

ROMANIAN INJURED IN UK PARLIAMENT TERROR ATTACK DIES

LONDON: A Romanian woman who fell into the River Thames during last month's terror attack outside the British parliament has died in hospital, police said yesterday, bringing the toll to five. Andreea Cristea, 31, was visiting London with her partner Andrei Burnaz, who intended to propose to her later that day, according to Romanian ambassador Dan Mihalache. She was knocked from Westminster Bridge as the attacker ploughed through pedestrians on March 22.

Life support for Cristea was withdrawn on Thursday, the police said. "There are no words to even begin to describe the crushing pain and emptiness that is left in our hearts," her family and partner said in a statement. Khalid Masood, a 52-year-old convert to Islam known to the security services, drove at high speed into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge before launching a frenzied knife attack on a policeman guarding the parliament building.

The rampage killed Leslie Rhodes, 75, a retired window cleaner; Aysha Frade, 44, a school administrator; Kurt Cochran, 54, an American tourist, and now Cristea. Masood fatally stabbed 48-year-old policeman Keith Palmer outside the House of Commons before being shot dead himself by an armed officer in the forecourt.

Brutally ripped away

"Our beloved and irreplaceable Andreea-wonderful daughter, sister, partner, dedicated friend and the most unique and life-loving person you can imagine-was cruelly and brutally ripped away from our lives in the most heartless and spiritless way," Cristea's family and partner said. "She will always be remembered as our shining ray of light that will forever keep on shining in our hearts.

"Andreea is now unfortunately not able to have

part of the money that was raised for her recovery, so we would like to donate it to charity. She would not have it any other way." London Mayor Sadiq Khan said he was deeply saddened by Cristea's death. "Londoners hold her and her loved ones in our thoughts," he said. Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, England's highest cleric, tweeted: "Let us pray hope and comfort for her family".

Partner's rose tribute

Footage of the attack, in which around 50 people were injured, showed Masood's hire car speeding into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and Cristea falling into the river below. Witnesses reported seeing a body lying face-down in the Thames in the wake of the assault. After being taken from the water and rushed to hospital for treatment, Cristea underwent surgery for a blood clot on the brain. —AFP



PRETORIA: Demonstrators protest against South African President Jacob Zuma outside the union building in Pretoria, South Africa, yesterday. — AP

SOUTH AFRICANS PROTEST AGAINST ZUMA; VIOLENCE HITS JOHANNESBURG

POLICE FIRE RUBBER BULLETS, TEAR GAS AT ANC SUPPORTERS

JOHANNESBURG: Violence broke out in Johannesburg as more than 30,000 people marched in South African cities to protest against President Jacob Zuma yesterday, demanding he quit after a cabinet reshuffle triggered the latest crisis of his presidency. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at some African National Congress protesters in Johannesburg, injuring a man and a woman, a Reuters witness said. Police were trying to prevent the ANC supporters from breaching a cordon separating them from backers of the opposition Democratic Alliance party.

The DA, which had called for the marches, held a rally of more than 10,000 people a few streets away that was calm. Zuma's sacking of Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan in the reshuffle last Thursday has outraged allies and opponents alike, undermined his authority and caused rifts in the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which has governed South Africa since the end of white-minority rule in 1994. Rating

agency S&P Global Ratings cited Gordhan's dismissal as one reason for its downgrade of South Africa to "junk" in an unscheduled review on Monday.

Syriana Maesela, 65, a retiree, was on her way by train to Pretoria to join the march, carrying a South African flag. "I am marching to get the ANC to take us seriously and respect our wishes by letting the president go," she said. "We are unhappy about his leadership because he does not seem to care about the people. "The irony is I did the same thing in 1976 when I was a student. I also marched then," she said, referring to protests against the apartheid regime.

The incessant blare of "vuvuzela" trumpets stirred the 5,000-strong crowds. Hundreds of motorbikes, many waving South Africa's flag, roared past the crowd, who cheered them on. Motorists and passengers pumped their fists in the air. Zuma has welcomed one of the marches, by the civil society group Save South Africa (SaveSA) that was planned for out-

side the Union Buildings, the site of Zuma's offices in the capital, Pretoria, saying it was the group's legal right to do so.

SaveSA is made up of civil society groups, business leaders and prominent individuals. Zuma, 74, has faced protests in the past. The ANC on Wednesday rejected calls for Zuma to quit, and analysts doubted marches would shake the president. The ANC said its members in parliament would vote to defeat a motion of no confidence against Zuma on April 18, a key rallying call for the marchers yesterday.

And Zuma supporters also gathered. About 300 camouflage-clad veterans of the ANC's now-disbanded Umkhonto we Sizwe (MKMVA) military wing ringed the party's Luthuli House building in downtown Johannesburg, mounting mock parades and singing in support of the president. Some clad in the yellow, green and gold colors of the ANC also danced, waving placards emblazoned with the words: "I'm prepared to die for my ANC" and "Hands off our President". —Reuters

KOSOVO BOWS TO US, NATO PUTS OFF PLAN TO CREATE ARMY

PRISTINA: Kosovo President Hashim Thaci bowed to pressure from traditional allies the United States and NATO yesterday by putting off plans to establish an army strongly opposed by the country's minority Serbs. Nearly two decades after the Kosovo war, relations between Serbia and the ethnic Albanian-majority government in Kosovo remain strained. Serbia continues to regard Kosovo, which declared independence in 2008, as a renegade province.

Thaci last month found a way to bypass Serb opposition in parliament to constitutional amendments required for an army by drafting changes to an existing law on the Kosovo Security Forces that would allow the KSF to acquire heavy weapons. This would effectively turn it into a military force. But Washington and NATO, which has kept forces in Kosovo since intervening in 1999 to stop Serbia's killings of ethnic Albanian civilians in a counter-insurgency campaign, voiced concern that the move could unravel Kosovo's fragile peace.

The Pristina government ordered the creation of a national army in 2014 but minority Serb deputies said they would block the required constitutional amendments. Yesterday, Thaci - a former Kosovo guerrilla commander - sent a letter to parliament asking it not to vote on his amendments so as to allow Western diplomats more time to convince Serbs to approve the amendments.

"The representatives of the Serb community should not think for any single second that Kosovo will not create its armed forces," Thaci told a conference in the capital Pristina attended by the US ambassador and other West European envoys. The KSF is currently a lightly armed, 2,500-member force trained by NATO and tasked with crisis response, civil protection and disposal of ordnance from the 1999 conflict. —Reuters

BOKO HARAM KILLS NIGERIAN TROOPS AFTER RAID ON FARMERS

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: Boko Haram jihadists have killed four soldiers in an ambush in northeast Nigeria, where they torched an army base a day after killing seven civilians, a soldier and witnesses said. "Our men came under attack near Gubdori village yesterday," the soldier said, asking not to be named. "We lost four men in the ambush. Five were injured and four are still missing." The Islamists opened fire on an army convoy heading to the small town of Gulumba in Borno state, he added.

Military reinforcements came from the town and the attackers "were forced to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties". The assailants came from the Boko Haram faction headed by Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, son of the sect's founder Mohammed Yusuf, the soldier added, in an account confirmed by two vigilantes. Barnawi was appointed last year by the Islamic State group to replace veteran Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. Jihadists also attacked the military base in Wajirko village, 150 kilometers from Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, forcing the soldiers to flee. "The gunmen arrived in pickups and engaged soldiers in the base just outside the village in a heavy shootout," Wajirko resident Bukar Maduye said. —AFP