

Growing fear of illegal immigrants and criminals replaces humanitarian response to refugees

Italian alarm as Albanian influx leads to clashes

FROM RICHARD OWEN IN ROME

THE flood of Albanians fleeing across the Adriatic to southern Italy approached 10,000 yesterday, with reports of growing tension and violence between residents and immigrants.

The humanitarian response to the exodus at the weekend has given way to alarm, with officials saying they fear Italy is facing an influx of illegal immigrants and criminals more than a refugee crisis.

The Italian authorities appear to have been caught napping, despite weeks of warnings in the Italian press of a repetition of the influx of 1991, when more than 40,000 fled to Italy after Communism collapsed in Albania.

Officials said it was "practically impossible" to establish the new refugees' identities, carry out full health checks and weed out criminal elements. "I fear the immigrants include Albanian mafiosi who have escaped from jail, and will link up with the Italian Mafia and give them arms," said Pier Luigi Vigna, the chief anti-Mafia prosecutor. "Albania has become the only country in the world with no prisoners." The Italian Cath-

net will meet today to review the crisis.

The separatist Northern League, which takes a strong anti-immigrant stand, said it was forming "vigilante patrols" to keep Albanians out of northern towns. Marco Formentini, the Northern League Mayor of Milan, said Italy was "raising the white flag in the face of an invasion of Albanian delinquents. These people are profiting from disorder to enter our country."

Police in Bari, Brindisi, Otranto and other ports who only a few days ago were seen carrying Albanian babies to safety, have now begun arresting the crews of fishing boats carrying refugees on charges

of transporting illegal immigrants and firearms. Ports and resorts further north such as Pescara, Ravenna and Jesolo near Venice, were "closed" to immigrants.

Caritas, the Catholic aid agency whose volunteers are bearing the brunt of the relief effort, complained that there were not enough police to keep order in the makeshift refugee camps. The head of Caritas, Mgr Luigi Di Liegro, said Italy and Europe had "sinned by omission" in failing to prevent the Albanian economy from falling into the hands of the Mafia.

In Bari there were ugly scenes as local people demonstrated at refugee centres in schools and church halls, in some cases clashing with the immigrants. "These people bring drugs, prostitution and skin diseases with them," one said.

Simone Di Cagno, Abbruzzese, the Mayor of Bari, was angered by a visit to one centre. "We give them a shower, clean clothes and bedding, and all they do is vandalise things and complain about the food," he said.

In a further sign of disarray, Paolo Foresti, the Italian Ambassador in Tirana -- who has played a key role in seeking a diplomatic solution -- was abruptly replaced by Alfredo Matalotta Cordella, another senior diplomat.

Italian coastguards said that because of calmer seas and clear moonlit nights, thousands more Albanians were making the 40-mile trip across the Adriatic in leaking and dangerously overcrowded vessels.

The Italian Government declared that it was providing only "temporary sanctuary," saying yesterday that many of the Albanians would add to the country's crime statistics.

Brindisi now contains nearly all of the ramshackle Albanian navy, rusting and battered minesweepers, coastal patrol vessels, torpedo boats and launches.



Albanians, desperate to flee anarchy and poverty afflicting their country, attempt to sail an abandoned cargo vessel to Italy yesterday by fashioning sails from rubbish sacks. The refugees, lacking any other means to flee, had hauled the rusting coaster, which has no power, along the dock

Perilous voyage to 'a better life'

in Durres harbour and then pushed off into the current, using lumber and metal sheeting as oars to propel it. The enterprise seemed so risky that about half of the people on

board disembarked at the mouth of the harbour, fearing it might sink. The rest, numbering about a hundred, drifted out into the Adriatic to what they hope will be a better life

abroad. Several smaller craft, also without power, were reported to have drifted out of Durres harbour as well yesterday. On Monday the US Navy rescued 20 Albanians who had been adrift in the Adriatic in a powerless boat for five days, three of them without food or water. (Reuters)



Iran school attacked

By JAMES PETHER

HEAVILY armed men leading a crowd of adolescents wielding pickaxes and shovels destroyed much of the Iranian Government's agricultural school on the outskirts of Tirana last night.

This impressive modern complex, near the airport, was the showpiece of the Tehran Government's quiet economic and diplomatic offensive in Albania. The cost of the damage is estimated by Albanian employees at about \$1.5 million (1950,000). The school was opened by President Berisha and a leading Iranian cleric three years ago.

Albania, where 60 per cent of the population is Muslim

was a natural target for Iranian aid and missionary work after years of religious persecution under communism. Strong American opposition has, however, prevented the opening of high-level diplomatic relations.

In response the Iranians have concentrated on economic links, with frequent trade exhibitions in Albania, subsidised exports of Iranian goods, and this large and well-run programme concentrating on educating farmers, particularly in the rearing of cattle.

The Tehran approach in Albania has avoided the ostentatious mosque-building programmes of Kuwait and Abu Dhabi.

Red Cross backs Tirana appeal for aid

Anthony Loyd reports from Tirana on the desperate state of the civilian population as food stocks fall to critical levels



ALBANIA'S new Prime Minister, Bashkim Fino, issued an urgent appeal for humanitarian aid yesterday after food stocks fell to critical levels.

The International Committee of the Red Cross backed his appeal and called for funds to finance emergency aid.

The head of the European Union delegation in the capital Tirana, refused to rule out recommending that foreign troops should be sent to safeguard the delivery of emergency supplies. "We are not looking at military intervention or a big force," Jan de Marchant, a Dutch diplomat, said yesterday. "But we need aid to be brought in for those who need

it and we cannot provide humanitarian assistance without first stabilising the environment, to do that might require a real European commitment here."

Mr D'Ansembourg spoke after separate meetings with President Berisha, Mr Fino and Albanian officials. His fact-finding delegation arrived in Tirana on Monday night and leaves today to submit a

report to EU foreign ministers.

The delegation is divided into three groups, assessing security aspects of any potential aid mission as well as financial and humanitarian requirements.

"We have four military men concentrating on that aspect of affairs," Mr D'Ansembourg said. His delegation was sent after an EU meeting in The

Netherlands last weekend refused Albania's request for a peacekeeping force to help restore order. However, that refusal did not preclude the deployment of a UN-style "protection" force for the delivery of aid.

Mr Fino repeated his request for outside assistance to restore order. "We need humanitarian aid as soon as possible, mainly food and medicine to prevent further aggravation of the situation," state television quoted him as saying on Monday.

"European police units are necessary to distribute this aid ... and contribute to restoring order and rebuilding our police. Reorganising public

and financial institutions would be another part of [the] assistance."

Although the overall level of violence has calmed over the past three days after police succeeded in holding the centre of Tirana, the state had been left fragmented into well-armed fiefdoms of conflicting loyalty.

The North is held largely by paramilitary and police units loyal to Mr Berisha. It is unclear whether the President or the Prime Minister holds the centre of Tirana, so confused is the situation, but most of the suburbs are loyal to the new Government. The South is held by rebel groups hostile to the President.

Is Kosovo the Albanian apocalypse?

Timothy Garton Ash visits a
province waiting to erupt

As Albania has descended into mayhem, Nato planners have agonised over the possibility of violence spilling into neighbouring Kosovo, where nearly two million Albanians live under Serb rule.

No one I spoke to in the dusty, battered and depressed province of Kosovo last week suggested that an Albanian insurrection was imminent. Even if large quantities of small arms were to be smuggled in from the plundered arsenals of Albania, the heavily armed and professionally trained Serb army could wreak terrible vengeance. "You see," both Serbs and Albanians told me, with chilling matter-of-factness, "there are some 700 purely Albanian villages. So the people there could all be killed."

Yet everyone speaks of the longer-term possibility of war — and the seeming impossibility of any peaceful solution. Kosovo has traditionally been regarded by Serbs as the mystical heartland of their great medieval state and national identity, their "Jerusalem". (How much of this is myth and how much reality we shall learn next year with the publication of a history of

Kosovo by Noel Malcolm, author of *Bosnia: A Short History*.) In the 1980s, it was an autonomous province in the former Yugoslavia, with a largely Albanian population and administration. Many of the remaining Serbs were leaving, often being forced out.

Ten years ago, Slobodan Milosevic came to Kosovo and told the local Serbs "No one should dare to beat you!" With this battle-cry, he mounted the Serb nationalist horse and rode it — ably assisted by politicians of other nationalities, and especially by the Croat Franjo Tudjman — to the bloody destruction of Yugoslavia. Kosovo itself was placed under direct Serb administration. The Kosovar Albanians responded by declaring an independent Republic of Kosovo and holding extraordinary underground elections in which a majority voted for the "Democratic League of Kosovo". Its leader, Ibrahim Rugova, became "President of the Republic".

His headquarters is a large hut in the middle of a dusty bus-station, full of picture-book hawkers and spitters. At the door I was incongruously met by the "head of protocol" who ushered me in to see "the President". Mr Rugova told me about the underground state: the 18,000 schoolteachers it funds from unofficial taxes, which the Kosovar Albanians pay in addition to the official Serb ones, the independent university, the attempt at healthcare through an organisation named after Mother Teresa. (Later, I visited a state school divided by an internal Berlin Wall, so that Serb and Albanian children should never meet.) Mr Rugova's immediate demand is merely for an alleviation of the repression. While the Serb police dare not touch him, they regularly harass low-level activists. He

insists on Gandhi-esque peaceful means, and has explicitly cautioned his followers against following the example of armed insurrection across the border. But on the central goal he is quite unyielding: self-determination for his people, statehood for the republic which he claims already exists.

His main rival, Adem Demaci, sometimes called "the Albanian Mandela" on account of his 28 years in prison, sat opposite me on a chair in his new party headquarters, and, Gandhi-like, pulled up his legs into the lotus position. He might be prepared to settle for slightly less than Rugova: a republic within a very loose confederation with Serbia and Montenegro. But he wants more dramatic protest actions to achieve it. He has called on his followers to imitate the student and opposition demonstrators in Belgrade.

That is the Kosovar Albanian mainstream. But in the past year there have also been a number of terrorist attacks, with responsibility claimed by a Kosovo Liberation Army. Are these the work of impatient young radicals, like the young Palestinians in Gaza? Or — for this is the Balkans —

Milosevic
might
yet play
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card

are they actually secretly encouraged by the Serbian leader? Back in Belgrade, even sober political observers speculate that a cornered Milosevic, faced with total economic collapse and massive popular calls for his resignation, might in desperation play the Kosovo card, provoking a terrorist assault or armed rising which he could then heroically suppress.

This may be far-fetched. But Kosovo remains a terrible problem for the diverse opposition parties in the Zajedno ("Together") coalition, which have won power in many cities and are gearing up for Serbian republican elections later this year. Not only are they far from together on this issue, but even those who privately want to concede most of the Kosovar Albanian demands feel that to do so publicly would be political suicide in a country still suffused with national self-pity.

Some have suggested a peaceful partition of Kosovo, giving Serbia its holy places, the mineral resources and main areas of Serb settlement, but these are not compactly contiguous with the mother country. How the line could be drawn without bloodshed and large transfers of population, as in Bosnia, no one has yet explained.

Pathetically, people still look to the West, to "Europe" and above all to America for a solution. An international conference has been proposed, but who would now put their faith in the so-called "international community" and its endless mediators and conferences? I left with a horrible feeling that here, too, the lines may be drawn first in blood. And the Yugoslav tragedy that began in Kosovo may yet end in Kosovo, in this faraway province of which we still know nothing.