

AFTER MASSACRE, CENTRAL AFRICAN TOWN YEARNS FOR PEACE

KAGA BANDORO: A month after rebels killed dozens of civilians in Kaga Bandoro, residents of the Central African Republic town still live in fear despite the presence of UN peacekeepers in the country and the prospect of nationwide disarmament. Returning to the scene of the massacre for the first time, Sylvie pointed to the ruins of the small home she built in what was a settlement for 8,000 civilians displaced during years of unrest.

"That's where I lived for three years," she said, recovering a comb from the scorched ground between the low walls of now roofless huts. On October 12 the predominantly Christian settlement was attacked by remnants of the mostly Muslim rebel "Seleka" coalition, which overthrew the national government in March 2013, only to be dislodged the following January.

In apparent reprisal for the death of one of their

own, the attackers killed at least 37 people and set fire to the camp. "People were burned on the spot, like two children and a grandmother over there," said site watchman Michel Kenze, near a pump where children were drawing water. After the attack, victims' corpses were left in the open to be eaten by wild pigs and other animals. Thousands of survivors, including Sylvie, fled to set up another camp between a base of the UN's MINUSCA peacekeeping force and the runway of the town's airport.

No longer in school

Sylvie now makes ends meet selling peanuts and fritters in a marketplace opposite the MINUSCA base. On the edge of the runway, young girls sing songs and play games. They are not in school. "We had just started the school year on September 19. On October 12, an education inspector was

killed. After that, inspections shut down," said an aid worker with MINUSCA. "Civil servants had returned (to Kaga Bandoro), but they went back to Bangui after what happened," said local government official Paul Fradjala, who never ventures far from the UN base. The large country's army, police and government have a very limited presence outside the capital, Bangui.

In 2013, Seleka's coup led to the formation of "anti-Balaka" vigilante units, drawn from the Christian majority, which began to target Muslims. Both sides committed widespread atrocities in different parts of the country, even after Seleka was chased from power. "We want peace, we want the armed groups to be disarmed," Sylvie said in her new home, a hut made from plastic sheeting where she stores her few possessions: a notebook, a jerrycan and an old mosquito net. A National

program to disarm fighters in CAR was officially launched a year ago, but in practice little has been done since to actually collect weapons or demobilize combatants.

Sylvie no longer dares to visit Muslim traders on the far side of town over a bridge guarded by a few Pakistani UN troops—members of the MINUSCA contingent accused of standing by as last month's massacre unfolded. The Muslim quarter is busy with shops selling food and clothes, a motel and a garage fixing motorbike taxis. In this part of town, Seleka fighters, along with gunmen from neighboring Sudan and Chad, rub shoulders with civilians, residents say. "In the displaced persons' camps, there are also armed men among the civilians and MINUSCA sees and knows about them," counters Idriss Al Bachar, a young Seleka leader. —AFP

TRUMP FIRM ON AGENDA BUT SAYS AMERICANS HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR

TRUMP 'SADDENED' BY HARASSMENT REPORTS

NEW YORK: President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to move aggressively on a conservative agenda in filling Supreme Court vacancies, cracking down on immigration and cutting taxes, but also sought to reassure worried Americans they have nothing to fear from his presidency. Setting aside the strident tone of his campaign, the 70-year-old assumed a gentler manner in his first television interview since his shock election, saying he was "saddened" by reports of harassment of Muslims and Hispanics, and telling the perpetrators: "Stop it."

The interview with CBS's "60 Minutes," which was taped Friday and aired in full Sunday, offered Trump an opportunity to reintroduce himself after an ugly, name-calling campaign and surprise victory that sparked protests in cities across the United States. "I just don't think they know me," the billionaire real estate mogul said at one point, of the thousands of protesters who have massed in streets below his Trump Tower headquarters. Told that many Americans are scared of his presidency, Trump said: "Don't be afraid. We are going to bring our country back."

Conservative agenda

Millions were expected to tune in to Trump's interview for clues on how the billionaire will govern, and to what degree he intends to convert his slogans into policy. Trump earlier Sunday named anti-establishment firebrand Steve Bannon his top strategist and senior Republican Reince Priebus his White House chief of staff, blending pragmatism with a rable-raising edge in the first appointments of his new administration. On the issues, however, Trump made it clear he intends to aggressively push a right-wing agenda, pledging to name justices to the Supreme Court who are against abortion and for gun rights.

"The judges will be pro-life," Trump told CBS. "In terms of the whole gun situation," he added, "they're going to be very pro-Second Amendment." He will have an



WASHINGTON: This combination of pictures shows Republican National Convention Chairman Reince Priebus (left) and Donald Trump's campaign Chief Executive Officer Stephen K. Bannon. President elect Donald Trump announced his White House transition team by appointing running mate Mike Pence as its chairman and naming Reince Priebus and Stephen Bannon as members of the executive committee. —AFP

immediate opportunity to fill a vacancy on the court left by the death of arch conservative justice Antonin Scalia. President Barack Obama's attempt to fill the seat was blocked by the Republican-controlled Senate. On immigration, Trump reaffirmed his signature campaign pledge to build a wall on the border with Mexico, although he conceded parts of it may be just a fence.

And he said as many as three million undocumented immigrants with criminal records would be deported or incarcerated. "What we are going to do is get the people that are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers," he said. "We

have a lot of these people, probably two million, it could be even three million, we are getting them out of our country or we are going to incarcerate," he said.

Conciliatory notes

He left the door open, however, on the fate of the millions of other immigrants in the country illegally. "After the border is secured and after everything gets normalized, we're going to make a determination on the people that you're talking about who are terrific people," he said. Immigration, he said, was one of three top legislative priorities he has discussed with

House Speaker Paul Ryan, the others being action to undo Obama's signature health care reform and a bill to cut taxes and simplify the tax code.

Trump had previously indicated he would keep some aspects of Obamacare, including a ban on insurance companies denying coverage for pre-existing conditions. He also signaled that he would not seek to overturn the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States. "It's law. It was settled in the Supreme Court. I mean it's done," Trump said when asked if he supports marriage equality. "And I'm fine with that," he added. He also confirmed he would forgo the \$400,000 salary that comes with the office of US president.

"I'm not going to take the salary. I'm not taking it," he said. "I think I have to by law take \$1, so I'll take \$1 a year," he added. In a call to Chinese President Xi Jinping, Trump told the leader he believes they will have "one of the strongest relationships for both countries moving forward," according to a statement released by the president-elect's team yesterday. Trump—who frequently savaged China on the campaign trail and threatened to impose a 45-percent tariff on Chinese-made goods—agreed to meet "at an early date" to discuss the relationship, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said.

Conspiracy-mongering

While Trump has veered on some pledges, his choice of Bannon as top strategist suggests he intends to preserve his populist edge. Bannon, who was campaign chairman in the final months of the Trump campaign, is CEO of the right-wing, conspiracy-mongering Breitbart News website known for withering attacks on the Republican elite. It has railed against everything from Muslim immigrants to women, once telling females facing online harassment to go away and stop "screwing up the internet for men." Priebus, meanwhile, is a seasoned political operative and head of the Republican National Committee, with close ties to Ryan, the House speaker. —AFP

STILL REELING, US DEMOCRATS BEGIN BATTLING FOR FUTURE

WASHINGTON: Still reeling from a devastating defeat in last week's election, Democrats are beginning the process of charting the direction of their party in the Donald Trump era. With Hillary Clinton and her team staying out of the public eye, liberal politicians have begun jockeying for control of the party's future. While they all backed Clinton, they're now pushing for a serious shift in the party's policy positions, financial resources and grassroots organizing to focus more on motivating their base and winning back the white working class voters who went for Trump.

"We have to do a lot of rethinking," said Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who mounted a fierce challenge to Clinton in the primary. "Democrats are focused too much with a liberal elite, which is raising incredible sums of money from wealthy people," Sanders said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

The Democratic National Committee, the last bastion of party power in Washington, is quickly emerging as ground zero for the fight. After losing the White House and Congress—and likely the ideological tilt of the Supreme Court—the Democrats' new chief likely will be one of the party's most visible faces in politics, making the role a far more influential post than it was during the Obama administration. Already, around a dozen Democrats' names have been publicly floated to succeed interim chairwoman Donna Brazile, who replaced Florida Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz in July after she was caught up in a hacking scandal.

Minnesota Rep Keith Ellison, a prominent progressive and the first Muslim elected to Congress, has emerged as an early contender, backed by much of the party's liberal wing. He's also picked up support from several key Democratic leaders, including outgoing Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid and Reid's likely replacement, New York Sen Chuck Schumer. Ellison was expected to officially announce his bid today. His supporters argue that Ellison's faith would send an important signal about the party's commitment to inclusivity during the Trump administration.

"My friend Keith Ellison is a terrific leader and a strong progressive who knows how to get things done. Now is the time for new thinking and a fresh start at the DNC. Now is the time for Keith," Reid said in a statement on Sunday. In interviews on Sunday talk shows, Ellison pushed back on concerns that he'd be unable to balance party responsibilities with the politics of his day job in Congress—a problem some Democrats believe hampered Wasserman Schultz.

"There're a lot of places that I can serve," he said, in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press." "I'm looking for a place to be of use and benefit. And every single Democrat in this country better be thinking the exact same way." Ellison is far from the only contender for the job. Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean announced his intention Thursday to reclaim a post he held during the Bush administration. Former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley, DNC National Finance Chairman Henry Muo'oz III, and South Carolina Democratic Party Chairman Jaime Harrison have also said they're considering bids. —AP

BULGARIA IN TURMOIL

RUSSOPHILE WINS PRESIDENCY; PM RESIGNS

SOFIA: EU member Bulgaria headed yesterday into fresh political turbulence after a former airforce commander seen as more sympathetic to Russia triumphed in presidential elections, prompting Prime Minister Boyko Borisov to quit. In his victory speech, Rumen Radev reiterated his opposition to EU sanctions on Russia and praised new US President-elect Donald Trump for "seeking more dialogue" with President Vladimir Putin. "This gives a lot of hope for reducing (the risk) of

between Ukraine and Romania, where the pro-Russian Igor Dodon beat his pro-European rival Maia Sandu to the presidency.

"The results clearly show that the ruling coalition no longer holds the majority," Borisov said on Sunday evening as he threw in the towel. "I apologise to those who supported us. I thought I was doing the right thing... If Bulgarians want a political crisis then they shall have one," the burly 57-year-old told reporters. Bulgaria is

backed by the opposition Socialists to run for president. Like other anti-establishment politicians—not least Trump but also populists around Europe—he struck a chord with voters by attacking the status quo and stressing issues like national security and immigration. Experts also saw his victory as a protest vote at Borisov's failure to improve the lot of ordinary Bulgarians—the average monthly is just 480 euros (\$535)—and to tackle rampant corruption. Radev's clear support for the lifting of sanctions on Russia and ambivalent statements about the EU, NATO and Crimea have prompted speculation that Bulgaria could lean more towards Moscow.

This could further undermine unity within the EU, already reeling from June's Brexit vote, in its stance towards Russia just as Trump's surprise election victory raises worries about the future of NATO. "General Radev's victory represents the unfolding of a pro-Russian scenario in Bulgaria so that the country supports Russian interests in the EU and NATO," political expert Antony Galabov said. But at the same time Radev, stressing that he is a "NATO general trained in the US," has said that Bulgaria's membership of the European Union and the NATO military alliance have "no alternative."

Bulgaria and Russia have deep historical, cultural and commercial ties and the country has long walked a tightrope in its relations with Moscow and the West. Bulgaria's outgoing president has been sharply critical of Moscow and Borisov's government angered Moscow by banning Russian supply flights to Syria from using its airspace last September. Antony Todorov at New Bulgarian University pointed out that as president a largely ceremonial but highly respected position-Radev on his own can do little. "The president only has influence if the government is on the same wavelength... Radev is not going to pull Bulgaria out of NATO," Todorov said. —AFP



SOFIA: Bulgarian president Rosen Plevneliev (right) shakes hands with president-elect Rumen Radev (left) prior to their meeting at the Bulgarian Presidency office in Sofia yesterday. —AFP

confrontation, particularly in Syria" where Russia and the US are backing opposite sides in a bloody civil war, the fighter pilot said.

He won 59.4 percent of the vote, well ahead of the more Western-leaning Tsetska Tsacheva, Borisov's uninspiring hand-picked candidate, who garnered just 36.2 percent, near-complete official results showed yesterday. The outcome was mirrored in Moldova, a small ex-communist nation wedged

now set for months of political inertia. Borisov yesterday formally handed his resignation to parliament. An interim government will govern until fresh elections, which are not expected until March at the earliest and could well be inconclusive.

Anti-establishment

Radev, 53, due to take office on January 22, has no political experience and was little known before being

News

in brief

Missing Mexican priest found alive, tortured

COATZACOALCOS: A priest whose disappearance sparked protests in an eastern Mexican town was found alive on Sunday but with injuries consistent with torture, the Catholic Church said. Father Jose Luis Sanchez Ruiz had last been seen on Thursday, and the next day the doors to his church in Catemaco, a town in the eastern state of Veracruz, had signs of forced entry. His disappearance sparked fears that he had suffered the same fate as two other priests who were found dead in Veracruz in September shortly after their disappearance. But the archdiocese of San Andres Tuxtla said in a statement that Sanchez Ruiz, 54, was found on Sunday morning "with notable signs of torture." After his disappearance, townspeople blocked roads in protest on Friday night. On Saturday, protesters burned part of Catemaco's municipal office and a police car. Sanchez Ruiz had received threats after complaining about crime in Catemaco.

Bangladesh buys two Chinese submarines

DHAKA: Bangladesh took delivery yesterday of its first submarines, bought from China, as it seeks to boost its naval power in the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh paid a reported \$203 million for the two submarines, a deal that reflects the country's growing economic and defense ties with Beijing. Armed forces spokeswoman Taposhi Rabeya said they would become part of the country's naval fleet at the beginning of next year. "This is the first ever addition of submarines in Bangladesh defense force," she said. Bangladesh has been expanding its defense capabilities in recent years, building a new airbase close to neighboring Myanmar, opening several new military cantonments across the country and adding new frigates to its naval fleet. In 2013 the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed a billion-dollar deal with Russia to buy fighter training jets, helicopters and anti-tank missiles. Hasina announced the plan to purchase two submarines the same year as part of her government's move to build a modern navy to defend the resource-rich Bay of Bengal.



MANILA: Smoke continues to rise from the Addition Hills community in suburban Mandaluyong city east Manila, Philippines, following an overnight fire that destroyed hundreds of homes. —AP

Fire sweeps through Philippine city slum

MANILA: A fire that raged for seven hours through a crowded Manila slum community killed two people and left close to 1,500 families homeless, fire authorities said yesterday. More than 5,000 people were temporary housed in four public schools in Mandaluyong City, to the east of downtown Manila, as fire protection officials investigated the cause of the fire, which destroyed more than 500 houses on Sunday. Damage was estimated at 10 million pesos (\$203,800). A blaze destroyed 800 houses in the same community last year. "The fire spread rapidly because the houses were made of light materials and the roads were so narrow," a fire official said, adding the two casualties had been trapped in their homes.

Nepal finds wreckage of missing ultralight

KATHMANDU: The wreckage of an ultralight aircraft that disappeared in Nepal last year with two people on board has been found, an aviation official said yesterday. The aircraft went missing shortly after taking off from the popular mountain resort town of Pokhara on October 8 with a Russian pilot and a South African tourist on board. Search teams were dispatched to the area after debris was spotted from the air, Pokhara's airport chief Bhola Prasad Guragain said. "The team recovered wreckage of the ultralight craft and bones from the site," "The marks on the wreckage confirm it is the missing craft but we have handed the remains to authorities for tests." Ultralight flights are popular among tourists in Pokhara for panoramic views of the majestic snow-capped Annapurna mountains. In 2013, a Chinese tourist and a Nepali pilot were killed when their ultralight crashed in the same area. Nepal, which is still reeling from a devastating earthquake last April, has suffered a number of air disasters in recent years.