

Albanians flock to polls for multiparty elections

TIRANA, Albania - Excited Albanians crowded polling stations Sunday for historic multiparty elections called after protests and desperate refugees helped force an end to 46 years of hard-line Stalinism and isolation.

The parliamentary vote, held less than four months after opposition parties were legalized, was described by Western observers as free but tainted by continued Communist domination over the media and government.

Supporters of the main opposition Democratic Party and other newly formed groups have blamed Communists for dragging the Balkan nation's 3.2 million people into extreme poverty.

"This day is the greatest day in Albania's history. . . . It's the end of dictatorship, the end of communism," said Gramoz Pashko, one of the Democrats' two main leaders.

Albania is the last Eastern Euro-

pean nation to hold multiparty elections since the collapse of Communist rule in the region.

Sali Berisha, a cardiologist and the Democrats' other leader, predicted "total victory."

There were no reports of election-related violence, and turnout was high among the nation's 1.9 million eligible voters.

By midafternoon, 73 percent of eligible voters had cast ballots in Tirana, and 79 percent in Vlore. The cities were thought to be strongholds of the Democratic Party. The polls closed at 8 p.m. (1 p.m. EST).

The turnout was reported even higher in smaller southern towns — thought to be areas of strong Communist support.

No official results were expected until Tuesday. In contests where no candidate gets an outright majority, runoff elections will be held in a week.

Strikers make threats

Miners demand parliament action

MOSCOW - Striking coal miners threatened Sunday to flood their mines unless Russian lawmakers met their demands, but the parliament remained preoccupied with a power struggle midway through its special session.

Speaker after speaker on the fourth day of the session of Russian Congress of People's Deputies appealed for leaders to resolve the fate of Russian leader Boris Yeltsin — or concentrate on pressing economic problems.

Opponents of Yeltsin, President Mikhail Gorbachev's chief rival, haven't mustered enough support for a no-confidence vote. But his allies do not have the two-thirds majority needed to create a stronger presidency, an office Yeltsin seeks in a popular vote.

Yeltsin's election as president would give him a moral edge over Gorbachev, who has never faced direct election by the voters.

"We are paying for your helplessness every day," Anatoly Ma-

lykhin, a strike leader from Kuznetsk in southern Siberia, told the parliament, which met in the Kremlin.

"Why don't you help us?" An estimated 300,000 of the country's 1.2 million miners have joined the strike that began as a 24-hour walkout March 1. Their demands include the resignation of Gorbachev, new elections and doubled paychecks.

Miners now earn an average of 375 rubles (\$660) per month, about 40 percent above the national norm.

Rebels: Iraqis pounding capitals

NICOSIA, Cyprus - Kurdish rebels said Iraqi forces backed by helicopter gunships, warplanes and artillery pounded two provincial capitals Sunday but had not managed to capture the cities.

Iraq, however, claimed it had chased the rebels out of the northern cities of Dohuk and Erbil, and said government troops were welcomed by cheering residents.

It was impossible to verify either side's claims.

The Kurdish rebellion flared in northeastern Iraq five weeks ago when the Persian Gulf war ended with a

route of Saddam's forces by the U.S.-led allied coalition. At the same time, Shiite Moslems revolted in the south.

Forces loyal to Saddam launched a major offensive last week against the Kurdish insurgents, who had captured nearly all of their historic homeland.

Government troops Thursday recaptured the oil center of Kirkuk, and on Sunday they appeared in complete control, Associated Press reporter Wafa Amr reported from the city.

She said burned corpses, cars and trucks still littered the streets, and that many buildings were ravaged by

shellfire and bullet holes.

Iraqi authorities accused the rebels of going on a rampage of murder, looting and destruction while they held the city.

The insurgents, however, accused Saddam's troops of atrocities against civilians and appealed to the allies for help.

But the United States has said it will not intervene in the civil war, although it has shot down Iraqi military planes that have taken to the skies in a violation of the cease-fire terms. U.S. forces have not shot down helicopter gunships, however.

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