

Jets seen dropping bombs on village but defence officials deny orders to hit civilian targets

Rebel barricades go up in south as army advances

THE state of emergency tightened in Albania yesterday as fighting appeared to intensify in the south and the Government rejected all offers of foreign mediation.

Telephone lines south of Tirana were cut, but accounts filtered in during the afternoon of tanks speeding towards the port town of Sarande, north of the Greek border. Journalists said they had seen Chinese-made MiG15 jets drop a bomb next to two houses in the village of Livina, near Sarande, and the smoke from two more bombs. About 400 families, most belonging to Albania's ethnic Greek minority, live in the village.

The Defence Ministry yesterday denied claims by two MiG pilots who defected to Italy on Tuesday that they had flown there rather than obey orders to fire on a column of civilian vehicles near Gjirokaster. "This is totally untrue," a ministry statement said. It said the pilots had been on a reconnaissance mission.

A journalist with the Greek television station Antenne said rebels had built barricades outside Sarande and had organised regular street patrols. Near Sarande, armed gangs seized an army tank from its crew and drove it gleefully through the streets.

Clashes with government troops were reported near

Albanian tanks, dispatched by President Berisha to rip into the heartland of the uprising, will face spirited resistance, Tom Walker reports from Tirana

Delvine, halfway between Sarande and Gjirokaster, which is now the main base for the Albanian Army in the rebel-controlled south. Injuries were rumoured, but Greek television said the fighting had stopped as rebels abandoned a plan to march on Gjirokaster. Four villagers and at least two soldiers were reportedly wounded in fighting six miles east of Sarande.

Further north, towards the capital, rebels were said to have blown up a road bridge near Fier, in a desperate attempt to stop more army tanks reaching Vlore and Sarande. The Government was said to be considering

shipping tanks south to avoid similar guerrilla attacks.

An Albanian Red Cross convoy was allowed to take antibiotics, blood and surgical materials to Vlore hospital. "Vlore is also Albania. You have to make a distinction between the population and the terrorists," said Tritan Shehu, the Foreign Minister.

Albanian state television cancelled its main afternoon news bulletin, and with anxiety spreading in the capital many opposition politicians and journalists were in hiding. General Sheme Kosova, the Army Chief of Staff sacked on Tuesday, was said to be under house arrest.

European diplomatic sources confirmed that visits, scheduled for today, by the European Union's Dutch presidency and by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe had been postponed. They said President Berisha wished to complete his military clampdown along the southern coastal belt before considering any offers of foreign diplomatic intervention. The mood on Tirana's



Albanian rebels brandish their guns from the top of a seized army tank in the hills close to the southern town of Sarande yesterday

streets was tense but calm. Regular police and their leather-jacketed colleagues in the secret police, the Shik, were out in force. Any dissent met with a swift response. Four policemen set about a stallholder near the statue of Skanderbeg, the national hero, beating him semi-conscious. With blood pouring from his ear, the man was kicked into the back of a police Fiat Tipo and taken away.

The state security apparatus

moved up a gear, with telephones monitored and cut regularly. Local and foreign media correspondents were followed. The locally relayed BBC broadcasts on FM remained off the air — although direct shortwave transmissions from London continued. No opposition papers were printed. "We have been told through the government papers that the souls of the dead in Vlore surround our offices," said one journalist.

who had not been home for four days. His family is also in hiding. "This is what you earn for telling the truth."

International pressure remains scarcely visible in Tirana, but International Monetary Fund sources were talking yesterday of halting a \$27 million (£16.8 million) standby loan to Albania. For Albanians themselves the civil unrest is disastrous: in Vlore a loaf of bread now costs three times the price in Tirana.

Government grain stores in Vlore were raided on Tuesday night, and municipal officials warned of famine conditions in the besieged town.

The Government blames the violence in the town on former army officers, who it said yesterday were under "the influence of communist and foreign insurgents." Mr Shehu urged a more conciliatory line than the President, imploring Albanians "to come together and protect the coun-

try." Commentators said the comments were unusually mild for Mr Shehu, who is regarded as a Berisha stalwart.

There was speculation that Tuesday's joint Italian-Albanian evacuation of journalists and civilians from Vlore was used as a dress rehearsal by the army for an assault on the port. A diplomatic source, however, was sceptical: "It's too clever a move for a stupid government."



Reporter dressed as nun beats press ban

FROM TUNKU VARADARAJAN
IN MADRID

A SPANISH journalist has disguised herself as a nun to file reports from the southern Albanian town of Vlore, at present still in rebel control.

Cristina López Schlichting, a special correspondent with the Madrid daily ABC, filed an extensive report from the embattled Adriatic port yesterday. The Albanian Government had banned foreign journalists from Vlore on Monday.

Señora López, 32, a mother of three, hit upon her idea when she met the mother superior of Vlore's Franciscan convent at a hotel in Tirana. The elderly nun was keen to return to her besieged community, but reluctant to travel south alone. Señora López offered to accompany her in exchange for the loan of a spare brown habit.

On their drive to Vlore, alarmed soldiers at checkpoints tried repeatedly to stop them. At the last government checkpoint, 30 miles from the rebel-held town, they were detained for several hours before being allowed to proceed. Señora López witnessed soldiers randomly pick out a man from a group of onlookers and thrash him severely. When she tried to intervene, playing the compassionate nun, she was warned to "shut up".

Eventually, they were allowed to proceed, having changed their car — which bore Tirana number plates — for one with plates from Vlore. "They will shoot you on sight with those Tirana plates," a soldier had said. According to Señora López, the soldiers made a pitiful sight — young, poorly armed and fed, and ill disciplined.

In Vlore, the Spanish reporter said hatred was expressed everywhere for President Berisha. Yet the mood, although sullen, was strangely conciliatory. Residents told her that a solution could be reached. A housewife said: "There will be peace if people get their money back, especially the poorest ones who have lost everything."