

IRA opens bombing campaign Two killed, 50 hurt in London blast

LONDON, Apr 11: Irish guerrillas opened a new bombing campaign against London killing two people just hours after Britain's general election, reports Reuters.

Police said a huge car bomb exploded late on Friday near the Baltic exchange international shipping market in the heart of London's financial district.

The ambulance service confirmed two dead and 80 injured.

Staff at Guys Hospital said two little girls were brought in with their faces covered in blood. One, aged seven, needed surgery to save an eye.

Workers in the city — the hub of London finance — had been celebrating a jump in share values that followed the right-wing Conservative Party's victory in the election.

The lights went out and all the glass shattered. It was like an earthquake, said Kinji Matsuo, a Japanese employee of Sanwa Bank.

In a second incident to cause chaos early today, a warning directed police to a van with a bomb in it at Staples Corner, a key north London highway intersection. Nobody was hurt when they blew it up.

The blitz appeared to be the answer of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), fighting to end British rule in Northern Ireland, to the return to power of Conservative Prime Minister John Major.

Commander George Churchill-Coleman, head of the British police anti-terrorist squad, said the first bomb comprised at least 100 pounds (50 kg) of high explosive. It was very large.

No immediate claim of responsibility was made but he said an IRA code word was used when a warning was given. But this warning directed police to the wrong place.

Warning of the second bomb was given, also with a code word, to the telephone exchange at Protadown, Northern Ireland. Both warnings were given in an Irish voice.

Home Secretary (Interior Minister) Kenneth Baker declared: "We have just had an election and democracy is about debate and not bombs. I have nothing but contempt for their cowardly and callous disregard for the lives of innocent people."

The British election saw Gerry Adams who is the president of Sinn Fein, the IRA political wing, lose his seat in parliament.

Hardliners may see this as a signal to step up their campaign of violence, sources in Northern Ireland have said.

The first bomb shattered the facades of office buildings that included the Hong Kong and Shanghai bank. Ceilings collapsed in several other buildings.

Steve Marshall, a Reuter technician working in a nearby office, said: "It has wrecked loads of buildings. The Commercial Union Insurance Building is in tatters."

In other recent IRA actions linked with political events police on February 11 defused a bomb planted in telephone box near Major's office just before he held talks with Northern Ireland political leaders.

Yeltsin to press for extension of executive leadership

MOSCOW, Apr 11: President Boris Yeltsin, who scored a first major victory over Conservatives in Russia's supreme legislature on Friday, returns today to press for an extension of his strong executive leadership, reports Reuters.

Yeltsin needs approval from the Congress of people deputies, which started a nine-day session on Monday, for his radical economic reform programme, a new constitution and an extension of his sweeping executive powers.

On Friday, he won deputies' approval for one tenet of reform — a looser Russian federation which gives ethnic minorities a first test of self-rule. Hostile conservatives had intended to torpedo it.

Today, Yeltsin will try to

push the reluctant right-wingers into granting him vital extra months in his second job as Prime Minister overseeing in person the shock economic reforms which have aroused deep conservative enmity.

Hardliners want to force him to present them with a draft law on his cabinet within one month. He would also have to step down as prime minister and propose a new candidate for the job.

Yeltsin firmly opposes this, saying he wants to remain at the helm of government until reforms designed to end 70 years of communist central planning are irreversible.

He told the Congress he intended to stay on as Prime Minister for three months, and submitted a written proposal later under which he would present the draft law on the

cabinet no earlier than September.

Congress sources said they felt Yeltsin and the liberal deputies backing him, spearheaded by the influential democratic Russia movement, were likely to win the extra time they want.

His liberal backers form democratic Russia have followed Yeltsin's lead by threatening the Conservative opposition with a referendum on reform if it tries to block change.

Yeltsin now seems set to strengthen his executive presidency and retain emergency authority to rule the economy by decree and appoint governments.

The Burly, 61-year-old engineer says Russia needs strong rule to endure political and economic crisis in a transition from communism to a

free-market economy.

But many deputies, remembering Soviet and Tsarist dictatorships, are keen to keep power in parliamentary hands.

Yeltsin adviser Sergei Shakhrai said this vision could turn into "a nightmare of governmental crises".

"I do agree dictatorship is bad," Iyar-Tass news agency quoted him as saying. "But I insist that the concentration of all powers in the hands of parliament is no better than the concentration of all power in the hands of the president."

"It is worse," Shakhrai added.

Deputies will also debate amendments to the constitution today, a safeguard in case the draft for the new version fails to get the two-thirds majority needed.



MOSCOW: Deputies react to Russian President Boris Yeltsin's speech at the Russian Congress of people's deputies in the Kremlin on Friday. —AFP/UNB photo.

UK becoming one-party state?

LONDON, Apr 11: Is Britain becoming a one-party state? No. But the Conservative Party's fourth consecutive election victory has cast doubts on Labour's prospects for a single-handed return to power, reports AP.

Thursday's national election was the Labour Party's golden chance the Conservatives had been in power for 13 years, Britain was mired in a recession. Labour had revamped and shifted centre and opinion polls gave Labour the edge.

But still the Conservatives pulled in 41.9 per cent of the vote to Labour's 34.4 per cent.

Next election it will likely be more difficult for Labour. A commission redrawing parliamentary boundaries, due to report by early 1995, is expected to remove some 20 Labour seats because of population shifts.

Scotland, where Labour dominates, has 72 seats while its five million people would control only a few more than 50 seats in southern England.

Russia calls Britain, US, China to halt N-test

MOSCOW, Apr 11: The Russian parliament on Friday called on Britain, the United States and China to join a moratorium on nuclear weapons testing after France announced it was halting nuclear tests for this year, reports AFP.

In a resolution, the congress of people's deputies praised the French decision, announced Wednesday, and noted that Moscow had also suspended nuclear testing under an earlier decision.

The resolution was addressed to the British, US and Chinese legislatures.

On Thursday a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Sergei Yastr Zhembski, said Moscow welcomed the French decision with great satisfaction.

Meanwhile, AFP adds, the federal Yugoslav army admitted Friday that one of its shells had knocked out the main TV station in Bosnia-Herzegovina, saying the British responsible had acted without orders and would be punished.

It was believed to be the first time that federal forces had admitted and apologised for any mistake since the Yugoslav civil war began in the middle of last year.

EC envoy in Bosnia to broker peace talks

SARAJEVO, Apr 11: A European Community envoy has arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina to try to broker peace talks after fresh battles erupted across the newly-independent state, reports Reuter.

Sarajevo television said envoy Jose Cutilheiro from Portugal met Muslim and Croatian leaders, who support Bosnia's split from Yugoslavia.

It said members of the Serbian minority, who oppose independence, did not attend the discussions on Friday evening but were expected to join them at the weekend.

The EC-brokered talks on Bosnia's future arranged before fighting erupted last week, took on greater urgency as new battles involving rival ethnic groups and the Serb-led Yugoslav army flared across the country.

Bosnia's leaders appealed on Friday for international

help, and Austria and Hungary called for urgent talks on Bosnia at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

"What we are talking about is aggression on Bosnia-Herzegovina as a peaceful country," Bosnia's Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic said.

"I appeal to the International Community and Institutions, the United Nations Security Council, the European Community, the CSCE and all governments to use their influence to prevent this aggression."

Dozens of people have been killed since Muslims and Croats voted for independence last month, fighting has worsened since the EC and United States recognised Bosnia's independence last week.

Some of the worst clashes in the last two days were around Zvornik, a strategically

valuable town on the Serbian border which was seized by Serbian paramilitary forces on Wednesday.

Izetbegovic said Serbian forces had trapped 3,000 people, including women and children, in Zvornik and were threatening to kill them unless they gave up their weapons.

But the Yugoslav army, which says it now controls Zvornik, issued a statement denying the allegation.

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Gorbachev in Japan

TOKYO, Apr 11: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, arrived in Japan Saturday for private meetings with Japanese leaders, reports AP.

Though not considered a state guest, Gorbachev is scheduled to meet with Emperor Akihito, Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and other top-level government officials and business leaders during his 11-day stay.

Gorbachev, who one year ago became the first Soviet leader to visit Japan, is here at the invitation of a major media group and a private welcoming committee headed by former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone.

He is expected to discuss his views on a longstanding territorial dispute over several small islands north of Japan that have kept relations between Tokyo and Moscow cool since World War II.



TUNIS: PLO Leader Yasser Arafat (L) and Tunisian President Zine-el-Abidin ben Ali salute the honour guard upon PLO chief's arrival at Tunis airport on Friday. Arafat received a hero's welcome when he arrived back from Libya after surviving a plane crash in the Libyan desert. — AFP/UNB photo.

S Korea welcomes North's Nuclear decision

SEOUL, Apr 11: South Korea, still suspicious of its northern neighbour's Nuclear intentions, today formally welcomed North Korea's decision to open its atomic facilities to international inspection, reports Reuter.

"We welcome the fact the north is putting the nuclear safeguards agreement it signed with the IAEA on January 30 into effect," the South's foreign ministry said.

But its brief statement warned communist North Korea to be "sincere" in submitting nuclear data to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Vienna-

based organisation responsible for inspections.

North Korea said yesterday it would "soon" submit details of its nuclear facilities and stocks of nuclear materials to the IAEA and pledged to ensure the inspections go smoothly.

For South Korea and its allies, the first test of the North's sincerity will come when it hands over the list. They are waiting to see if it names the Yongbyon facility, 90 km North of Pyongyang.

North Korea says it has built a research centre at Yongbyon for the purpose of nuclear power generation. Washington, Seoul, and

Tokyo suspect it is close to producing a crude nuclear bomb there.

William Direks, IAEA Deputy Director General, said yesterday his agency would take North Korea to the United Nations Security Council if it failed to open all nuclear facilities to inspection.

"It could go to the Security Council but, so far, indications are that North Korea wishes to cooperate," he said.

Naming Yongbyon will not completely alleviate concerns that North Korea, like Iraq, may have nuclear facilities hidden away, perhaps underground, political analysts say.

IAEA regulations require a

country to submit a list of all its facilities within 30 days of the last day of the month in which it ratifies the safeguards accord.

North Korea said its parliament ratified the accord on Thursday.

Off the Record

US women victim of gender discrimination

WASHINGTON: American women were paid far less than men because of entrenched gender discrimination, the United States National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE) said Friday, reports Xinhua.

Releasing poll findings at the US capital, Susan Bianchi-Sand, executive director of NCPE, said that in 1990 White women earned only 69 per cents for every dollar earned by White men.

African-American women earned only 62 per cents and Hispanic women 54 per cents of the White man's dollar, she said.

Bianchi-Sand said, in fact, in 1990 alone, the wage differentials between men and women amounted to over 240 billion dollars.

"For decades, employers have been using gender and race to determine pay," said Congresswoman Mary Rose Oakar at today's conference.

"The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that, by and large, women remain in the low-paying traditionally female occupations."

Woman on intravenous feeding gives birth

BEIJING: A Shanghai woman who has lived exclusively on intravenous feedings for six years has given birth to a healthy baby girl, a Chinese newspaper said Friday, reports AFP.

The China Daily, quoting doctors, said the birth — by caesarian section Wednesday at Zhongshan hospital in China's biggest city — was a world first.

The mother, Zhou Yisi, 33 has eaten no solid food since February 1986 when her small intestine was removed.

For eight hours every night she takes intravenous feedings manufactured by a Sino-Swedish company in order to live a near-normal life.

When Zhou learned that she was pregnant and insisted on having the child, which weighed two kilograms (about four pounds) at birth, doctors increased her daily feeding, China Daily said.

500-yr-old oak tree survives chain saw attack

MANGOLIA SPRINGS: Spring is bringing signs of recovery to a 500-year-old live oak tree that drew wide attention when someone tried to kill it with a chain saw, reports AP.

New leaves are covering the gantlimbs as the tree enters its second-spring since a 4-inch (10-cm) wide gash was cut through the bark all the way around its 29-foot (10 meter) circumference. New tissue was grafted on to bridge the gap so sap could flow.

But the healing process — aided by thousands of tourists and T-shirt sales — is a slow one for the tree, 65 feet (22 meters) tall with limbs spreading 150 feet (50 meters) across.

"I would say there is a chance the tree will survive," said Auburn University forester Bill Goff, who examined the tree about three months ago. However, Goff said, it could take years for the tree to recover.

Stan Foots, a retired Navy captain, helped organize supporters of the tree to raise funds for its protection and to nurse it back to health.

Foots said pieces of smaller trees were grafted onto the tree to provide the bark that carries water and nutrients between roots and leaves.

An irrigation system provides constant watering and the tree is partially enclosed by a greenhouse. A chain-link fence has been erected for security.

The tree was attacked in October 1990 during a dispute over ownership of the site.

Court summons Noriega's wife for shoplifting

MIAMI, Apr 11: Manuel Noriega's wife was arraigned on Friday for allegedly shoplifting buttons, one day after the former Panamanian dictator was convicted of dealing drugs for a Colombian cocaine cartel, reports Reuter.

Felicidad Noriega, who has kept a low profile since the button-theft incident made headlines last month, did not show up for her morning arraignment in a Florida court. A lawyer entered a not-guilty plea on her behalf and for her alleged partner, a friend named Rosa Busto.

Noriega and Busto were arrested and held overnight in a county jail last month after detectives at a department store saw the two women snip a core of buttons of several expensive jackets and walk out of the mall.

Dade county circuit Judge Allen Kornblum set trial for June 15, but prosecutors offered the women a plea bargain arrangement, which court officials said is routine for first offenders.

"We're offering her a withdrawal of adjudication, PTI (Pretrial Intervention).

Sharif urges Mujahideen to bring back peace

ISLAMABAD, Apr 11: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif urged Afghans on Friday to stand united and seize the opportunity to bring peace back to their country, reports AP.

Sharif was reacting to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's announcement in Geneva that all sides in 13-year civil war in Afghanistan had agreed to form a transitional council to replace the Soviet-installed government in Kabul.

All the objectives of the heroic Afghan Jihad (holy war) have been achieved, the Prime Minister said.

Afghans, he added, were ready to turn a new page in their history.

On Boutros Ghali's announcement, Sharif said: "We welcome this development."

Pakistan has given sanctuary to both Afghan war refugees

and many of the western-backed Mujahideen groups that had been fighting to overthrow Najibullah.

Sharif said that, as Najibullah has agreed to resign and make way for the Council, the peace process will soon lead to the establishment of an Islamic interim government.

He appealed to all Afghans to unite and seize the opportunity for peace.

We hope that the historic transition to be materialised shortly will be smooth and peaceful and bring to an end the great tragedy suffered by the Afghan people, Sharif said in a statement.

In Karachi, the news from Geneva was similarly welcomed by former Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo, whose government had signed first UN sponsored Geneva accords on Afghanistan in 1988.