

Nation nearly incapacitated by anti-apartheid strikers

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Millions of blacks stayed away from jobs and schools Thursday, crippling factories, mines and stores in the largest anti-apartheid protest in South African history.

The nationwide strike, demanding in part that May Day be declared a national holiday, signaled a powerful new organizational strength among black workers, students and civic groups in the campaign for equal rights.

An academic monitoring group said at least 1.5 million workers, and possibly many more, struck for the day in the nation's four largest cities alone. A government spokesman also estimated at least 1 million urban black students boycotted classes for the day.

Beyond those 2.5 million strikers, there was no way to calculate how many others left school and work for the day in rural areas and the nation's 10 tribal homelands, scenes of turmoil in recent months.

The national Associated Chambers of

Commerce reported "massive absence from work" across the country, ranging from 70 to 100 percent. The black workforce is estimated at more than 6 million in a population of 24 million.

Both Vincent Brett, manpower director for the chamber, and Professor Eddie Webster, head of the academic monitor group, agreed the strike was the largest ever in South Africa.

In Port Elizabeth in eastern Cape Province, researcher Glen Adler said a survey of 86 companies showed that just six of 11,000 black employees turned up.

Thousands of mixed-race people joined the strike and many Asians closed their shops in sympathy. Supermarkets tried to cope with white staff, but checkout counters were jammed.

Transport to and from townships halted as bus, train and taxi drivers joined the strike. Most companies adopted a policy of "no work, no pay, no penalty."

Radiation levels decrease; Soviets reject offers of aid

MOSCOW (AP) — The Soviet Union told a nervous world Thursday that radiation from the nuclear plant disaster was decreasing, but one of its diplomats said other countries should not relax because the "accident is not over."

The Kremlin presented a calm face, rejecting offers of help from the United States and other countries, but an international bone-marrow transplant organization said its offer to aid victims had been accepted.

Traditional May Day parades were held as usual, including one in Kiev, the Ukrainian city of 2.4 million only 80 miles from the Chernobyl power plant where a reactor caught fire Friday. State television showed colorfully dressed folk dancers performing there.

The cause of the accident has not been revealed, but when asked Thursday if it was a meltdown of the reactor core, Soviet radiation expert Pavel Ramzaev said, "I suppose that is so."

There were conflicting reports about whether the reactor fire had been extinguished. U.S. intelligence sources had said Wednesday in Washington that it still raged and could burn for weeks.

Vitaly Churkin, second secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, testifying before a House of Representatives sub-

committee Thursday, was asked whether the fire had been put out. He said, "I don't know," and added, "The accident is not over with. That is clear. We have not told other countries that everything is OK and they can relax."

The U.S. Agriculture Department said shifting winds were carrying a radioactive plume from the stricken plant over the rich farmland of the western Ukraine and into Romania, Hungary, eastern Czechoslovakia and Austria. Poland reported less fallout than in previous days, but said radioactivity levels in water and soil remained high.

The Soviet government said only: "Efforts to implement a complex of technical measures continued at the Chernobyl nuclear power station (NPS) in the duration of April 30. The radioactivity on the territory of the NPS and the NPS' settlement dropped 1.5-2 times."

The "settlement" is Pripjat, a town of 25,000 built at the plant site.

Officially, the casualty toll is two dead and 197 injured, but Secretary of State George P. Shultz said it was higher "by good measure."

An Israeli amateur radio operator in Tel Aviv said a Soviet ham told him there were 300 casualties, but how many were dead was not clear.

Senators demand inspection of reactor

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three senators have called for a review of the Hanford, Wash., nuclear reservation's N Reactor, the only U.S. reactor which has a graphite core and no containment building.

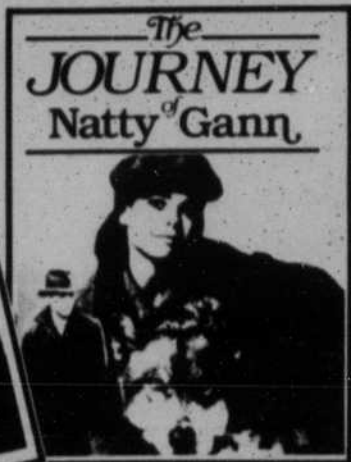
The senators' demand, in the wake of the disaster at a Soviet reactor that has some of the same design features, came Wednesday from Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., and both of Washington's senators, Republicans Slade Gorton and Dan Evans.

Meanwhile, an Oregon congressman said

that a federal Department of Energy budget request indicates the reactor's cooling system may not withstand a severe earthquake. But Hanford's operations manager said Wednesday that the request did not mean Hanford is unsafe, and noted that the request was a small part of the facility's budget.

A second Hanford document, a "Conceptual Design Report" prepared a year ago by UNC Nuclear Industries, which operates the N reactor for the DOE, warned of "serious deterioration" in valve discs at the reactor.

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