

Rwandan rebels kill 13 clergymen

LONDON, June 9: Thirteen clergymen, including two Roman Catholic bishops and the Archbishop of Kigali, were killed by four Rwandan rebel soldiers assigned to guard them, Rwandan rebel radio reported, says Reuter.

Radio Muhabura, monitored in London by the British Broadcasting Corporation on Wednesday night, said the guards believed the clergymen had taken part in massacres against their relatives.

It added that a search had been launched to find them and bring them to trial before a military tribunal.

The radio said that the political director of the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) Colonel Frank Mugambage, announced the "sad news" of the deaths on Wednesday. But the report gave no indication of when the killings took place.

It named the bishops as the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Conference, Bishop Thaddee Nesengiyumva, and Bishop Joseph Ruzindana of Byumba.

The clergymen had been "placed under the protection" of eight soldiers following the recent fall of Kabgayi, on the outskirts of Gikaranga, to rebel soldiers, the radio said.

It added that four of the soldiers executed the clergymen. When the other guards discovered the killings, they killed one of the renegade soldiers but the other three escaped.

Meanwhile, the Security Council Wednesday formally approved 5,500 troops for Rwanda with a limited mandate.

The troops, authorised for six months, are to set up zones to protect refugees fleeing fighting the slaughter and protect relief convoys. But they cannot use force to stop the fighting.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali originally wanted the troops to be authorised to use force, if necessary, to stop the killings.

China rebuffs ROK appeal to back sanctions against DPRK

BEIJING, June 9: Rebuffing South Korean appeals, China refused Thursday to endorse sanctions as a means of prying open the nuclear programme of its long-time ally, North Korea, reports AP.

"We do not agree on sanctions. Sanctions would only serve to push the opposing sides into confrontation with one another and result in a situation that no one would like to see," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang.

Shen spoke at a news briefing hours after South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo sought China's endorsement for sanctions in a two-hour meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen.

South Korea, Japan and the United States are seeking UN Security Council approval for economic sanctions to force North Korea to prove that its nuclear programme is not producing atomic weapons.

North Korea says its programme is peaceful and that it would regard sanctions as a declaration of war. Shen said China did not know whether its Communist neighbour's nuclear programme was peaceful. He also suggested that the North's threats of war should not be taken at face value.

South Korea's foreign minister rushed to Beijing from New York Wednesday after Chinese leaders reiterated their opposition to sanctions and publicly reaffirmed their close friendship with the North.

China's cooperation is needed because it has veto power as one of the UN Security Council's five permanent members, and also because it is North Korea's main trade partner, supplying oil and foodstuffs.

Shen said Han and Qian agreed that they did not want to see the North Korean nuclear crisis worsen. They also agreed that the Korean Peninsula should be nuclear-free and peaceful, he said.

Han explained to Qian why sanctions were needed and asked for China's support. South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted South Korean officials as saying. The report said Qian replied that the door to dialogue should be felt open.

Spokesman Shen said, "We are not in favour of the involvement of the United Nations Security Council," he did not say whether China would exercise its veto to block sanctions.

China and North Korea fought together against US-led United Nations forces in the 1950-1953 Korean War, and have maintained close ties since.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin met Tuesday with

Off the Record



Cecilia, who is in charge of the project "Green Iguana," holds up one of the specimens raised in captivity outside Panama City, the Panamanian capital, on June 6. The project aims at raising green iguanas, an endangered species, to repopulate the banks of the Panama Canal. — AFP photo.

Merry-making ends in cannibalism

MOSCOW: A drinking binge in a far eastern Russian city turned into a gruesome night of violence and murder in which one reveler was cooked and eaten by his companions, a news agency reported Thursday, says AP.

Two other party-goers were killed during a "heinous feast" in Artyom, 6,800 kilometers (4,200 miles) east of Moscow, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

It did not say when the incident occurred or how many people were involved.

Police arrested one suspected murderer and are looking for others, ITAR-Tass said.

Investigation officers so far have no clues about the motive for the slayings or whether the suspected cannibals had ever tasted human flesh before, the agency said.

Spurned lover steals tank

VIENNA: A soldier angry that his girlfriend left him rode a tank through the streets of Vienna, demolishing some 20 cars, a bus and power lines, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The 22-year-old serviceman was identified by police only as Gerhard M. Authorities said he got drunk Wednesday, then stole a large M60 tank from an Austrian army barracks at Zwölfaxing, some 16 kilometers (10 miles) east of Vienna.

The soldier drove the vehicle to Vienna, leaving a trail of destruction.

He ignored warning shots from police, but surrendered after a police tank forced him to crash against a concrete pillar beneath a downtown bridge.

BRIEFLY

Clinton returns home: President Bill Clinton arrived Wednesday night in Washington after an eight-day European tour to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landing in World War II, AFP reports from Washington.

Clinton arrived back at the White House at 10:30 pm (0230 GMT) with his wife Hillary, a spokesman said. Clinton's tour took him to Italy, the Vatican, Britain and France.

Christopher to visit ME: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will tour the Middle East before the July 6-7 Group of Seven economic summit in Naples, an administration official said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

The chief US diplomat, who participated with President Bill Clinton in D-Day celebrations in Europe last week, will return to the United States before heading to the Middle East.

In midday Christopher went on a shuttle mission between Israel, Syria and Egypt.

47 militants held in Egypt: Egyptian security services have arrested 47 Islamic militants in the past few days in a sweep across several regions, the official Cairo daily Al-Ahram said yesterday, AFP reports from Cairo.

Some 145 members of the Jumma Islamiatyia's armed wing have now been arrested, the paper added. The militants had taken part in several attacks including the killing in April of General Rauf Khayrat, who had been leading the fight against fundamentalism.

Automatic weapons, explosives and more than 120,000 dollars had also been found by security services in the sweep which was carried out without the police firing "a single shot", the paper added.

One more killed in S Africa: One person died and two were injured Wednesday when gunmen opened fire on a downtown taxi stand, police and witnesses said, AP reports from Johannesburg.

The two attackers escaped from the bustling taxi stand immediately after the shooting, witnesses told the South African Press Association.

Police Col. Eugene Opperman initially reported two dead, but later changed it to one. He said two people were injured. Violence between rival taxi operators has flared recently in Johannesburg, where an attack on a taxi van killed four people last month.

Nigerian opposition leader held: Police of Nigeria's military junta arrested Wednesday a senior member of the pro-democracy opposition coalition, bringing to 10 the number of prominent opposition activists detained in a crackdown launched last week, AFP reports from Lagos.

The police seized retired air commodore Dan Suleiman, a former minister, ex-state military governor and a top official of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) at Lagos Airport, his colleagues said.

Dan 52, a close friend of chief Moshood Abiola, the undeclared winner of presidential elections held last June 12, is the coordinator of NADECO activities in the middle belt's grouping states in the middle part of the country. All the 10 activists now in custody are all either former ministers, state governors or ex-senators.

9 killed in Lankan battles: Clashes involving guerrillas fighting for independence in Sri Lanka killed four soldiers, three policemen and two rebels, military officials said Thursday, AP reports from Colombo.

On Thursday, Tamil rebels ambushed and killed four soldiers on patrol in the northeastern Trincomalee district and three policemen moving through eastern Welikanda.

On Wednesday troops killed two rebels, including an intelligence wing leader in the Trincomalee district.

The Tamil minority accuses the Sinhalese majority, which controls the military and government, of discrimination.



"PLO OUT OF JERUSALEM" is what Jewish settlers are demonstrating on Wednesday outside Orient House, the main PLO office in East Jerusalem. The settlers are against the presence of all PLO institutions in what they term as the eternal capital of the State of Israel. — AFP photo

Israel prepares laws to keep PLO out of Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, June 9: Israel is preparing legislation to prevent the PLO from setting up politically in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Thursday, reports AP.

"Two or three weeks ago we began to study the situation in Jerusalem," Rabin told state radio amid a continuing rumour over a secret letter from Foreign Minister Shimon Peres pledging to maintain Palestinian institutions in the holy city.

"There are Palestinian institutions providing services to the Palestinians such as the Higher Islamic Council and the Maqassad hospital which have no political impact," Rabin said.

"On the other hand, we are checking if the PLO is trying to create a fait accompli in Jerusalem. We may have recourse to special laws to prevent that."

Government officials said Attorney General Michael Ben Yair had drafted a bill under which "all institutions other than Israeli ones in Jerusalem will be banned and those belonging to them liable to imprisonment."

Rabin warned that the PLO leader on the West Bank Faisal Hussein, could not continue to reside in Jerusalem if he takes up his post on the new Palestinian self-rule authority for Gaza and Jericho.

He went on to put Jerusalem at the top of his priorities.

"I believe that in our political struggle, the order of priorities is keeping Jerusalem, Israel's united capital, the control of major areas of Judea and Samaria (West Bank), the Golan Heights and finally some areas of the Gaza Strip."

Rabin on Wednesday had lumped together PLO chief Yasser Arafat and the opposition Israeli right-wing Likud Party, saying they had both "lied" over the letter which the government had denied existed.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres came under strong attack in parliament here on Tuesday over the October 11 letter.

He pledged "not to hamper their activity," underlining the contrary that their "important mission is to be encouraged."

The opposition charged he had been "caught lying red-handed."

Rabin said Arafat had established a link between the letter and the institutions of the autonomous authority which does not exist.

At the centre of the dispute is Orient House, the official headquarters of the Palestinian delegation at the Middle East peace talks, but which effectively operates as PLO HQ in Jerusalem.

Rabin said a very broad consensus in Israel was determined to maintain Israeli sovereignty over all the holy city, including the eastern sector captured from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East War.

Under the autonomy agreement, Jerusalem is to be negotiated after two years of self-rule as part of an attempt to reach a permanent settlement with the Palestinians.

China prepares N-arms test, says US State Dept

WASHINGTON, June 9: China is preparing a nuclear weapon test explosion despite a UN-led moratorium on underground testing, the State Department said Wednesday, reports AP.

"There is evidence that China is preparing to test a nuclear device in the near future," the State Department said in a statement.

"We oppose this test and have urged China not to conduct it," and to join the other declared nuclear powers — Britain, France and Russia — in a informal moratorium in place since 1992, the statement added.

Continued testing now complicates overall international non-proliferation efforts aimed discussions on a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Progress in talks over Black Sea Fleet

KIEV, June 9: Ukraine and Russia made progress during talks on Wednesday on dividing up the disputed Black Sea Fleet, delegation members said, reports Reuter.

"The talks are going well, and we expect a positive result," said Ukrainian Navy Commander, Volodymyr Bezukorovany.

The delegations headed by senior military officials, had agreed Russia would keep the fleet's current base in Sevastopol on the Crimean coast, said Leonid Smolyakov, Russia's ambassador in Ukraine.

Russian hostage drama ends

MOSCOW, June 9: A hostage drama in which 17 visitors at a detention centre in central Russia were seized by four armed prisoners ended peacefully on Wednesday when the last two prisoners surrendered, reports Reuter.

ITAR-Tass news agency said last two of the four prisoners who took hostages at the centre in the Ural city of Yekaterinburg gave themselves up to police.

All the hostages were freed unharmed.

One of the four prisoners was killed and three police were injured in an earlier attempt by police to free the hostages, the agency said.

UNITA bows to govt's power-sharing terms

LUSAKA, June 9: Angola's UNITA rebels have largely bowed to terms set by the government for power-sharing in a bid to speed up peace talks and end escalating conflict in Angola, UNITA spokesman Jorge Valentim said Wednesday, reports AP.

The rebels have agreed to all that they were offered in a future government and administration of national unity, but still insisted on being granted the governorship of their stronghold in Huambo, Valentim said.

He was speaking a day after both the Angolan army and UNITA reported heavy fighting in Kuito, the chief town of the central Bie province, and government air raids on Huambo Angola's second city in the central highlands.

"This is our hour for an important decision... a time for our destiny as Angolans for Angola's salvation," Valentim told Journalists here.

"We have analysed the documents from the UN mediation and the government... and we see an opening for a solution to the Angolan crisis and in this spirit we accept whatever these say in order to achieve peace," he added.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) meanwhile suspended relief flights to Kuito and Huambo and several other towns because of the fighting, the ICRC announced Wednesday in Geneva.

General food distribution to some 250,000 people in Huambo has stopped, though the ICRC has kept food kitchens open in the town, where its delegate Philippe Lazzarini told the Geneva Headquarters "we absolutely need to be resupplied fast."

The ICRC stated that its delegate in Kuito, Dominique Henry, had described the situation there as "alarming, even catastrophic" and said that many wounded people could not be treated.

Hezbollahmen abduct 6 Lebanese, one Syrian

BAALBEK, Lebanon, June 9: Pro-Iranian Hezbollah guerrillas kidnapped six Lebanese and a retired Syrian soldier Wednesday in Syrian-controlled eastern Lebanon, police said, reports AP.

Lebanese and Syrian security services had contacted the group late Wednesday in a bid to secure their release, they said. The seven were not identified.

Yeltsin plans to shake up cabinet

MOSCOW, June 9: President Boris Yeltsin plans to shake up his government and replace Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin with the former head of the powerful Security Council, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AP.

The Komsomolskaya Pravda daily quoted unidentified informed sources as saying Yeltsin's entourage had decided in principle on Chernomyrdin's resignation for health reasons and his replacement with Yuri Skokov.

The newspaper said Yeltsin thought the executive branch had lost control over parliament and he wanted Skokov, who is considered a tough political operator, to push the president's agenda through the legislature.

Yeltsin's chief press spokesman, Vyacheslav Kostikov, issued a sharply worded statement saying the Komsomolskaya Pravda article "from the beginning to end was false and lies."

There was no immediate reaction to the newspaper report from Chernomyrdin, who was in Germany, where he was successfully treated earlier this week for kidney stones.

"Everyone has always known Chernomyrdin has kidney stones, but it's not something that prevents him from working and living normally," said Anatoly Krasikov, another presidential spokesman.

Chernomyrdin, however, agreed with Yeltsin's decision on his resignation, Komsomolskaya Pravda said. Skokov and Yeltsin discussed the transfer of power at a meeting earlier this week, the newspaper said.

Kostikov denied Yeltsin had met with Skokov and said: "Publications of this kind are of a provocative and anti-state character and undermine the authority of the free Russian press."

Chernomyrdin has been prime minister since December 1992 when Yeltsin chose him over Skokov to replace reformer Yegor Gaidar.

Despite his background as a Soviet-era manager in the gas industry, Chernomyrdin has been credited with trying to keep inflation in check and economic reforms on track during his 18 months as prime minister.

Remington Steele actor to portray James Bond

LONDON, June 9: Pierce Brosnan, who just missed being James Bond in 1986, has won the role of 007 in the forthcoming film "Goldeneye," reports AP.

Producers for the Bond films announce Wednesday that they had chosen Brosnan, an Irish actor best known as the suave star of TV's "Remington Steele," for the lead role in the 17th Bond film.

"It took me eight years to get here but here I am," Brosnan told the news conference. "It's a magnificent role but it's time to clean the slate and start again."

Brosnan, 43, appeared in the movie "The Lawnmower Man" and more recently in "Mrs. Doubtfire."

The producers told a London news conference that filming will begin in the fall in Russia and the Caribbean. In 1986, Brosnan was prominently mentioned as the next Agent 007 but missed out when NBC revived the previously cancelled "Remington Steele."

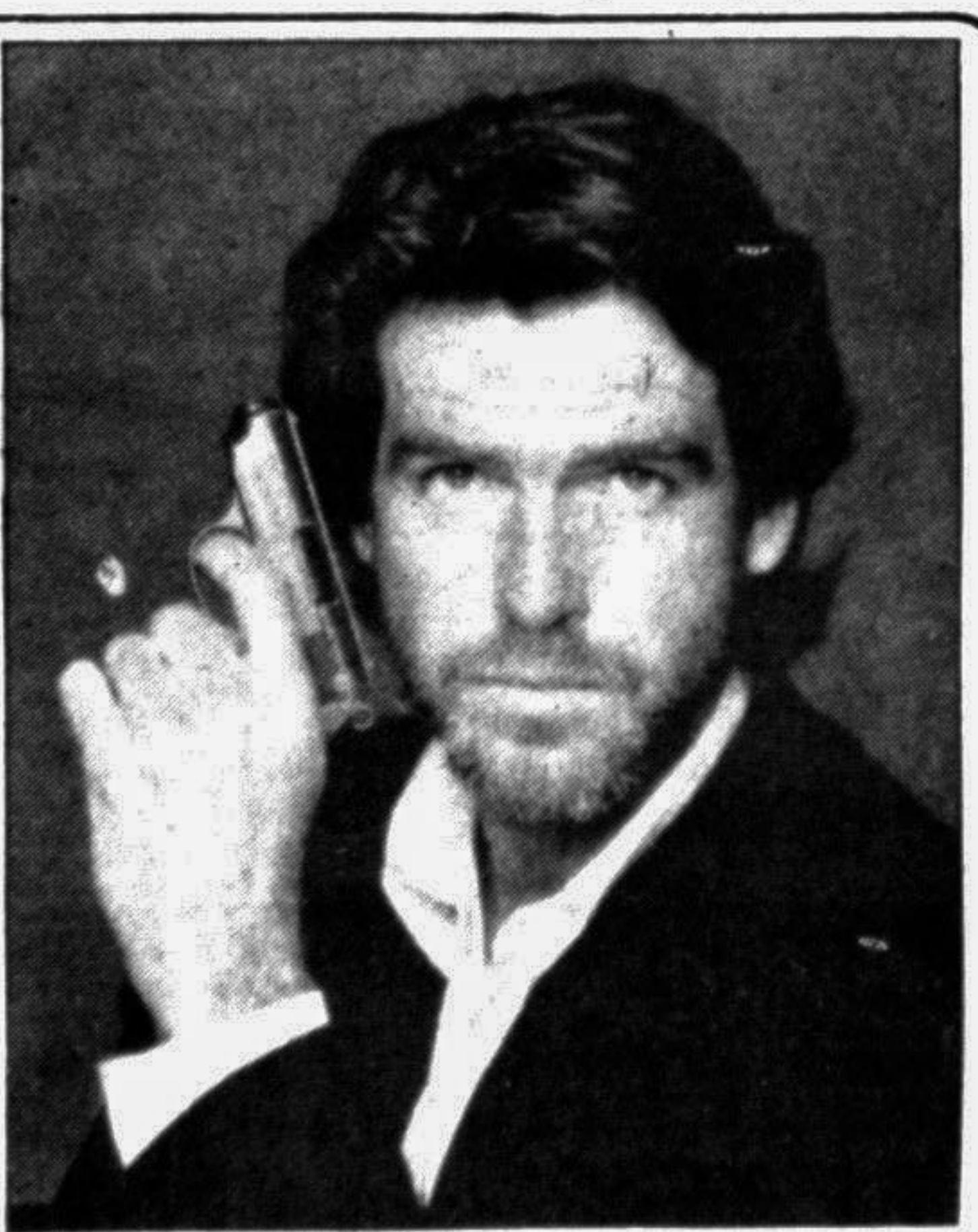
Currently sporting a beard and flowing hair for a role as Robinson Crusoe, Brosnan said he planned on making the secret agent "more flinty with a little more humour."

"Over the last few days we have been talking about it and we want him to be more flinty with a little more humour which has to come back. We want to peel back some layers of his character and see what demons may lie there. He is a secret agent with a licence to kill and that needs to be explored."

In a 1987 interview with the Associated Press, producer Albert R. (Cubby) Broccoli said Brosnan had been his choice to be the fourth James Bond but was not available "because of the shenanigans of a certain network which wanted to hold onto him."

At that time Timothy Dalton got the Bond role.

Brosnan's wife, Cassandra Harris, who died of ovarian cancer in 1991, played opposite Moore in the Bond film "For Your Eyes Only."



Irish actor Pierce Brosnan poses with a gun on Wednesday after being named to act as the new James Bond in London. — AFP photo

UN, Arab efforts will prolong war: N Yemen

SANAA (Yemen), June 9: The president of northern Yemen defiantly warned Wednesday that UN and Arab-sponsored efforts to end the nation's 5-week-old civil war would only prolong the fighting, reports AP.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh's warning came as UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi was due in Yemen to discuss implementation of last week's UN ceasefire resolution.

In his first news conference since the Security Council endorsed the resolution, Saleh criticized Saudi Arabia and other states in the region for bringing the United Nations into the conflict.

"We didn't wish to see the tremendous efforts by our brothers... to mobilize the Security Council," Saleh told reporters at the presidential palace. "This situation will prolong the period of conflict."

Saleh did not say whether he would meet Brahimi to discuss the resolution, which calls for an immediate truce, a weapons embargo and the fact-finding mission Brahimi is leading.

But he ruled out allowing international observers to monitor the war.

"Accepting observers is a flagrant interference in our internal affairs," Saleh said. "We will not accept any observers in Yemen."

Since the war began May 4, the breakaway South has sought international mediation to help end the war.

Saleh has rejected outside intervention as "foreign interference" and only appeared to embrace the UN resolution after his forces became bogged down in their advance on the southern stronghold of Aden.

On Monday, he declared a unilateral ceasefire to take effect at midnight, but fighting resumed early Tuesday with each side accusing the other of starting it.

Southern leader Ali Salem al-Baidh, Saleh's former vice president, announced the south's secession on May 20 and named himself president. The breakaway state has not been recognized internationally, but is believed to have the support of Saudi Arabia and several Gulf states.