortly before 1 p.m. local time today. He was rushed to hospital where doctors performed an emergency surgery to save his life but in vain.

Mr. Djindjic was shot at close range in the chest and back as he was walking into the Serbian Government building in downtown Belgrade.

This was the second attempt on the Serbian leader's life in the past month. A couple of weeks ago, a lorry crashed into his official car in a bid to push it off the road. Mr. Djindjic said at the time that attempts on his life were "part of being a politician in a democracy".

Two men have been arrested in connection with the murder and airports have been closed and roadblocks erected on all arteries leading from the capital.



Zoran Djindjic

Observers say the assassination further underlines the chaos beneath Serbia's outer mantle of democracy.

Mr. Djindjic had authorised the arrest and transfer of the former Yugoslav strongman, Slobodan Milosevic, to the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague, the Netherlands, a move that earned him the hatred of Serbia's substantial nationalist minority.

There is speculation that

the assassination was ordered either by Mr. Djindjic's political enemies of which there are many or by organised crime.

Mr. Djindjic had recently ordered a crackdown on organised crime, saying he was determined to break the links between the mafia and the political establishment, set up during the Milosevic regime.

Police say there have been 45 high-profile murders among Serbia's elites since 1995. Many of these crimes have been blamed on Mr. Milosevic and his associates.

Mr. Djindjic, an articulate politician, shot to prominence during municipal elections in 1990 when he led daily protests against Mr. Milosevic until the latter recognised the Opposition victories in several prominent Serbian cities such as Belgrade and Nis.

Mr. Djindjic was trying to push Serbia towards secular reform. But many disliked his autocratic style of government and what many described as "rank opportunism".

13 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Blair, Ahern begin Ulster talks

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 3. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and his Irish counterpart, Bertie Ahern, today began what were billed as "make-or-break" negotiations with political parties in Northern Ireland to revive the peace process, deadlocked since last October when the provincial Government was suspended following allegations of IRA spying.

The talks were being held in Belfast at the end of a deadline set by Mr. Blair last month for Ulster politicians to resolve their differences by March 3 so that the local Government and assembly could be restored ahead of the regional elections in May.

The British and Irish Governments were reported to be carrying draft proposals to facilitate decommissioning by IRA, which has been principal sticking point between the Unionists and the Republicans. In return, the British Government would agree to the Republicans' demand for removal of military bases from Catholic strongholds, reduction in troops and more police reforms.

Hopes of a breakthrough were raised after the Republicans indicated that considerable progress had already been made in behind-the-scenes talks with the British Government last week, and that the IRA was poised to announce a major act of decommissioning.

But given the unpredictable nature of Northern Ireland politics, observers were keeping

their fingers crossed. The Northern Ireland Secretary, Paul Murphy, echoed the general sense of cautious optimism when he said that there was "everything to play for" and that the talks were "about going forward and not looking backwards."

In remarks, which were seen to be directed particularly at the IRA, he insisted that all paramilitary activity must end. "The cessation of paramilitary activity is at the heart of this particular (Good Friday) agreement," he said confirming that no progress was likely unless the IRA gave up its weapons as agreed under the Good Friday accord.

All eyes were on Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, after Republican sources were widely quoted as saying that a deal on decommissioning was on the cards.

The Sinn Fein leadership was reported to have persuaded the IRA to fall in line, starting with a significant act of decommissioning.

But Unionists raised the stakes by insisting that any such act should be filmed and not shrouded in secrecy, as in the past. They also demanded that in future, sanctions should be imposed on Sinn Fein if the IRA reneged on its promise to disarm.

Republicans were quick to reject both these demands leading to some sharp exchanges between the two sides, but the view in London and Dublin was that once the basic issues were settled details could be taken care of.

Slovenes approve referendums

LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA): Slovenes strongly endorsed membership in NATO and the European Union, a sound victory for pro-Western leaders who hope joining the bodies will give their tiny nation a say in international politics. Results from Sunday's referendums showed 89.61 per cent of Slovenes in support of membership in the E.U., while 66.02 per cent said yes to entry in the military alliance — an outcome hailed as historic on Monday. The President, Janez Drnovsek who served as a long-time Prime Minister before being elected to the Presidency last year, called the referendum "the crowning achievement of a decade of efforts" (in the picture, the Slovenian Prime Minister, Anton Rop (left), the Defence Minister, Anton Grizold and the Foreign Minister, Dimitrij Rupel (right) celebrates the first results, in Ljubljana on Sunday) — AP



THE HINDU

25 MAR 2003

Slovenia votes on E.U., NATO

LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA): Slovenes on Sunday voted to decide whether the nation will join the European Union and NATO, as rising anti-war sentiment put the chances for entry into the military alliance into question. Support for E.U. membership has been consistently high with more than 70 per cent in favour. But only 48 per cent want membership in NATO, 28 per cent are opposed and 23 per cent undecided, according to poll conducted by Ljubljana University. The opposition to NATO stems from a desire among Slovenes to stay out of armed conflicts far from home, and from opposition to the U.S.-led war against Iraq. "Although NATO is not directly involved in the Iraq war, ill-feelings toward the U.S.-led war could tilt many votes," the President, Janez Drnovsek (*in the picture*), said. First unofficial results were expected late on Sunday. The Government has campaigned strongly for entry into both the E.U. and NATO, summing their message up into the slogan: "At home in the E.U., safe in NATO." — AP



SEE FINDO

24 MAR 2003

Europe

THE BALKAN TRAGEDY

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THE BALKANS CONTINUES to live up to its reputation as the cauldron of Europe. The assassination of the Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic, comes almost a century after another killing in the streets of the capital, Belgrade, started World War I. There is no danger that Wednesday's assassination will bring about another catastrophe in a world whose epicentre has moved away from Europe and whose colonial empires of the last century have long become part of history. But the experience of Serbia, which was till the 1980s the driving force of the Yugoslav republic, should strike a warning note: a state that allows criminals and the mafia to operate with impunity must be ready to pay a heavy price. The murder of the relatively unknown Djindjic and the boldness with which it was executed in the centre of the country's capital raise questions about who is running Serbia. Hardly a fortnight ago he had had a narrow escape when a gangster tried to drive a lorry into his convoy. That he should be killed in a second attempt so soon after the first shows extremely poor security — or conspiracy at the highest political level.

In the Balkans cauldron, Djindjic apparently paid with his life for ignoring the Machiavelian dictum that no dictator can hope to flourish if he allows those he had vanquished to survive. He had made some powerful enemies during his rise to power and his mentor, the U.S., could not protect him from them. Djindjic had led the uprising on the streets of Belgrade that deposed the Serb dictator, Slobodan Milosevic, in October 2000, and took the risky decision to turn him over to The Hague tribunal to be tried for genocide and war crimes. He also utilised the help of some of the paramilitary leaders and ethnic cleansers,

with records of atrocities in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, to rise to the premiership of Serbia. Despite urgings by the U.S., his main supporter, and the European Union, Djindjic did little to curb the activities of these men who had, after the bloody wars of the 1990s, turned to crime, making fortunes from the privatisation of state enterprises and forming links to elements in the security agencies. By handing over Milosevic, he had whetted the appetite of the U.S. for the extradition of war criminals. And by his failure to act firmly against the hardliners of the Milosevic camp he had provided havens for his enemies at home.

With the international community's attention riveted elsewhere, there is every likelihood that Serbia will be left to its fate — and Serbians will continue to feel cursed as victims of history. Assassinations have forever shaped Serbia's political life. The most explosive of these took place on June 28, 1914, when Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a band of nationalists from Belgrade. That was the torch that set the world on fire and wrecked old, proud empires in Moscow, Istanbul, Vienna and Berlin. It also gave birth to new nations, one of which was Yugoslavia, then known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and renamed a decade later. Under Marshal Tito after World War II there was a respite from political assassinations. With his death in 1980, the region surged back to its old ways, the horrific ethnic cleansing proving extremely bloody even by Balkan standards. Six centuries of occupation by the Ottoman empire, loss of a third of the adult male population during World War I and the slaughter in concentration camps during World War II and then the ethnic killings: Serbia has paid an intolerable price for its geographic location.

15 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

New state born from Yugoslavia's ashes

Agence France Presse

BELGRADE, Feb. 5. — A new European state was born when the Yugoslav Parliament voted to dissolve Yugoslavia and replace it with a new union called "Serbia and Montenegro."

"We have finished a major task and we just need some time now to breathe life into the new state," parliamentary chairman Mr Dragoljub Micunovic said yesterday after the new Constitution was passed to applause in the Assembly.

"After both Chambers of the Federal Parliament adopted the Constitutional charter, and following its adoption by the Serbian and Montenegrin Parliaments, I proclaim the Constitutional charter of Serbia and Montenegro," he said minutes later as the new country was founded.

The vote was 84 in favour and 31 against, automatically rendering the 1992 Yugoslav Constitution null and void and consigning the country to history after nine months of gruelling negotiations.

The Parliament, which will assume a caretaker role until a new Central Assembly takes over in the coming weeks, also passed a law on the technicalities for setting up the new union.

The Constitution guarantees a high degree of autonomy for the two Republics, which also have the right to hold referendums on independence after three years, a key clause for Montenegro's pro-independence government.

The European Union has pushed Serbia, with some 10 million people, and Montenegro, with just 650,000, to remain allied for the sake of stabil-



Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic (left) shakes hands with Montenegrin officials, just after the Yugoslav Parliament adopted the Constitutional Charter of the new state of Serbia and Montenegro. In Belgrade on Tuesday. — AFP

ity in the Balkans but many people in both countries believe a final split is only a matter of time.

EU foreign envoy Mr Javier Solana welcomed the creation of a new state of Serbia and Montenegro but said "the real work now begins."

"The real work now begins to make the new union work," Mr Solana said. "There is still a lot

of work to be done." He insisted that "it is up to the new institutions and the governments of Serbia and Montenegro to make the union function and make the possibility of European integration a reality." The new state's first President will be elected by its Central Parliament in the coming months.

Yugoslavia dissolved, gets new name and statute

Belgrade, February 5

LAWMAKERS IN Belgrade's federal Parliament consigned the troubled name Yugoslavia to the history books on Tuesday, endorsing the constitution of a new, less binding union between the republics of Serbia and Montenegro.

The new state, to be called simply Serbia and Montenegro, is a compromise between the aspiration among many Montenegrins for independence and an edict from international officials that there can be no further redrawing of borders in the Balkans.

This latest incarnation of this country has only increased nostalgia for the peace and relative prosperity that Serbs and Montenegrins shared with their Croatian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Slovenian neighbours before the ethnic wars of the 1990's ripped apart the socialist Yugoslavia created by Marshal Tito in 1945.

The new union, which binds Serbia and Montenegro together for three years, leaves them the option to part company thereafter.

In effect, the new consti-



tution will shift power to the two republics, whose prime ministers have been seeking to extend their influence under the old framework.

The big loser is Vojislav Kostunica, who has been President of Yugoslavia since he defeated Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 at the

helm of an unwieldy alliance of 18 reform-minded parties.

For most of his time in office, Kostunica has been locked in a seemingly interminable power struggle with the Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic.

The New York Times

6 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

EU takes over Bosnia mission from UN

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Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Jan. 1. — The European Union hoisted its dark blue banner today to officially mark the transfer of peacekeeping duties from the United Nations to the EU, while Nato-led troops handed over control of Sarajevo's airport to Bosnian authorities.

The EU replaces the UN's mission, which ended yesterday after a decade in Bosnia.

The EU takes over the UN's postwar mandate of reforming and monitoring the local police force to ensure that it is professional and does not include people who committed crimes during the 1992-1995

Bosnian war.

Mr Sven Fredriksen of Denmark, who headed the UN police mission and will also lead the EU police mission, promised to help build a police force that "serves and protects all people unconditionally," regardless of ethnicity, in a speech during today's ceremony, held at the former UN headquarters in Sarajevo.

The EU police mission includes about 500 international police officers who will be deployed in Bosnia along with local police. The EU mission, the first of its kind organised by the union, is set to end in 2005.

UN peacekeepers were deployed in Bosnia from the beginning of the country's

1992-95 war. When the war ended, the UN mandate changed to police reform.

About 15,000 troops who are part of a Nato-led stabilization force are also deployed in Bosnia.

Also today, Bosnia's top international official Mr Paddy Ashdown urged Bosnian politicians to hasten economic reforms and increase the pace of privatisation.

"We are competing with our neighbours for investment and jobs," Mr Ashdown said.

Mr Ashdown has the power to impose laws but often prefers to urge local politicians to take measures he says would bring the country forward.

THE STATESMAN

2 JAN 2003