

Chechen charged in slaying of 6 red cross workers

By Susan Sachs=(c) 1998, Newsday

MOSCOW -- Chechen officials Monday named the man they say is responsible for the murder of six foreign Red Cross aid workers 13 months ago -- a Chechen who denied the specific charge but freely admitted he champions restored Russian control over the separatist republic.

In a statement issued in the capital of Grozny, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov said 37-year-old Adam Deniyev organized the killings -- the heaviest loss of life ever sustained by the staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross -- at the behest of the Russian security services.

"At present, Deniyev is staying in Moscow, where he has been given an office," said the Chechen statement, as quoted by the Interfax news agency. "All the required conditions have been created for him to carry on his activities."

The Chechens demanded that Russia turn over Deniyev to them for trial. But, based on Deniyev's comfortable Moscow surroundings and his devotion to the cause of Russian domination of Chechnya, it seems unlikely that he would be so sacrificed.

Interviewed in his modern west Moscow office, Deniyev said the separatist government in Grozny has accused him of the Red Cross murders only to discredit his opposition to Maskhadov.

Whether his self-proclaimed movement, called "Adamalla," or

Humanity, has any clout among Chechens is doubtful, and Deniyev himself is a character of much mystery and self-created myth.

He claims to have "the gift of prophecy," to be a descendant of the Muslim prophet Mohammed, and to receive money from unnamed "Chechen businessmen" to distribute videos and leaflets proclaiming himself the savior of Chechnya.

Deniyev called Russia "a great country" and dismissed Maskhadov, who was elected last January, as a "terrorist" and a "bandit." He scoffed at the idea of an independent Chechnya, the goal for which tens of thousands of Chechens died in a brutal three-year war with Russia that ended in 1996, and denied he receives any money or support from Russia's intelligence services.

"We are trying to revive the spirit of humanism," said Deniyev, outfitted in a broad-shouldered, double-breasted suit and guarded by at least 10 young men in turtleneck sweaters and boxy sports coats. "I am the plenipotentiary head of the Muslim world. Could such a person as I am have anything to do with harming a human being, an animal or anything in nature?"

In an attack that prompted the Red Cross and all other foreign aid organizations to pull out of Chechnya, gunmen entered a Red Cross field hospital in the village of Novye Atagi near Grozny and shot five women -- two Norwegian, one Spanish, one New Zealander and one Canadian -- and a Dutchman in their beds.

Santeria religion sees statue in different light

By Mark Fineman=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

SANTIAGO, Cuba — Pope John Paul II gently placed a tiny, jewel-encrusted crown on the 18-inch-high figure before him, then lovingly draped a golden rosary on her hand. And with that simple act in a public square at noon Saturday, tens of thousands of Cubans erupted in unison:

"Long live our Virgin of Charity! Long live our patron saint! Love live the queen of Cuba!"

It was a moment that electrified Cuba's Roman Catholics, bringing tears of joy to a multitude of believers, from this eastern city to the nation's capital, 625 miles to the west.

But in the same instant that the pope crowned the beloved saint of Cuba's Catholic believers, his blessing also swept through the souls of millions of Cubans who have never prayed to Jesus Christ.

For them, the small wooden figure in Santiago's Antonio Maceo Plaza was not the Virgin Mary — who, legend has it, miraculously appeared to three fishermen just above the waves off the Cuban coast nearly 400 years ago, becoming a singular symbol of faith for Cuba's devout Catholics.

For them — the followers of the Afro-Cuban religion Santeria — the statue is Ochun, the flirtatious deity who was sent by Orofi across the oceans from Central Africa to protect the slaves in the copper mines and cane fields of the New World.

And for them, the pope had crowned Santeria's goddess of beauty, sexuality, promiscuity and the river, one of the main Orisha deities presiding over a religion that guides the lives of millions here.

At the moment of coronation, Aurora Ibanez Sanchez, 73, clutched the yellow Santeria beads around her neck and burst out crying. "Ochun is my mother," she said later. "She is also the Virgin of Charity."

The parallel faiths — and the occasional ironies in their juxtaposition — are among the world's most curious forms of religious syncretism, a convergence of religious iconography, born out of colonial repression, that flourished through 400 years of Spanish rule and 30 years when Communist Cuba was officially an atheist state.

But Saturday's simultaneous papal coronation of patron saint and pagan goddess came amid a broad and growing political debate within Cuba's Catholic Church about whether — or how — to separate Catholicism from Afro-Cuban religions that have a powerful hold on Cuba's deeply spiritual culture.

At a time when the pope's visit already has galvanized and emboldened the church, the debate is a critical one for the Cuban clergy and the future of their church after the pope leaves Cuba Sunday.

For the church, separating the faiths or trying to co-opt Santeria risks alienating millions of Cubans. But Cuba's prelate, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, appears to be running that risk.

Adopting a distinctly conservative line toward Santeria and several other Afro-Cuban sects, which include Yoruba, Palo Mayombe and the secret Society of Abakua, Ortega has sought to play down Santeria's influence and power.

"Journalists ask us whether 'African cults' constitute the biggest religion in Cuba," the cardinal said in a homily in July. "Setting apart the confusion between beliefs and folklore on the one hand and true religious faith on the other, if they will ask us which is the strongest religion in Cuba, I would not hesitate in saying that it is the church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, that of Peter and Paul."

At a news conference last week, the cardinal took a more conciliatory tone. He stressed that he views adherents of Santeria and other sects as an integral part of Cuba's Catho-

Brawl erupts over war crimes photo exhibit

By Mary Williams Walsh=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

BERLIN — Hundreds of neo-Nazis and left-wing protesters battled one another with stones and fists on a train in eastern Germany on Saturday, in a brawl connected with a traveling photo exhibit documenting war crimes committed by the German army during World War II.

Police said that eight people were hurt in the clash and that the train — full of unsuspecting passengers when it was beset by neo-Nazis throwing rocks — was damaged but able to keep rolling after about 100 officers were called in to break up the fight.

The controversial photo exhibition, which has been touring Germany for more than two years, has triggered protests before. The criticism often

comes from elderly German veterans

who argue that the Wehrmacht was, on the whole, a "clean" and "honorable" army and that the mass murders of Jews, Gypsies and other non-combatants on the Eastern Front during World War II were the work of Hitler's fanatical SS forces.

Some of the biggest protests took place in March, when the photos arrived in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, Germany's conservative heartland. Neo-Nazis staged one of their largest rallies ever, veterans charged that the photos were faked, and even mainstream conservative politicians denounced the show.

After that, officials elsewhere in Germany debated whether to cancel the show's stops in their cities. But it has kept traveling with notably few disturbances until its arrival in the

stately old city of Dresden.

Saturday's clash appears to have stemmed from recent calls issued by right-wing leaders urging their followers to converge on the city. One of the most resounding battle cries came from Manfred Roeder, an elderly neo-Nazi leader who was convicted in 1982 on terrorism charges for involvement in a firebombing that led to the deaths of two Vietnamese.

His latest rallying cry directed at neo-Nazis, along with the other appeals like it, attracted about 1,400 skinheads and other far-right demonstrators to Dresden on Saturday. Carrying Iron Cross banners and other German-nationalist paraphernalia, they rallied in front of the city's ornate opera house, railing that the photo exhibition "defamed the honor of German soldiers."

Their presence, in turn, attracted hundreds of left-wing counterdemonstrators to protest neo-Nazism and xenophobia in front of City Hall.

About 3,000 police were deployed in the city to keep the two groups apart. But the authorities couldn't be everywhere, and about 60 neo-Nazis were able to stake out the train station in the nearby town of Wurzen and intercept the train from Leipzig as it made a stop, loaded with about 300 left-wing counterdemonstrators.

When the neo-Nazis began stoning the train, the driver tried to pull out of the station, police said, but someone pulled the emergency brake. The train stopped again, and the left-wing protesters jumped down and began battling the neo-Nazis on the tracks and in the passenger cars.

Santeria requires that its priests and priestesses be baptized as Catholics. Santeria also includes its own brand of spiritual Masses. But there are few other liturgical similarities.

"What happened was the slaves brought their own deities from Africa, but they had to hide them from the dominant class," said Natalia Bolivar, a prominent Cuban anthropologist and author of eight books on the subject. "So the people began to mask their deities within the images of the Catholic saints."

"But they only masked them. It was a self-defense of their gods. It was not true syncretism."

Bolivar is especially critical of the cardinal and the daily practices of the church, in which parish priests and nuns in the sanctuaries that hold the most sacred icons of Santeria have been advised to discourage Afro-Cuban worship.

For example, at Havana's sanctuary of Santa Barbara, whose mirror image is the god Chango, Father Oscar Perez was compelled by official church policy to raise half a dozen

Protestant terrorist group ends campaign of reprisal shootings

By John Burgess=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

LONDON — An outlawed Protestant terrorist group said Friday it had ended a campaign of reprisal shootings in Northern Ireland. That announcement was followed a few hours later by another shooting death in the capital city of Belfast.

The Ulster Freedom Fighters had not previously admitted taking part in an almost month-long string of shootings that have threatened the province's all-party peace negotiations. But in statements faxed to news organizations Friday, the group said it had been mounting a "measured military response" to attacks by Catholic groups. "That response is now concluded," the statement said.

It was not immediately clear who carried out the subsequent attack in which police said a man was shot and killed. Local press reports identified

Havana. There, Maria Elena Garcia Castro, a Spanish Cuban nun, has lived with the convergence of the faiths every day for eight years.

San Lazaro the saint and Babalu Aye the deity present themselves to believers through similar statues in separate shrines in the church. Both help the suffering, the pained, the handicapped and the infirm. The San Lazaro figure in the center of the church draws the Catholics; an almost identical image to the left draws the devotees of Babalu Aye.

"People offer hair, fingernails, cigars, rum, even goats. Last year, I received four goats in one day," Sister Maria Elena said of the Babalu Aye shrine as she stood beside its altar.

"This religion, Santeria, implies fear, superstition and animosity," she said as hundreds of pilgrims who had traveled from throughout Cuba prayed at the shrine to San Lazaro-Babalu Aye recently.

At least a dozen times a day, devotees of both faiths approach the nun to bless plastic or glass bottles filled with water from the spring behind the church. She follows each blessing with orders that the water is to be placed in wounds, not drunk or sprinkled about as it is in Santeria.

"This is a sanctuary to San Lazaro, the friend of the sick. Our mission is to centralize the Christian faith," she said. "The idea is to help them understand that the saints are intermediaries between the people and God. They are not gods in and of themselves."

the man as a Catholic.

The Loyalist Volunteer Force, another Protestant group which has claimed responsibility for some of the recent shootings, has not announced a halt to the violence.

The Ulster Democratic Party, which represents the Ulster Freedom Fighters at the peace talks, has faced possible expulsion from the negotiations because the rules admit only parties whose armed allies are maintaining a cease-fire.

Party official John White told Sky News television Friday that the group's statement had "averted a major disaster," adding that "the Ulster Democratic Party has always been opposed to violence and I hope that this will create a situation where there will be no opposition to our involvement in the talks process."

Talks are due to resume Monday in London. Officials hope that the change from Belfast will inject some

Suicide attempts fuel virginity-test debate

By Kelly Couturier=Special to The Washington Post

ANKARA, Turkey -- The importance of the virginity of an unmarried girl to a family's honor goes to the heart of Turkey's traditional moral code. But recent suicide attempts by five girls seeking to avoid a forced virginity examination -- and a strong defense of the practice by the government's women's affairs minister -- has sparked a public outcry.

Women's rights activists were infuriated when Isilay Saygin, state minister in charge of female and family affairs, defended mandated medical examinations to verify the virginity of girls in state-run foster homes. That Saygin, a woman, is prepared to uphold the state's involvement in a practice that has caused much anguish to some young women is particularly offensive, in the view of several women's groups.

The case of the five girls who attempted suicide after the director of their state foster home ordered them to undergo virginity tests when they returned late to their dormitories one night has fueled a campaign elsewhere in the government, led by Human Rights Minister Hikmet Sami Turk, to ban such tests, except in court cases involving sex crimes.

"Being a virgin bride signifies a woman's purity and her loyalty to the family," said sociologist Dilek Cindoglu, who has researched virgin-

ity testing in Turkey. In Turkish society, "patriarchal control over women's bodies has been reproduced through honor and shame codes," she has written.

The phenomenon of virginity testing and the social norms behind it exist, paradoxically, in a country where women were granted the right to vote before many of their Western European counterparts; have equal legal rights to men in the areas of marriage, child custody, inheritance and property ownership; and have reached high offices, including that of prime minister.

Physicians interviewed in one study said many young women seek the tests themselves. Some interpret this as an indication of the pressure many women feel in a society in which an unmarried woman discovered not to be a virgin risks being ostracized by her family or losing a chance to get married. In more-conservative communities, she risks being beaten or killed.

Human Rights Watch reported finding that virginity exams are forced on female political prisoners as well as common criminal suspects, and said it found evidence of such exams being performed on hospital patients and state foster-home residents.

The five girls involved in the suicide attempts, ages 12-16, took rat poison and then jumped into a water tank rather than face the tests. They survived and the virginity tests were carried out in their hospital beds.