

Yugoslavian leaders dim peace hopes

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Reuter in Belgrade

A CROATIAN policeman and a civilian were killed in mortar and machine-gun attacks by Serbian hit squads in Yugoslavia yesterday. At the same time, peace talks collapsed, increasing fears of a full-scale civil war.

Croatia said the Serbian-dominated federal army planned to attack it within days, and the military stepped up a war of nerves by accusing the break-away republic of trying to shoot down a military plane with a missile.

Leaders of Yugoslavia's six republics dimmed hopes that they can end the violence. They exchanged bitter recriminations, blaming each other for the failure of the state presidency to agree a venue for crisis talks.

"[We are] aware of the dramatic situation in the country and the ever clearer orientation towards the use of force and war instead of a peaceful unravelling of the crisis," two members of the eight-man presidency, Vasil Tupurkovski and Bogic Bogicevic, said. They threatened to quit.

A new round of violence that began on Sunday continued yesterday with machinegun and mortar attacks in several parts of the Roman Catholic republic of Croatia, where the Christian Orthodox Serbian minority opposes secessionist moves.

The Croatian policeman and the civilian died in a two-hour attack on a police station in the mainly Croat village of Lisani, 125 miles south of the Croatian capital, Zagreb, Croatian officials said.

Serbs attacked police patrols in two villages south of Zagreb but no one was hurt. A man was shot and seriously

wounded by Croatian police when he failed to stop at a road block near Osijek in eastern Croatia.

At least six people have been killed since Sunday and more than 100 have died in the fighting triggered by the June 25 independence declarations by Croatia and neighbouring Slovenia.

The Croatian defence minister, Sime Djodan, accused the federal army — which has been deployed in some flashpoints to keep the warring factions apart — of siding with the Serbs. He repeated charges that it planned to attack Croatia within days. "The most critical time will be in the next four days," he told a news conference in Zagreb.

The Yugoslav air force responded by saying Croatia had fired a missile at a Super Galeb aircraft on Tuesday evening over Jasenovac, south-east of Zagreb. It narrowly missed. It accused Croatian leaders of ignoring a truce worked out with the state presidency and the European Community.

"This proves that the armed members and leaders of the ruling party in the republic of Croatia are deliberately violating the state presidency's decisions," the air force said.

Croatia's arch-rival, Serbia, and its allies on the state presidency, refused for the second successive day to attend crisis talks with the Croats, Slovenes and government leaders on the Croatian island of Brioni.

They said the presidency, the highest state body, should meet as usual in Belgrade, the federal and Serbian capital.

Slovenia's representative, Janez Drovsek, had refused to go to Belgrade for the meeting.

● AP adds: The official Yugoslav army newspaper yesterday accused Germany and Czechoslovakia of supplying arms to Slovenia.