

Paparazzi suspected of manslaughter

PARIS (AP) — A French judge declared seven paparazzi to be manslaughter suspects Tuesday in the death of Princess Diana, including one aggressive photographer said to have felt the dying princess's pulse while snapping shots of the car wreck.

A lawyer for one photographer dismissed the investigation as "theater justice," a sop to public outrage over the fact Diana, her millionaire companion and their driver were killed while being chased by paparazzi.

But an attorney for companion Dodi Fayed's father, Mohammed Al Fayed, said there was "causality" between the photographers' pursuit and the fatal crash, and the elder Fayed was joining the case as a civil party to prove it.

Fresh disclosures, however, pointed anew at a combination of deadly factors in Sunday's accident, including the apparently drunken condition of the driver, a Fayed employee.

A Paris newspaper reported chauffeur Henri Paul's blood alcohol level may have been almost four times the legal limit at the time of the crash — higher than originally believed.

The photographers who went before the judge Tuesday, one by one, all had been in custody since being arrested at the crash scene Sunday morning.

Judge Herve Stephan placed them under formal investigation for "involuntary homicide" — the French equivalent of manslaughter. It does not mean they will necessarily be formally charged with any crimes.

They also will be investigated for failing to aid people in danger, a crime under the French "Good Samaritan" law requiring onlookers to assist victims of road accidents.

All were freed, two on bond. Both involuntary homicide and Good Samaritan violations can be punished by up to five years in prison and fines of almost \$100,000.

In central London on Tuesday, a grieving human tide engulfed St. James's Palace, where Diana's body lay in a chapel closed to the public, as the British monarchy and government prepared for Saturday's grand funeral.

The White House announced that first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will attend on behalf of the United States.

Thousands of Britons waited hours to sign books of condolence at

St. James' — ordinary people with special places in their hearts for the young princess.

"Actually, I think the royal family should be done away with," said Irene Treble, 85. "But Diana was amazing as she had a real common touch that appealed to so many people."

The circumstances of her death — a high-speed chase by celebrity-hunting photographers on motorcycles, an alcohol-loaded driver who may have been pushing the armored Mercedes-Benz sedan over 100 mph as it roared through a Paris tunnel — have outraged people worldwide.

An American businessman who said he happened on the scene just after the crash called the photographers "disgusting."

"I mean (they were) all over the car," said Jack Firestone, of Hewlett Harbor, N.Y., "climbing all over the car as if they were mosquitoes ... clicking away like mad. ... It was obvious these paparazzi knew they had struck gold."

Some witnesses said photographers even pushed aside rescuers and policemen, saying they were ruining their pictures.

Police accused Romuald Rat, of the Gamma photo agency, of

obstructing the work of the first officers on the scene. Rat's lawyer, Philippe Benamou, said in defense that his client merely took Diana's pulse when he was taking pictures of the wreckage.

"He wanted to see if she was dead or alive," the lawyer said.

The other paparazzi under investigation are Nikola Arsov, of the Sipa agency; Jacques Langevin of Sygma; Laslo Veres, a free-lancer; Stephane Darmon, a motorcyclist for Gamma; Serge Arnal of the Stills agency; and Christian Martinez of Angeli.

Rat and Martinez were the only ones who had to post bond — the equivalent of \$16,000 — and were forbidden from working as journalists pending resolution of the case.

"This is theater justice, aimed at satisfying the expectations of the public," said William Bourdon, a lawyer for Arsov.

"There is no crime here, the file is empty," he said. "I will demand that the case be dismissed immediately."

The driver, Paul, No. 2 security chief at the Fayed-owned Ritz Hotel, where Diana and Fayed dined before their fatal ride, was already reported by authorities to have been legally

drunk at the time of the crash.

The newspaper Le Monde reported Tuesday that a second police toxicology analysis on Paul's body came up with a level of 1.87 grams of alcohol per liter of blood — even higher than the initially reported 1.75 figure. If confirmed, that would give the driver a blood-alcohol level nearly four times the 0.5 grams per liter legal limit in France.

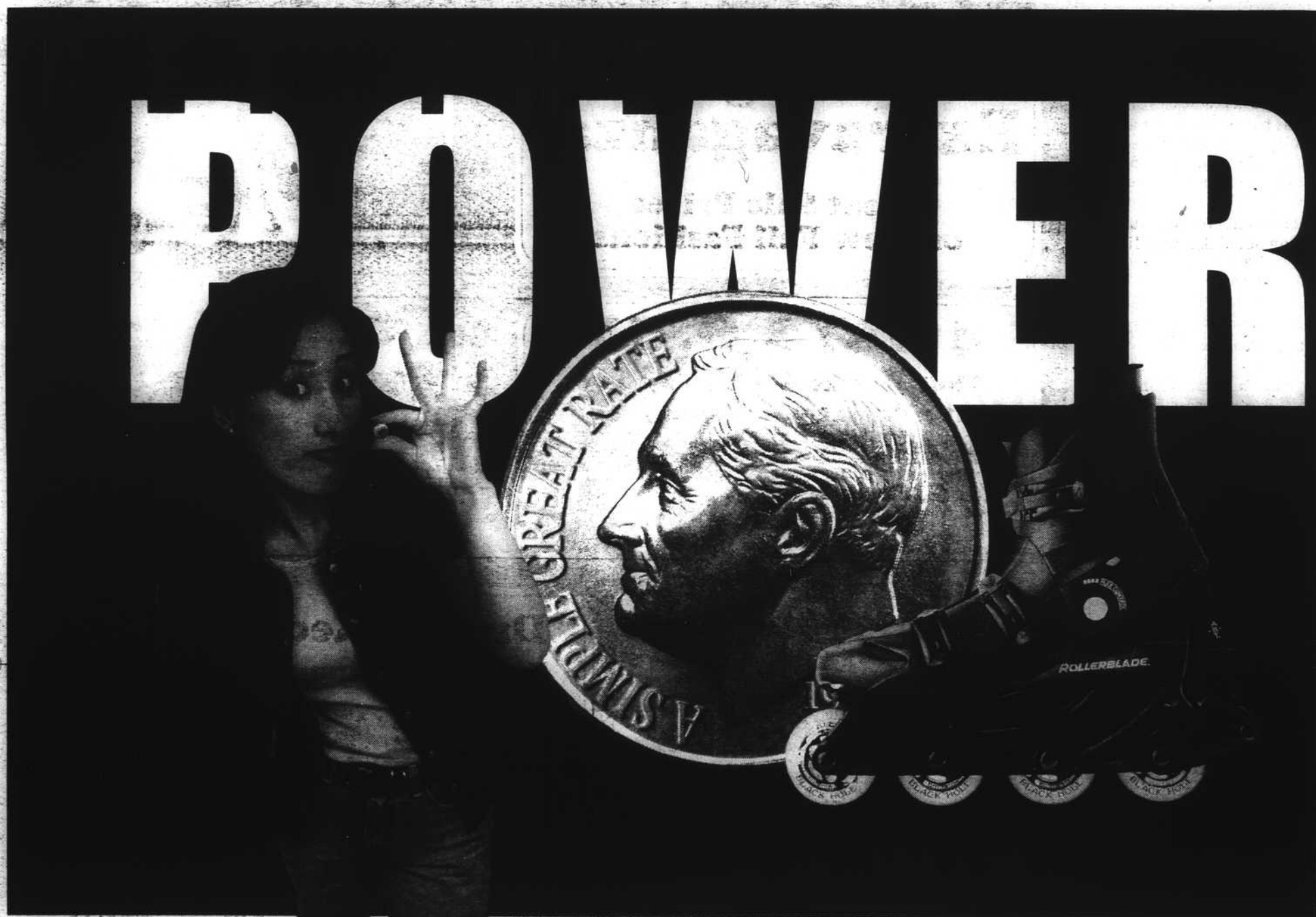
A 1.75 level is the equivalent of drinking about 11 ounces of whiskey in rapid succession.

Police sources say the wrecked car's speedometer was found stuck at 196 kilometers per hour — 121 mph — a strong indication of its speed at impact.

Despite these damning reports, George Kiejman, a lawyer representing the elder Fayed, made it clear his aim is to establish the fault of the photographers in the case.

"There is a causality between the pursuit (by paparazzi) and the accident," he said.

Prosecutors had formally asked the judge to jail two of the photographers — Rat and Martinez — indicating they felt evidence against them was most serious. But the judge did not follow their recommendation.



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