

News Digest

By the Associated Press

Black sea disaster 300 feared dead in Soviet ship sinking

MOSCOW — A tourist-packed Soviet cruise ship, rammed and torn open by a freighter, sank so fast that there was no time to deploy lifeboats and more than 300 people are feared dead, a maritime official said Tuesday.

Deputy Merchant Marine Minister Leonid P. Nedyak told a news conference that rescue boats plucked 836 survivors from the Black Sea, most of them clinging to rafts that floated free when the liner Admiral Nakhimov plunged to the bottom at about midnight Sunday.

There were 1,234 people aboard, according to official reports.

Nedyak said 79 bodies were recovered and that 319 people were still missing two days after the collision.

"I hope and all of us hope that out of the 319 missing persons there may be some survivors," Nedyak said. But he added: "I believe that most of these passengers are still aboard the ship. Until the divers do their work it will be difficult to confirm this supposition."

He said the vessel rests on the bottom at a depth of 155 feet.

Nedyak said the information he had indicated no bodies had been recovered since late Monday. He said 29 of the survivors were hospitalized, but he did not give their conditions.

He said the liner was rammed amidships on its starboard at 11:15 p.m. Sunday by the Soviet freighter Pyotr Vasyev. The collision occurred about nine miles from the port of Novorossiysk.

Nedyak said officials believe the cruise ship sank within 15 minutes. "The blow came into the partition between the engine room and the boiler room, and practically speaking, it ripped the ship open," Nedyak said.

"From the moment of the blow until the moment of the sinking of the ship, it was not possible to launch into water any of the rescue boats," he said.

Nedyak said it was too soon to assign blame. He said there was no fog at the time of the collision.

He said about 50 vessels were continuing search and rescue operations, along with helicopters and other aircraft.

There were no casualties among the crew of the freighter, which was laden with grain, Nedyak said.

The 888 cruise ship passengers were all Soviet tourists, mostly from the

Ukraine and Baltic republics, he said. He said about 270 of the 346 crew members were among the survivors.

Nedyak said he was not sure how many children were aboard. He said five of those rescued and two found dead were children.

Nedyak said that among the survivors of the Admiral Nakhimov was the captain, Vadim G. Markov, who had skippered the ship since 1959. He identified the captain of the freighter as Viktor I. Tkachenko.

Lloyd's Registry of Ships says the Admiral Nakhimov was 575 feet long and was built in Germany in 1925 as a steam-powered vessel. It was later refitted with diesel engines.

According to the reference book "Great Passenger Ships of the World, Vol. 3," it struck a Soviet mine on Feb. 1, 1945, and sank near the Baltic port of Swinemunde. The book provided no figures on loss of life in that sinking.

The vessel was raised by the Soviets in 1949 and rebuilt.

Nedyak said that, despite its age, the ship was "in good working condition."

Jet crash toll may reach 91; heart attack unlikely as cause

CERRITOS, Calif. — Up to 24 people on the ground may have been killed when a jetliner crashed into a residential neighborhood after colliding with a small plane whose pilot had just had a heart attack, sources said Tuesday.

A top federal investigator said it was unlikely a heart attack led to the collision that killed the 67 people aboard the planes.

"I'm skeptical that it was a factor," said John Lauber, the National Transportation Safety Board member in charge of the investigation of Sunday's crash.

NTSB spokesman Ira Furman said

key remaining questions include why the single-engine Piper was in restricted airspace used by planes approaching and leaving Los Angeles International Airport, and why it was not seen by the crew of the Aeromexico DC-9 or the air traffic controller at the airport.

The confirmed dead included 58 passengers and six crew members aboard the jet and the three people in the small plane. Numbers from various sources indicated that up to 24 others on the ground also died, which could bring the death toll to 91.

Garry Oversby, of the Los Angeles

County Fire Department, said a man and two of his teen-age children died in one house, while 15 partygoers died in another house. One woman was believed killed in her home, her son said Monday. Five other people, believed to be residents or visitors to another house, also were killed, the Orange County Register said Tuesday, citing unidentified sheriff's and coroner's officials.

The Piper pilot was identified as William Kramer, a Rancho Palos Verdes resident who had been flying his wife and daughter from Torrance to the Big Bear mountain resort for the Labor Day weekend.

An autopsy by the Los Angeles County coroner's office found that Kramer died of injuries from the crash, not from a heart attack that occurred minutes before the collision. Lauber said Kramer's heart tissue would be sent to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology near Washington to confirm the heart attack.

In Brief

European balloonists set record

ALMERE, Netherlands — Three Dutch balloonists set a new transatlantic crossing record Tuesday when their helium-filled Dutch Viking plunged into a wheat field here 51 hours and 14 minutes after liftoff from Newfoundland.

The hard but accurate landing by professional balloonists Henk Brink, 44, his 31-year-old wife Evelien, and Dutch fighter pilot Willem Hageman, 39, about 12 miles east of Amsterdam marked the first successful Atlantic balloon crossing by Europeans.

It was also the first balloon journey across the Atlantic by a woman. The two previous transatlantic balloon flights were made by Americans. Because of high winds, the gondola hit the ground shortly after 8 a.m. at a speed of about 30 mph, according to police estimates, and the gondola overturned on impact.

As the Dutch Viking headed for its stormy landing, the crew dropped 14 canvas ballast bags of lead pellets in an attempt to gain altitude, and some of the 22-pound bags smashed through roofs in the coastal town of Velsen, about 27 miles from the landing site. No injuries were reported according to Velsen police.

Judge rules in Belushi case

LOS ANGELES — Cathy Evelyn Smith, who injected comic John Belushi with drugs before he died, was sentenced to three years in prison Tuesday by a judge who called her "the source of the poison."

Smith had pleaded no contest to a charge of involuntary manslaughter and three counts of furnishing and administering dangerous drugs in Belushi's heroin and cocaine overdose death on March 6, 1982.

Smith had faced a maximum possible sentence of eight years and eight months in prison.

The prosecutor, Deputy District Attorney Eldon Fox, said he agreed that drug addiction is a disease but in Smith's case it became a crime, and he recommended the three-year sentence ultimately imposed by Judge David Horowitz.

Belushi, a star of TV's "Saturday Night Live" and the movies "Animal House," "The Blues Brothers" and "1941," died in a rented bungalow at the Chateau Marmonte Hotel above Sunset Boulevard at the age of 33.

CIA steps up anti-Gadhafi efforts

NEW YORK — The CIA is intensifying its covert efforts to unseat Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, accused by the United States of promoting terrorism, The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

Under a plan approved last month by President Reagan, the CIA is increasing support to Gadhafi's internal enemies and trying to unify some of the splintered Libyan opposition groups, the newspaper said.

Attributing its information to unnamed sources, the Journal said the plan also calls for the CIA to promote reports in the Middle East of increasing opposition to Gadhafi and to recruit new agents to provide information on the Libyan regime.

The newspaper said U.S. analysts believe Gadhafi is losing touch with the military, including those officers who helped him seize power in 1969.

In an effort to destabilize opposition, Gadhafi reportedly has shuffled commanders, withheld ammunition from some army units and assigned more than 1,000 fanatical young revolutionary guardsmen to the military.

While the CIA is believed to have made some progress against Gadhafi, officials said it faces many difficulties in opposing him.

"He's still in control," the Journal quoted a senior Reagan administration official as saying. "Even though he's isolated, he can still manipulate the intelligence services and the revolutionary guards."

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