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THE BATTALION NEWS

Page
Thursday • September 26, 1996

Gunman opens fire in church

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A man carried a gun and a can of gasoline into a downtown Church of Scientology on Wednesday, starting a fire and shooting four people, including a pregnant woman.

The suspect surrendered after walking out of the church's Portland Celebrity Centre with a female hostage who was heard shouting: "Don't do anything. He's got a gun to my head." Police talked the man into releasing the woman unharmed and dropping his handgun.

Firefighters quickly put out the blaze and it did not cause serious damage.

The pregnant woman was hospitalized in critical condition with gunshot wounds to her shoulder and abdomen. Two men were in serious condition and a fourth victim was hospitalized with a gunshot wound to the hip.

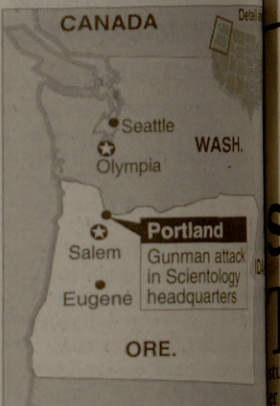
It was not immediately clear what motivated the shooting. The name of the suspect was not released.

Witnesses across the street at The Heathman Hotel said another suspect fled the scene. Police spokesman Lt. Cliff Madison said he had no information on a second suspect.

"Our reservation manager said she saw two men throw something into the building and a flash of fire and two men run away," said Lorraine Thayer, the hotel's sales manager.

The building, located in the heart of downtown Portland, features big displays of Scientology books, and Scientologists often attempt to persuade passers-by to listen to talks about the religion.

"Any shooting is pretty disturbing. But our business is for the



public so we're not going to get people out," said Barbara Ruff, church community organizer. Founded 40 years ago by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology teaches that technology can expand the mind and help solve human problems.

Yeltsin asked to step down

MOSCOW (AP) — Boris Yeltsin's bypass surgery will have to wait six to 10 weeks to give his damaged heart time to heal, and then he'll need two months to recuperate from the operation — meaning Russia will likely be governed from a sickbed into the new year.

"He's mentally as alert as he can be," said American specialist Michael DeBakey, who consulted with Yeltsin's Russian doctors for three hours Wednesday and will return for the operation.

"There is no reason why he cannot function in his capacity as president" while awaiting surgery, DeBakey said at a news conference.

However, new details of Yeltsin's ill health, including recent internal bleeding and the length of his expected recovery, are certain to bring new demands for his resignation by the Communist-led opposition.

Hard-liners have already called on Yeltsin — who was re-elected to a second five-year term in July — to step down.

"If there's a feeling that the pres-

idential staff is ruling instead of him, the question might be raised" in parliament, said Communist Gennady Seleznyov, speaker of the Duma, the lower house.

Yeltsin's illness was also causing anxiety in Washington about the future of Russia's reform process and its ability to carry out a peaceful succession if Yeltsin dies.

"Democracy in Russia is doing fairly well, but it is hardly an absolute certainty that it will take deep root," Assistant Secretary of State Thomas McNamara said.

Dr. Renat Akhchurin, head of Yeltsin's surgical team, said doctors told the president the bypass operation had an 80 percent chance of success if it was done now, but an almost 100 percent chance if he waited.

The president, who had been eager to get the surgery over with, "reacted courageously and calmly," Akhchurin said.

For two months, the only glimpses Russians have had of their president have been in photos and carefully edited TV pictures showing him standing or sitting

stiffly and talking with difficulty. Doctors confirmed Wednesday that Yeltsin suffered a heart attack in June after campaigning vigorously for re-election. The president and his aides covered the heart attack until recently.

DeBakey said Yeltsin's heart was damaged, but that the procedure showed "considerable significant improvement" over the past month. "The operation is needed and should provide excellent results," said DeBakey. "There is no reason why the president should not be restored to full normal activities."

Yeltsin has promised to transfer his powers to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin during surgery. But Chernomyrdin's resignation is out of the question. All indications are that Yeltsin remains in charge, although he works as little as 30 minutes a day, according to press secretary Sergei Yastrzhembsky.

If Yeltsin dies or is incapacitated, the prime minister would take over for three months and call a presidential election. Yeltsin's resignation would have a major impact on the presidential election, which is scheduled for next year.

Violence breaks out over holy sites

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Palestinian police and Israeli troops battled with automatic weapons Wednesday, casting Israel and the Palestinians into their biggest crisis in three years. Seven people were reported killed and more than 350 were wounded as Palestinians cheered on their police against the Israelis.

The exchanges of fire in the West Bank towns of Ramallah and Bethlehem began during stone-throwing protests by thousands of Palestinians angered by Israel's decision to open an archaeological tunnel near Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third-holiest site.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who personally ordered completion of the tunnel, said "the decision was good, but the timing was bad."

Wednesday's confrontations for the first time involved armed Palestinian forces — 30,000 armed Palestinian police were deployed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of the peace accords.

Palestinian demonstrators said they took to the streets with the encouragement of their leaders. "The Palestinian Authority is giving us the green light to demonstrate and throw stones and return to the uprising," said Mohammed Kafkay.

The violence dealt another blow to Israeli-Palestinian relations, which have faltered since Netanyahu took office in June, and comes at a time when Israel's relations with much of the Arab world are troubled.

The Palestinians postponed a round of talks with Israel that had been scheduled for Thursday. Israel said the talks would be held Sunday.

The Palestinians claim the archaeological tunnel undermines their rights to the Muslim shrines. Netanyahu insists the tunnel does not affect Islamic holy sites.

Arafat responded to the tunnel's completion by ordering a commercial strike in Jerusalem and protest marches in all Palestinian areas Wednesday.

Seven Palestinians, including a 15-year-old boy and two policemen, were killed in rioting near Ramallah, Israel radio said, quoting Palestinian sources. The report could not be immediately confirmed. Earlier, hospital sources in Ramallah said four people had been killed.

More than 350 Palestinian protesters and nine Israeli soldiers were injured in both clashes.

In Ramallah, more than 1,000 Palestinians marched to an army checkpoint south of the city and hurled stones at Israeli soldiers,

who responded with rubber bullets and tear gas.

Palestinian witnesses said by mid-afternoon, Israeli troops took positions on hills overlooking the protesters and opened fire with live ammunition. They said Israeli police, cheered by demonstrators, then fired at Israeli soldiers.

The Israelis and the Palestinians accused one another of live rounds first. Palestinian witnesses said commanding officers tried to stop junior Palestinian policemen from shooting at Israeli soldiers, but the policemen defied their orders.

The fighting in Bethlehem began after nightfall, when about 1,000 Palestinians hurled firebombs and stones at Israeli troops guarding Rachel's Tomb, a Jewish holy site where the biblical matriarch is believed to be buried.

In downtown Bethlehem, police and demonstrators clashed through the streets in a riot of cheering and singing national songs as if in a victory parade.

Netanyahu blamed Palestinian leaders for inciting the violence and said he would not be pressured into softening his position.

"This is a very dangerous situation and I do not advise anyone to do it," Netanyahu told reporters in Paris, where he met with President Jacques Chirac.

A grim-faced Arafat accused Netanyahu of undermining the peace process. "They are speaking about peace while they are working against our students, our youth, and our women," he said outside Gaza City headquarters.



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