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INTERNATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

200 to 300 believed dead after plane crashes on street in Kinshasa

■ ACCIDENT: The Russian-made cargo plane was said to be almost 600 pounds overweight

KINSHASA, Zaire (AP) — A cargo plane plunged onto a busy downtown street just after take-off Monday and tore through a crowded market, mowing down cars, and people in a fiery skid that left more than 200 dead.

Smoke billowed from the wreckage as soldiers covered victims' bodies with white sheets.

As darkness fell over Kinshasa, a chaotic, crumbling city of 6 million, calls went out over national radio and television for people to donate blood. The dead filled the city's four main hospital morgues.

No official casualty count was released, but hospital workers and news reports said more than 200 people died. A U.S. Embassy official said he had unconfirmed reports from embassy sources of 300 dead.

The government said the pilot and two crew members were Russian and all three had survived the crash. It called for two days of national mourning and grounded all cargo flights until

an investigation was complete.

The largest state-run hospital in Kinshasa, Mama Yemo, had to turn away victims for lack of equipment and supplies.

"Bring your blood to save the injured. They need us to survive," Dr. Maholo Pelagie of the Kinshasa blood bank begged over state radio.

Information Minister Masegabio Nzanu said the plane, a Russian-made Antonov-32 twin-turboprop, was owned by the private cargo company African Air.

The Minister of Transportation, Bernardin Munguldeaka, told Radio Zaire that the plane was nearly 600 pounds overweight. The An-32 is designed for loads of about 10,000 pounds.

The plane had just taken off from Ndolo airport in Kinshasa when it plummeted to the ground. The plane skidded 600 feet across the street, smashing through cars and stalls in the Simba Zikita market before screeching to a stop.

The airport, used for private planes and cargo flights, is in the heart of Kinshasa, three miles from major hotels and embassies. It used to be Kinshasa's international airport.

"The plane just piled into the market," said John Escodi, a spokesman at the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa. "It was the worst possible time for that market because it was very busy and it's located right at the end of the runway, across the street from the runway."

Kinshasa is covered with such markets, sprawling open-air mazes of hawkers selling anything from live chickens to clothing. Most of the dead were on the ground, said Kamanga Mutond, a Zaire radio reporter who visited the crash scene. "The plane was totally destroyed," he said.

The crash was the second in two months involving a Zaire-based cargo plane, and the sixth west African crash.

On Dec. 18, a jet operated by Zaire's Trans Service Airlift, a charter company, crashed in Angola, killing at least 136 people.

On Dec. 3, a Cameroon Airlines Boeing 737 on a commercial flight slammed into swamps while trying to land at Cameroon's international airport, and 72 people died. Three Nigerian jets also have crashed in recently, the latest in November.

Champion of European unity dies at 79

■ PRESIDENT: Francois Mitterrand's death is mourned by leaders world-wide

PARIS (AP) — Francois Mitterrand, a leading architect of European unity who promoted France's role on the world stage, died of prostate cancer Monday at 79. World leaders remembered him as a great statesman — and a friend.

President of France from 1981 to 1995, Mitterrand abandoned his Socialist vision after determining that his country would remain a world power only within a strong Europe.

His vision of a unified Europe and a nagging recession led him to cast off dreams of nationalizing broad sectors of French industry and to push instead for European economic integration.

Mitterrand worked tirelessly with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to construct the European Union, forging a much-debated Maastricht Treaty that calls for a single currency, and common defense and foreign policies among member countries.

"I am mourning a good friend. We worked together in a close and trusting way for many years in the building of Europe and the deepening of German-French friendship," Kohl said. "Europe has lost a great statesman."

Mitterrand also sought to project a strong French presence on the international stage, sending troops to Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia and the Persian Gulf.

"Not only France, but the United States and the entire world, benefited from his strong and principled leadership," President Clinton said in a statement.

In Houston, former President George Bush called him "one of the great leaders of our time."

"He was a man of his word and I had great respect for his intellect and for his innate sense of decency," Bush said. "He was my friend, and I will miss him very much."

Conservative rival Jacques Chirac, who succeeded Mitterrand as president, said he "wrote an important page in the history of our country ... He made the concept of Europe progress with determination."

Mitterrand's reputation, like his health, declined swiftly in the last year of his presidency as unflattering disclosures tarnished his image.

Books and articles chronicled his work with Nazi sympathizers in World War II, confirmed he fathered an illegitimate daughter and depicted him as a schemer with few abiding political values beyond a thirst for power.

Indian rebel leader's appearance stirs hope

■ FORUM: Advocate's public support turns media's light on fight for indigenous rights

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, Mexico (AP) — Supporters of Indian rights welcomed a reclusive rebel leader's first appearance in nearly two years as a boost for their fight.

Supporters cheered "Viva Marcos!" and punched the air with fists as Subcomandante Marcos, leader of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, arrived late Sunday at a week-long forum on indigenous rights. He was expected to speak again later Monday.

Organizers say Marcos' participation will add glamour and

prestige to the movement to improve the lives of Mexico's more than 7 million Indians.

"Marcos being here turns the problem of the Indians into a national problem," anthropologist Carlota Botey said Monday. "Unfortunately, the media doesn't pay any attention to the indigenous question without his presence."

Calling the forum "a bridge that we have to build to give birth to new worlds," Marcos told the several hundred participants, mostly of mixed Indian and European descent, to push for Indians' demands.

"Two years ago, on this same ground, the dignity of Indians woke up and woke us up," Marcos said late Sunday, appearing in his trademark ski mask.

In response to rebels' demands, the forum was set up by legislators, who are mediating the peace talks between the rebels and the government.

"It creates a space in which the Zapatista Army can participate in the reform of the state in a peaceful way," said Jose Narro Cespedes, a member of the legislative mediation commission.

Peace talks that resume Wednesday are expected to result in small-scale reforms for the southern state of Chiapas, where the rebels draw their support.

The mostly Maya-descended rebels rose up two years ago, demanding social services and democratic reforms. At least 145 people died in fighting.