

Blacks kill 5 whites

EAST LONDON, South Africa, May 2: Five whitemen were shot dead and seven people were wounded late Saturday when black gunmen opened fire with automatic rifles in a hotel bar in this coastal South African city, police said, reports AFP.

Police spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Christo Louw said a handgrenade and a tear gas canister were also thrown into a snooker room adjacent to the bar at the Highgate Hotel by the three black-voiced gunmen.

A witness told the South African Press Association the killings had been "in cold blood."

Colonel Louw said four men were killed by gunfire while the fifth died in the blast.

Lanka may become 'political Lebanon'

COLOMBO, May 2: The assassination of Sri Lanka's strong-man, President Ranasinghe Premadasa, has left an unprecedented power vacuum that could plunge the country into a "political Lebanon," analysts here said today.

Premadasa was blown up by a suspected suicide bomber as he led his United National Party (UNP) in a May Day rally, just eight days after another major slaying of his main political rival and opposition leader Lalith Athulathudali.

The two assassinations so close to each other were aimed at destabilising the entire political fabric of the country and weaken democracy in a very dramatic way, Liberal Party leader Chanaka Amararatunga told AFP.

He said the ruling party lacked a nationally accepted figure to take over the leadership and would remain in a state of confusion and lack of direction at least in the short term.

"It is going to be the most difficult transformation for the UNP since independence

from Britain in 1948. I am not too pessimistic, but this is going to be a very very serious catastrophe for the country.

The assassination "has left a vacuum that is hard to fill. With Premadasa you knew where the country was heading. They might be able to keep up the reforms, but it is going to be very difficult," Amararatunga said.

Cabinet spokesman and industries minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said he was too shocked to comment on the immediate political aftermath of the assassination.

Sri Lanka's political lightweight Prime Minister Dingiri Banda Wijetunga took over as the acting President before parliament elects and MP as the new head of state within one month.

Thereafter, the new president could continue for the remaining time of Premadasa's term which was to expire in December 1994.

Wijetunga, who comes from an upper class elite family, had been a politician with a re-

laxed, low profile approach which has attracted many sympathisers.

Although he was state minister for defence under Premadasa as commander in chief of the armed forces and police, Wijetunga himself had admitted that his job was ornamental.

Non-controversial Wijetunga was seen by political analysts as a compromise candidate as electing a more dynamic minister could lead to factionalism which in 1991 led to Athulathudali leaving the UNP to form a rival party.

Athulathudali's Democratic United National Front (DUNF) was formed after UNP dissidents failed to impeach the President in August 1991 and their raison detre was the opposition to Premadasa.

"Now that Premadasa is no more there could be reconciliation between the DUNF and the UNP. Otherwise it would be to the advantage of leftist parties," a spokesman for a radical left-wing New Equal Society Party (NSSP)

said.

A Tamil politician said they were concerned that instability in Colombo would be a further blow to finding a solution to the island's long-drawn ethnic conflict which claims a daily death toll in the northern and eastern regions.

This is going to be messy. We are not interested in a single party, but if there is instability in the government that will affect the entire country. It could lead to total anarchy," Tamil politician Dharmalingam Sidhathan said.

Sri Lanka's opposition has been in total disarray without a proper leader since repeated electoral defeats since 1977, and Athulathudali was seen as a man who could have given direction to the fragmented anti-government forces.

The assassination has also raised doubts about the staging of crucial provincial council elections that were scheduled for May 17. Postponement of local elections may compound the uncertainty, analysts said.

China to buy 40 commercial aircraft a year

BEIJING, May 2: China will import at least 40 commercial aircraft a year to keep up with its rapidly growing air transport needs, an official newspaper reported Sunday, says AP.

Domestic passenger and freight air transport is expected to increase 20 per cent annually in coming years, the China Daily said.

Therefore China has to buy at least 40 aircraft each year, primarily passenger jets that can seat more than 150 people each, Ye Yigan, president of the China Aviation Supplies Corporation told the newspaper.

Ye's group controls China's vast commercial aircraft import business.

BRIEFLY

3 Serbians held in US: US federal agents arrested three Serbian refugees and five US citizens allegedly paid to smuggle them into the United States from Canada, United Press International reported Saturday, says Xinhua from Washington.

Federal agents made the arrests at the Ambassador Bridge that spans the Detroit river from Detroit to Windsor, Canada, and a downtown hotel in Detroit.

Agents found the three Serbians from Macedonia in the trunk of a car driven by fellow countryman legally living in Canada at the immigration checkpoint at the Ambassador Bridge.

The Serbians told immigration agents they had paid 8,000 US dollars each to get to New York, where they were guaranteed jobs. Agents also seized 39,000 US dollars in cash.

3 Chinese crew missing: A Chinese survey ship collided with a tanker in the East China Sea Sunday morning and three Chinese crewmen are missing, Japanese maritime official said, reports AP from Tokyo.

Norihisa Seko of the Maritime Safety Agency, Japan's coast guard, said the Chinese ship sank after colliding with the Cyprus-registered tanker 450 kilometres (280 miles) west of Takara Island.

The island is halfway between Okinawa and the southern most main Japanese island of Kyushu.

Seko said communications with the tanker were poor and no further details were available.

Indonesian boat capsizes: Eighteen people are missing from a small boat with 35 Indonesians aboard that capsized off Singapore, a police spokesman said Sunday, reports AP from Singapore.

Marine police boats and helicopters are searching for the missing, said the spokesman, who refused to give his name.

The capsized boat was on its way from Indonesia's Bintan Island, just south of Singapore, to Johore in Malaysia, a few miles north of Singapore.

It capsized eight kilometres (five miles) east of Singapore Friday night, and 17 Indonesians were rescued by a passing coast guard patrol boat Saturday morning, the Marine Department said.

Iranian army hits Kurdish base: The Iranian army has pounded Iranian Kurdish bases in northern Iraq and Iranian troops entered that border region, an Iraqi Kurdish source said Saturday by telephone from there, reports AFP from Ankara.

The shelling killed and wounded several civilians in the regions of Khala-Diza, Raniya and Penjwin, the source said but gave no figures for the casualties and did not say when the attack occurred.

He said most of the villagers had been evacuated to other villages, adding that Iranian troops penetrated four kilometres (2.4 miles) into northern Iraq after the shelling.

There were no clashes between the Iranian troops and Iraqi Kurdish rebels.



KARACHI: Supporters of ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) take away the body of Azim Ahmad Tariq for a burial ceremony from his residence Saturday. —AFP/UNB photo

Top MQM leader shot dead

KARACHI, May 2: Gunmen shot and killed Azim Tariq, a prominent leader of a militant political group, and wounded his wife early Saturday, police said, reports AP.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the pre-dawn shooting at Tariq's home, but police said they suspected political rivals.

Within hours of the shooting, gunmen fired from rooftops at thousands of mourners marching toward Tariq's house, according to ambulance attendants.

At least a dozen people were wounded, but it was not known how many were seriously hurt, said Anwar Qasim, of Edhi Welfare Trust, a nationwide ambulance service.

At least 10 ambulances were sent to Tariq's fortress-style residence in a middle-class neighbourhood in the centre of Karachi, Qasim said.

It was not known who was

behind the shooting, but Qasim said the gunfire broke out as the mourners passed the home of Alaf Hussein, Tariq's main political rival.

Tariq, 45 led a breakaway faction of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement, (MQM) or People's Refugee Movement, which represents Indians who went to Pakistan following independence of the subcontinent.

He was said to be a moderate among leaders of the immigrant movement, considered Pakistan's most militant political organization.

It has been demanding recognition as a fifth ethnic group in Pakistan after Punjabis, Baluchis, Sindhis and Pathans.

The immigrant group, which split last year into three factions, has been accused of kidnapping, murder and running torture cells.

The factions are vying for control of the cities in Pakis-

tan's southern Sindh province, including Karachi, the industrial heart of the country with 9 million people.

Last June, the government ordered the army into Sindh to curb increasing ethnic violence, mostly between the immigrant movement and Sindh nationalists demanding greater independence.

The immigrant group has also clashed with former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's left-leaning Pakistan People's Party, considered the strongest political party in Sindh province.

Police officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they feared an outbreak of retaliatory violence from Tariq supporters.

Most of the businesses in Karachi closed following the shooting and most people stayed at home, local residents said.

Deportees end sit-in

MARJ AL-ZOHOUR, Lebanon, May 2: Palestinian deportees in southeast Lebanon trudged back to their tent camp in the rain Sunday, ending a weeklong outdoor sit-in to protest resumption of Arab-Israeli peace talks in Washington, reports AP.

Abdul-Aziz Rantisi, spokesman for the nearly 400 exiles, said strong winds and heavy rains overnight made it impossible to continue the protest.

"We spent a sleepless night in stormy weather, trying without success to light fires and stay dry," Rantisi said. "We're now thinking of a new escalation."

Israeli troops in raincoats fanned across the hills overlooking the sit-in site and watched the retreat through binoculars.

Hussein unique survivor of ME tempests

AMMAN, May 2: King Hussein, the Arab world's longest-serving ruler, marks his 40th year on the Hashemite throne Sunday, a unique survivor of Middle East tempests, reports AP.

The 57-year-old monarch's longevity in the cutthroat politics of the region is remarkable. When he was crowned May 2, 1953, the boy-king of an impoverished desert state, few believed he would last long in the Middle Eastern cauldron.

He has survived countless assassination attempts, a Palestinian attempt to oust him, Arab-Israeli wars and political confrontations.

When Hussein returned last September from the United States after surgery for cancer, more than 1 million people packed Amman's streets in an ecstatic welcome.

Kuwait-Russia defence accord in Aug

KUWAIT, CITY, May 2: Kuwait is to sign a defence accord with Russia in August, Kuwaiti Defence Minister Sheikh Ali Salem Al-Sabah announced here Saturday, reports AFP.

He said in a press statement he would travel to Moscow to sign the pact, which is aimed at "strengthening Kuwait's ability to confront any threat to its security."

The agreement was discussed here during a visit in mid-February of Soviet Defence Minister Pavel Grachev.

Sheikh Ali said at the time that his people "will never forget the role played by the former Soviet Union and its firm and just position regarding the Iraqi regime after its invasion of Kuwait" in August 1990.

A US-led allied coalition drove Iraqi troops out of the Emirate after a brief land battle in February 1991.

Kuwait subsequently signed defence agreements with the United States, Britain and France.

In another defence-related move, parliamentary sources said, Kuwait planned to build a sand wall along its border with Iraq to foil infiltrations.

There will be a trench three meters (yards) deep and five meters wide, and the wall will be four meters high," MP Ahmad Baqr said, adding that the plan had been announced by Sheikh Ali in parliament on Saturday.

He said the project should be completed within three months, but he did not disclose the start-up date nor the cost.

Kuwaiti military experts warn that a wall will not be sufficient to deter an Iraqi land offensive but should reduce the frequency of cross-border incursions.

The 200-kilometer (125-mile) border has been patrolled by United Nations military observers since the departure of Iraqi troops.

But Kuwaiti authorities say they have nonetheless foiled several Iraqi infiltration operations.



A youth throws a stone towards Russian militia as the May Day march in Moscow turned violent Saturday. —AFP/UNB photo

150 hurt in Moscow May Day clashes

MOSCOW, May 2: Some 150 people were hurt Saturday, some seriously, as riot police used water cannons and truncheons to fend off an assault here by around 100 stonethrowing communist protesters marking the May Day holiday, reports AFP.

A number of large trucks were demolished and at least two of them set on fire by the demonstrators as a pitched street battle that lasted about half an hour left a scene of devastation on a main boulevard near Moscow's Gagarin square.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said 77 riot police, or omon, were hurt in the clashes. Most were treated by medics on the scene but 11 were hospitalized, four of them with serious injuries.

Interfax news agency reported that up to 70 protesters were also injured in the clashes and several of them were seen by AFP reporters being dragged away from the scene of the violence with their faces covered with blood.

However, he said one riot policeman who was crushed between two trucks was in "very, very serious condition."

The clashes were the most violent in years in Moscow between security forces and demonstrators and seemed certain to provide a fresh rallying cause for the political opposition to president Boris Yeltsin.

Several of the accused plotters behind the aborted 1991 Soviet coup attended the demonstration, including Anatoly Lukyanov, the former Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, and Gennadi Yanayev, Mikhail Gorbachev's vice-president.

Former Soviet KGB chief Vladimir Klyuchkov, who also attend, said Yeltsin's decision to close the center of the city to the the hardline protesters was an "irrational act that proves the authorities are nervous," Interfax news agency reported.

At least 10,000 people took part in the May Day demonstration.

Ruling party wins Yemen's elections

SANAA, May 2: President Ali Abdullah Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) swept to victory in Yemen's first general election since unification three years ago, the Electoral Commission announced Saturday, reports AFP.

But opposition parties charged fraud and ballot rigging in an election marred by violence.

The GPC won 121 seats out of 301 contested in Tuesday's election, followed by the Islamic Party Al-Islah with 62 and the GPC's junior coalition partner the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) with 56.

Independent candidates, some allied to the three main parties, secured 47 seats.

PARIS, May 2: Pierre Berégovoy, ousted as France's premier when his Socialist Party was crushed in March elections, shot himself in the head Saturday and died hours later while being airlifted to a hospital, reports AP.

Berégovoy died shortly after 10 pm (2000 GMT) in a helicopter en route from his hometown of Nevers to a military hospital in Paris, 150 miles (240 kms) to the north, a Defence Ministry spokesman said on condition of anonymity.

Among those awaiting Berégovoy at the hospital were President Francois Mitterrand, a longtime friend, and Edouard Balladur, the conservative who took over as premier March 29.

Balladur said in a statement late Saturday night that he was "profoundly shaken by

Former French PM commits suicide

the tragic disappearance of Pierre Berégovoy.

"He was a man of great courage who sought over many years to serve the interests of our country as best he could," Balladur said.

Political colleagues said Berégovoy had been depressed by the Socialist's landslide defeat. They said he also was dismayed by the disclosure in February that he received an interest-free 180,000 dollars loan in 1986 from a businessman later jailed on corruption charges.

Authorities said Berégovoy shot himself Saturday evening with his bodyguard's handgun while walking along a canal near Nevers. They said he asked his driver and

bodyguard to let him walk alone, then shot himself with the gun, which Berégovoy apparently had taken unnoticed.

He was rushed to a hospital in Nevers. Mitterrand's office initially reported Berégovoy had died before reaching that hospital, but officials later said he was alive, though in critical condition.

In Nevers, where Berégovoy was mayor since 1983, employees cried at City Hall after learning he had shot himself.

Earlier in the day, the May Day holiday, Berégovoy had conferred with local union leaders and presided at the start of an amateur bicycle race.

Berégovoy, a loyal colleague of Mitterrand's, served almost exactly one year as premier after replacing controversial Edith Cresson. Earlier, he served two widely praised stints as finance minister.

Colleagues said he held himself responsible for the Socialist defeat and was depressed that doubts about his honesty had surfaced despite his insistence he had done nothing wrong in accepting the interest-free loan.

"He became the target of many unjust, personal attacks," said Pierre Mauroy, another former Socialist premier. "As a man of honour, he suffered a great deal."

Berégovoy "didn't recover psychologically" from the allegations of impropriety concerning the loan, said Socialist Party spokesman Jean Glavany. He said the



Pierre Berégovoy, former French PM, died Saturday. —AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

It's my job to do more

WASHINGTON: President Clinton humorously summed up his first 100 days in office Saturday night, telling reporters that if he stumbles it's because he wants to do far more than just run in place, reports AP.

"It is my job to do more than enjoy the honour of being President of the United States," he said.

Clinton had barbs for friend and foe alike in remarks that closed the 79th annual dinner of the White House Correspondents Association.

But at the end he turned mostly serious, saying that campaign chief James Carville had leaned across the head table to share some Southern folk wisdom.

"He told me, 'If you never want to stumble, stand still,'" Clinton said.

And then addressing himself to the reporters who cover his administration, he said: "You tell them when I stumble. But always tell them I'm not standing still."

Clinton had a jocular verbal elbow for many of his associates, including Budget Director Leon Panetta, who was widely quoted last week in a startlingly candid and very gloomy assessment of the fate of Clinton's legislative programme in Congress.

The president led into it this way: My daughter Chelsea came to me and said that since she had been in Washington she no longer believed in the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus or even the tooth fairy," the president said.

"I said, 'Did you learn all this at your fancy new school?'" "She said, 'No, I had a long talk with Leon Panetta.'"

It was just a joke

DES MOINES: A high school student was arrested for trespassing Saturday night when he showed up at his prom dressed as a woman, reports AP.

Brett Martin, 18, said he was charged with criminal trespass when he arrived at Knoxville High School wearing the red, sequined, spaghetti-strapped dress his sister, Jennifer Leslie, had worn to her prom the year before. His sister also loaned him a wig and helped him with his makeup, Martin said.

"Everybody knew it was just a joke," he added. Officer Sam Nichols of the Knoxville Police Department confirmed charges were filed, but declined to discuss the matter further.

Calls to school superintendent Randy Flack were not immediately returned.

Martin said he and a friend, Terry Massick, decided to go to the prom as a couple after Massick's date backed out on Monday. The formal dance is one of the biggest events of the year in Knoxville, a city of 8,100, said Martin's father, Rodney Martin.

Brett Martin said school officials learned of the plan Friday. "They asked me, 'Why do you want to do this? I said I really don't see anything wrong with it. People are going to enjoy it.' It wasn't really that big of a deal. They never said, 'Don't do this,'" Martin said.

Condom for soldiers

BANGKOK: US and Thai soldiers taking part in joint maneuvers in northern Thailand have been issued 20,000 condoms in a bid to protect them against the AIDS killer disease, according to a senior official in the Thai health ministry, reports AP.

Health Ministry Permanent Secretary Phatchit Pavvut was quoted on Sunday by the Bangkok Post as saying that the condoms, distributed by health authorities in the Thai provinces where the war games are taking place, are of high standard.

Last month the Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned that one in 20 condoms available in Thailand was liable to malfunction and did not meet international standards.

The condoms, both locally made and imported, could be at risk quality because of poor storage conditions, the FDA explained. This year marks the resumption of the annual joint Thai-US military maneuvers. The exercise, codenamed Cobra Gold, were cut short in 1991 because of a military coup in Thailand in February of that year and not held last year as a protest by Washington against the military takeover.

At least 10,000 Thai and 8,500 US soldiers are to take part in this year's Cobra Gold. The full maneuvers are scheduled for May 20-25, but preliminary exercises had already begun late last month.

DPRK to deploy new missile, believes Japan

TOKYO, May 2: Japan's defence authorities believe North Korea will deploy later this year new intermediate-range ballistic missiles that may be capable of carrying nuclear warheads, the newspaper Yomiuri reported Saturday, reports AP.

The longest-circulation newspaper in Japan quoted unnamed Defence Agency sources as saying the 1,000-kilometre (625-mile) range missile, "Rodong-1," is a modified and upgraded copy of Russian Scud missiles.

Their deployment would pose a serious threat not only to Japan, but also to the security of Asia and the Pacific.