

Ethnic violence escalates in Yugoslavia

LJUBLJANA, Yugoslavia — Seven people died Wednesday in ethnic fighting one day after the republics of Croatia and Slovenia declared independence. Federal police moved to take control of Slovenia's border crossings.

The federal army moved into two towns in Croatia after the deaths in violence between Serbs and Croats, Croatian radio and officials reported. Several others were wounded, they said.

Both the federal army and Slovenia's rival territorial defense force were put on high states of combat readiness, officials said.

The violence occurred overnight, Croatian officials said.

Six people were killed and nine wounded in clashes between Croatian police and rebellious ethnic Serbs in the Croatian town of Glina, 30 miles south of the republic's capital, Zagreb, they said.

Another man was killed and four injured in the village of Brsadin, on the border between Croatia and Serbia, when Croatian security forces and ethnic Serbs clashed there, Radio Zagreb reported.

Fighting subsided when federal troops moved in, the radio said.

In Slovenia, federal army tanks were sighted on at least one road, and army convoys and transport trucks were seen on several.

Federal warplanes flew low over the republic's capital, Ljubljana, Belgrade radio reported, and guards of the republic's territorial defense were increased around government buildings and parliament.

The rival forces in Slovenia nearly clashed, according to reports. But Slovenian Premier Lojze Peterle told reporters that "for the time being nothing unusual is happening at our borders."

"If force is used against Slovenia, Slovenia will respond," he said.

Slovenian flags were flying at the border posts and signs declaring the Republic of Slovenia had replaced the Yugoslav one, he said.

The federal and Slovene interior ministers met Wednesday and planned to meet again to try to avoid conflict, the national news agency Tanjug reported.

The federal government issued a statement that called for continued efforts to reach a "democratic agreement" on Yugoslavia's future. The two secessionist republics have not ruled out accommodation if Serbia drops its opposition to a looser Yugoslav federation.

But there was no sign of compromise Wednesday, and the government statement said it had "issued orders designed to ensure the normal functioning of the Yugoslav state and to secure its external and internal borders."

No injuries reported

Soviets seize Lithuania communications centers

MOSCOW — Soviet troops Wednesday seized Lithuania's communications centers, taking over its independent TV and radio station and cutting telephone and telegraph links to the republic, Lithuanian officials in Moscow said.

The reported takeover of the republic's central telephone and telegraph office in the capital, Vilnius, occurred at about 4:40 p.m. (10:40 a.m. EDT).

About 30 minutes later, Soviet troops also occupied Lithuania's independent television and radio station in Kaunas, said Yanis Lulis, spokesman for the pro-independence People's Front in the neighboring republic of Latvia.

Lulis said he received the information by shortwave radio from Lithuania. He said there were no reports of injuries.

Telephone calls to Vilnius, the republic's capital, did not go through. A Soviet telephone operator said all connections to the

republic had been cut off, but she declined to say why.

The reported action at the telephone and telegraph center was described by the independent radio and TV station before it was attacked, according to Alba Spruza, a spokeswoman for the Latvian parliament. No shots were heard during the takeover of the telephone and telegraph center, she said.

If the reported takeovers are confirmed, they will be the latest in a series of confrontations between Soviet authorities and Lithuania, which has angered Moscow by declaring independence, along with two other Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia.

The reported takeovers also come at a time when Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev is trying to gain financial and technical assistance from Western governments that have been sympathetic to Lithuania's bid for independence.

Senate OKs limiting execution delays

WASHINGTON — The Senate Wednesday approved President Bush's plan to severely limit legal maneuvers by death row inmates seeking to delay their executions.

The White House proposal, passed 58-40, would block so-called habeas corpus petitions in federal court unless the judge found that state courts treated the defendant unfairly, and those petitions would have to be filed within six months.

Democrats also proposed a time limit, but without such strict standards for the initial appeal. After the

first petition, subsequent efforts would be barred unless new facts came to light or if the Supreme Court changed the law.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., argued the Bush plan would "rid us of abuse" but "at the very high price of endangering our constitutional rights."

But Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said the Democratic proposal had too many loopholes. "There is no reason why the federal courts must hear every claim in every case at every time," he said.

The plan to limit death row ap-

peals was approved a day after the Senate voted to expand the federal death penalty to dozens of additional crimes.

The amendments are part of an overall crime bill touching on many controversial subjects.

Senate leaders planned to finish the bill this week, but that was put in doubt Tuesday when Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., introduced an amendment to ban all job preference based on race, national origin or similar factors — an issue other lawmakers didn't want to tack on the crime bill.

Life or death?

Governor hopes board reaches decision soon

The Associated Press

Gov. Ben Nelson said he hopes the three-member state Board of Pardons can reach a speedy decision on the request by death row inmate Harold Lamont Otey to commute his sentence.

"It's hard to predict how long it will take, but I wouldn't be inclined to see it unnecessarily delayed," Nelson told reporters Wednesday.

Nelson, Attorney General Don Stenberg and Secretary of State Allen

Beermann sit on the board. They are to meet Friday to discuss Otey's request.

The request for a commutation to life in prison, filed by Otey's attorney Vic Covalt, delayed a scheduled June 10 execution, which would have been the first in 32 years in Nebraska's electric chair.

"Ours will be an extremely important decision," Nelson said.

"We have a system with a lot of safeguards in it," he said, adding that a speedy decision wouldn't place the

inmate in jeopardy.

"Clearly, time is a factor here. The board will set the execution date, but it would be inappropriate to discuss that now. You can't begin to get a mindset going on this," he said.

Nelson, who supports the death penalty, said he hoped Friday's hearing "won't be a referendum on capital punishment. It's the law. The Legislature changes law, we don't."

"This is an issue where you look at commutation or the death penalty," he said.

Kuwaiti emir commutes death sentences

UNITED NATIONS — The emir of Kuwait has commuted all 29 death sentences handed down by his country's martial-law courts, changing them to life imprisonment, U.N. officials and diplomats said Wednesday.

The move came one day after

Kuwait decided to lift martial law, which was imposed immediately after the liberation of Kuwait City by U.S.-led allied troops in late February. The lifting of the decree closed the martial-law courts. Their sentences had been sharply criticized by other

countries.

Kuwaiti Ambassador Mohammad Abulhasan informed U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar of the decision to commute the 29 death sentences, U.N. spokeswoman Nadia Younes said.

Renewed clashes in Algeria leave seven dead

ALGIERS, Algeria — Soldiers and tanks took up positions in the capital Wednesday after renewed clashes between security forces and Muslim fundamentalists left at least seven people dead and 34 wounded.

The military command said the victims died in clashes that erupted Tuesday when fundamentalists, furious over the removal of Islamic insignia from public buildings, confronted

police. Tank columns began rolling into Algiers just before midnight Tuesday. Gunfire echoed in troubled neighborhoods overnight and tracers lit the night sky, but calm returned to the city with the dawn. Barricades made of overturned cars, telephone poles and debris still blocked some streets.

The government said it was determined to keep a lid on the latest

unrest, the worst since the government of President Chadli Bendjedid proclaimed a state of emergency June 5.

The emergency declaration followed nearly two weeks of fundamentalist protests in which at least 18 people were killed. Troops were deployed in the capital after that outbreak but gradually had been withdrawn.

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