

9 more killed in violence UN officials due in S Africa today to monitor strike

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 1: Nine people died in scattered violence, including five shot to death by attackers driving in a taxi van, police said Saturday, reports AP.

The latest political violence occurred as the nation prepared for a two-day national strike beginning Monday called by the African National Congress and its allies.

President F W de Klerk's government has said the strike and other protests planned by the ANC could spark violence because of high political tensions in the country.

The ANC says its protests will be peaceful, and that political opponents could foment violence to try to hurt the ANC alliance.

Ten United Nations officials were scheduled to arrive Sunday to monitor the strike.

The ANC is mounting a protest campaign to try to pressure the government to end white minority rule quickly.

Police said unidentified gunmen in a taxi van opened fire on people in downtown Johannesburg Friday night. The attack followed earlier incidents in which shots were fired at commuters waiting at a nearby taxi rank and at a workers hostel in the area, police said.

A black policeman and another man were shot to death in the Voolosour black township near Johannesburg, also on Friday night, and two other people died in unrelated killings in the Wembezi township in Natal Province, police said.

More than 8,000 blacks have died in political violence since De Klerk took office.

US sending 2,400 troops to Kuwait for war games

WASHINGTON, Aug 1: The United States, flexing its military muscle against Iraq, will begin sending 2,400 troops to Kuwait next week for war games in addition to two navy and marine exercises already set there, the Pentagon said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Defence officials said the troops will be flown to Kuwait from Texas and Kentucky in an exercise which had been planned for later in the year but was pushed back because of a confrontation between Iraq and the United Nations over arms inspections.

The new exercise, which will involve armoured troops from the 1st Cavalry Division and members of the 5th special forces group, will test the ability of American troops to get to the Gulf quickly and link up with military equipment already stored there.

While the Bush administration has stressed that it has no plans for any immediate military action against Baghdad, US officials have warned they are holding open all options to force Iraq President Saddam Hussein to comply with Gulf war ceasefire agreements.

It was the third exercise announced for Kuwait this week. The other two will begin next Monday and will involve an amphibious landing by up to 1,900 US Marines and the off-loading of equipment from US military cargo ships in the region.

Defence department spokesman Pete Williams told Reuters that the timing of the army exercise, originally planned for September, was linked to the Iraq situation despite the settlement last Sunday of a dispute between Saddam and the UN over the right of US inspectors to search the agriculture ministry in Baghdad.

"We started planning this exercise last February. It was originally planned for September and then the trouble started with the inspec-

tors, we decided to push it up a couple of weeks," Williams said.

"Even though the situation in Baghdad was resolved, we decided to go ahead anyway."

Williams said the exercise will be to test US ability to send forces to Kuwait to link up with pre-positioned equipment, train on the equipment, put it back in storage and go home.

"These guys will go over there and work with equipment there under our defence agreement reached with Kuwait last year," he said.

The United States and Kuwait agreed to keep US tanks and other equipment in the emirate and to give US warplanes landing rights after a US-led military coalition drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait last year.

Washington has reached or is negotiating similar agreements with other moderate Arab states in the Gulf region. In a move to show its support for those states against any threat from Iraq, the Pentagon this week sent a battery of Patriot anti-aircraft missiles to Kuwait and another to Bahrain.

Williams said all the troops would not finish arriving in Kuwait for several weeks. He did not say how long the transfer and training exercise would last.

"The arrival of the advance element begins next week but the entire battalion won't be there until late August," he added.

But the Pentagon announced earlier this week that two other joint US military exercises with Kuwait forces — dubbed "eager mace 92-3" and "native fury" — would begin on August 3 and run through August 19.

The first will involve an amphibious landing by US Marines and the second practice in unloading American equipment and military supplies stored on cargo ships in the region for emergencies.

Off the Record

He is bugged now

MOSCOW: Former Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev said in an interview published Saturday he never authorised political bugging by the KGB and that he himself was now being bugged, reports AP.

He also told the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda that the attempt to oust him last August was partially the result of the coup leaders listening to a bugged conversation he had with the leaders of Russia and Kazakhstan.

In another interview, a lawyer for former KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, one of the coup plotters, said the secret police agency bugged top Soviet leaders on direct orders from Gorbachev.

The charges and denials followed revelations in Russia's Constitutional Court on Tuesday that the KGB had installed listening devices to hear conversations by former Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev adviser Alexander Yakovlev, Raisa Gorbacheva's hairdresser and also bugged a sauna used by now Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The court is to decide whether Yeltsin's banning of the Communist Party last year was constitutional.

Gorbachev said that in all his years as general secretary of the Communist Party and president of the Soviet Union, he never ordered buggings.

"I could not sanction this kind of investigative action," he told Komsomolskaya Pravda.



TWA fire: Pilot aborted takeoff after seeing warning signal

NEW YORK, Aug 1: The pilot of an airliner that veered off a runway and erupted in flames told investigators Friday he aborted the takeoff when a warning system indicated engines were stalling, a federal official said, reports AP.

The pilot had no indication there was a fire until after he aborted the liftoff at Kennedy Airport, John Lauber, a National Transportation Safety Board investigator, said at a news conference.

All 292 people aboard escaped through emergency exits as flames engulfed the back half of the plane. Fifty-five people were hurt, none seriously. TWA Flight 843, a Lockheed L-1011, had been headed to San Francisco.

Passengers told investigators that the plane lifted off the ground from 2 feet to 100 feet (2/2 meter to 30 meters) before pilot William Shelby Kinkead decided to abort the flight, Lauber said.

He quoted the pilot as saying: "The airplane didn't feel normal at that point. It didn't feel like it was going to fly." Lauber said Kinkead told investigators a warning system indicated engines were stalling.

Air traffic controllers told investigators they saw smoke coming from the plane when it was halfway down the runway and radioed the pilot at about the time of liftoff, Lauber said.

Lauber disputed an earlier report that fuel had leaked from the plane during the takeoff.

The Port Authority's preliminary report on the accident said a rear fuel line to the plane may have ruptured, causing the fire, said a Port Authority police official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

That report said the plane

left a trail of fuel stretching 2,500 feet (760 meters) behind the site where the plane came to rest, the source said.

But Lauber said investigators could find no evidence that any fuel lines broke and found no fuel on the runway.

Earlier Friday, Gregory Feith, a safety board inspector, said an engine problem may have preceded the fire. But Thomas Conroy, who is heading the investigation, said it was too early to say what the cause was.

Investigators collected and analyzed pieces of wreckage. The plane's flight and voice recorders were sent to Washington.

The L-1011 has a good safety record, according to aerospace experts. But twice in the past two years L-1011 engines have spurted flames: at Kennedy on April 16, 1992, and at Boston's Logan Airport on March 26, 1990. No serious injuries were reported in either case.

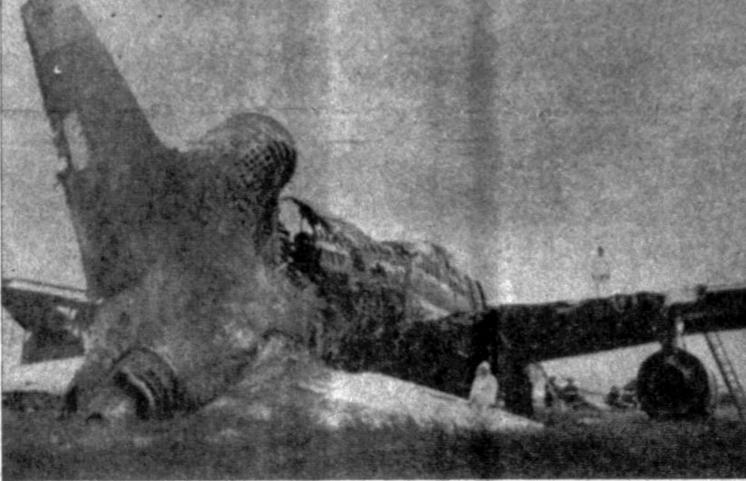
Passengers who watched from the tarmac as flames enveloped the rear half of their plane praised the 12-member crew for getting them out.

"People were panicking. We were all trying to get away from the flames," he said. The captain was helping everyone out. He was the last to go."

The evacuation went extremely well," agreed Frank Huever, chief supervisor of operations for the Port Authority, which runs the airport.

Kinkead has flown with TWA since 1965 and for the Air Force before then, said family members at his home in Road Town, Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands.

Kinkead has no record of accidents at least back to 1986, said FAA spokesman Frazier Jones in Washington.



NEW YORK: Investigators check the damage of a TWA jet as it sits on the runway at John F. Kennedy airport on Friday, after an aborted takeoff Thursday. All 292 passengers escaped before the plane burst into flames. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Honecker's wife in Chile:

Margot Honecker, wife of imprisoned former East German leader Erich Honecker, arrived Friday on a flight from Moscow to the Chilean capital, AFP reports from Santiago.

The 65-year-old Honecker, who was Education Minister in her husband's former communist regime, will join her daughter Sonja, who has been living in Chile since 1989.

She arrived at the Santiago airport at 1645 GMT carrying a valid German passport with a Chilean tourist visa, which will allow her to remain in the South American country for at least 180 days, Chilean officials said.

The Honeckers had taken refuge in the Chilean embassy in Moscow, remaining more than seven months, until the Santiago government Wednesday ended its protection, allowing the former East German President to be handed over to Russian police and subsequently extradited to Germany.

Floods toll rises to 16 in Orissa:

About three million people have been affected by floods caused by heavy rains in India's central coastal state of Orissa, as the number of rain-related deaths rose to 16, Xinhua reports New Delhi.

Hundreds of thickly populated villages are inundated as there are 44 breaches of embankments of the Mahanadi river system in the districts of Cuttack and Puri.

About 50,000 hectares of paddy crops have been damaged.

The situation is not expected to improve soon because the discharge of the floods into the sea is slow.

Vance ends mission to S Africa:

UN special envoy Cyrus Vance ended an 11-day fact-finding mission to South Africa Friday telling a news conference he welcomed the UN decision to send observers to monitor next week's general strike, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

The African National Congress (ANC) and its labour allies have called a two-day strike for Monday and Tuesday to press demands on ending violence, and to force the white minority government to accept the ANC's formula for a constituent assembly to write the new constitution.

Vance said: "I'm glad that even as we leave, the United Nations will be able to assist next week at the request of the parties with the provision of some 12 observers during the period of mass action."

"We leave with the hope that mutual respect and wisdom will prevail in the crucial period that lies immediately ahead."

Forest fires in Russia:

Forest fires are raging in Russia's far eastern region of Magadan, while the Pacific coast further to south has been hit by a cyclone, Russian television reported here, AFP says from Moscow.

Fires in the north have destroyed large tracts of forests because of a severe drought there, while to the south the cyclone brought on heavy rains, causing damage to the Komsomolok-On-Amur region, television said Friday.

Forest fires have also broken out in western Russia where more than 3,000 men are involved in fire-fighting operations.

Terrorism part of daily life in Peru: UNHRC

GENEVA, Aug 1: The UN Human Rights Commission Friday unanimously condemned Peru, saying its executive branch had become all-powerful and terrorism a part of everyday life, reports AFP.

Before and since President Alberto Fujimori's crackdown in April, "internal disorder and lawlessness in Peru... obstructed the effectiveness of the international covenant on civil and political rights," the resolution said.

In some cases, these had made the covenant inapplicable, it said.

The 18-member commission denounced "the concentration of all power in the hands of the executive" and the terrorism which it said "appeared to form part of daily life in Peru."

It also noted the "great number of complaints of extrajudicial executions and disappearances attributed to the security forces."

On April 5, Fujimori dissolved the legislature and courts and suspended the constitution in a move he said was legislative and courts and suspended the constitution in a move he said was needed to battle corruption, drug trafficking and a strong leftist insurgency.

Human Rights Commission President Fausto Pocar told reporters that passage of this resolution was unique in that it was adopted by the entire commission rather than by individual members.

"The Peruvian government sent us a delegate who gave us incomplete and insufficient answers. The report prepared by officials in Lima was unacceptable," Pocar said.

The pact on civil and political rights was passed by 112 countries. The United States joined in June, and 66 countries have accepted voluntary compliance on individual complaints. China is the only major power that has not ratified it.

Iraq executes 42 traders

BAHGDAD, Aug 1: Iraq, squeezed by almost two years of UN trade sanctions is cracking down on merchants accused of profiteering and has executed 42 traders by firing squad and jailed or detained more than 550, diplomats said today, reports Reuters.

Several of those executed came from prominent families and the contents of their warehouses and business had been confiscated by the state, the diplomats added.

Interior Minister Wathban Ibrahim Al-Hasan, a half-brother of President Saddam Hussein, vowed to continue the drive against profiteers and those who cheat with the food of the people.

The Defence Ministry daily Al-Qadisiyah quoted Hassan as saying he was determined to implement a special decision to stamp out profiteering by monitoring prices in local markets.

Saddam lashed out on July 26 against merchants he said were cheating the people. The law takes action over the necks that do not deserve to live, he added.

Pakistan won't give up acquired N-technology, top diplomat says

ISLAMABAD, Aug 1: Islamabad will not give up any of its acquired nuclear technology, Pakistan's top diplomat was quoted as saying today, reports Reuters.

Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Akram Zaki, quoted by the official APP news agency, told a seminar in Islamabad on Friday that India and Pakistan, traditional foes, must be treated equally in seeking nuclear non-proliferation.

Pakistan will follow the acquisition of nuclear technology with firm determination and will not give up whatever has been acquired, he said.

Pakistan dismisses western fears that it is trying to make nuclear weapons and says its nuclear programme is geared to meet its future energy needs.

The United States cut off all military and new economic aid to Pakistan in 1990 after President George Bush would not certify to Congress that Islamabad was not making nuclear arms.

Zaki said no country could afford to remain indifferent to the latest technological achievements and we have to catch up the lost time with the acquisition of available technology.

Pakistan refuses to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty unless the same is done by India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974.

"The solution is only possible when the balance of terror exists and both countries are subjected to equal treatment," Zaki said.

A regional approach should be adopted for the solution of the nuclear issues between the two countries, which have fought three wars since their independence from Britain in 1947, he said.

This approach has amply proved its veracity in the solution of a similar issue between Argentina and Brazil," he added.

Rescue team fails to find wreckage of Thai airliner

KATMANDU, Aug 1: Air and ground rescue teams, hampered by monsoon rains, failed Saturday to find the wreckage of a Thai Airways airliner that crashed with 113 people on board, Nepalese authorities said, reports AP.

The officials also said the most likely cause of the crash was a technical failure in the aircraft that the pilot reported moments before the control tower lost contact on Friday.

The captain did not say what the problem was, but told the tower in his last communication that he had solved it and was making his approach, said Nagendra Ghimire, the deputy airport manager.

13 killed as police, NPA clash in Philippines

MANILA, Aug 1: At least 13 people have been killed in a clash between communist guerrillas and police in the southern Philippine province of Misamis oriental, police spokesman said today, reports AFP.

In a related development, the insurgents' political leadership issued a new statement further deriding the efforts of President Fidel Ramos to grant amnesty to the guerrillas and legalize the Communist Party.

Eight policemen, two civilians and three guerrillas were slain when a meeting between senior police official Inspector Rodolfo Dela Piedra and Commander Jabbar, the leader of the guerrillas band, erupted into violence.

Four policemen, including Dela Piedra, were also taken hostage during the incident Thursday, the police spokesman said, adding that Jabbar was among the fatalities.

There were reports that Jabbar had deliberately tricked the police into an ambush while other reports said the guerrilla, a member of the communist New People's Army (NPA), was negotiating to surrender but that fighting broke out after he turned down the government's conditions.

Heavy artillery duels in Sarajevo: 15 killed

SARAJEVO, Aug 1: Six Ukrainian peace-keepers were injured Friday in Sarajevo during a day of intense shelling and infantry attacks and counter-attacks by both Serbian and Bosnian forces, a UN spokesman said here, reports AFP.

Friday night as artillery bombardments resumed after an evening lull, a thick cloud of smoke could be seen hanging over Vogosca, an industrial quarter in the northwest of the city controlled by Serbian forces.

Meanwhile, the UN peace-keeping force had to abandon two of its observation posts overlooking the city because of the fighting.

A radar post, from which Ukrainian soldiers serving with the UN were monitoring the artillery duels, also came under fire and six of the soldiers were hurt, two of them seriously, according to UN spokesman Mik Mangusson.

Radio Sarajevo, for its part, said 15 civilians had been killed and 70 injured Friday.

The two most seriously hurt Ukrainians were evacuated to a hospital in Frankfurt, Germany, by a US plane.

The UN force did not say who had fired at its radar observation post, but it issued a protest to the Bosnian presidency saying Bosnian forces had set up artillery pieces next to the observation post Thursday night, attracting fire from Serbian forces.

Meanwhile, the second in command at the Bosnian Sarajevo headquarters, Colonel Jovan Divijak, said Bosnian forces had launched "several diversionary attacks" on Friday "with significant results" after Serbian forces tried to seize two main roads crossing the city.

UN forces here said casualties among the combatants appeared to be very high.

Flights in and out of the airport were also suspended for a time Friday because of the shelling.

The UN force commander, General Lewis Mackenzie from Canada, was due to leave the city today for Croatia where UN headquarters were being relocated.

The UN headquarters, after four months in Belgrade, are to be relocated in Zagreb for a similar period of time. UN officers started to leave for Zagreb on Friday.

Meanwhile, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic Friday told a press conference that his community, which has proclaimed a Serbian republic within Bosnia-Herzegovina, laid claim to part of the Croatian coast for an outlet to the sea.

In a communique from Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, local nationalist leader Fehmi Agani, for his part, demanded that ethnic Albanians who form a majority in Kosovo, an autonomous province of Serbia, be allowed to send their own delegates to the international peace conference on Yugoslavia due to be held in London in the second half of August.

Britain's WW II pilot dead

LONDON, Aug 1: British war hero Leonard Cheshire, a bomber pilot who observed the 1945 atomic bombing of Nagasaki and then founded a string of homes worldwide for the sick and disabled, died on Friday aged 74, reports Reuters.

Britain's most-decorated World War two pilot, he commanded the famous "Dambuster" squadron and won Britain's highest decoration for valour, the Victoria Cross (VC), for "placing himself invariably in the front of battle."

His wife, Baroness Ryder of Warsaw, said Cheshire died in Cavendish in eastern England "after much suffering with motor neurone disease."

As a veteran of 100 bombing raids over Europe he was sent by wartime leader Winston Churchill!