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Local & National

Man, 45, held over pub massacre

Tuesday, July 01, 2008

By Lesley-Anne Henry

A 45-year-old man was being held by police last night in connection with the Loughnisland massacre 14 years ago.

The man, who was arrested in England, was being quizzed about the murder of six men and the attempted murder of five others at the Heights Bar in June 1994.

The victims, all Catholics aged between 34 and 87, were killed when UVF gunmen opened fire inside the Co Down pub while locals were watching the Republic of Ireland play Italy in a World Cup match. The terrorists, thought to have been linked to the notorious Mount Vernon gang, sprayed the bar with more than 170 bullets.

One of the victims, 87-year-old Barney Green, was one of the oldest people to be murdered during the Troubles. Eamon Byrne (39), Malcolm Jenkinson (54), Daniel McCreanor (59), Patrick O'Hare (35) and Adrian Rogan (34) were also murdered.

Last night a PSNI spokeswoman said the arrested man was in custody and was " helping police with their enquiries" at the serious crime suite in Antrim.

It is understood the arrest was part of a joint operation between the PSNI's serious crime branch and officers from Kent Police.

To date no one has been convicted of the killings. The victims' families have accused the security forces of collusion.

Earlier this year the families formally complained to Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman about serious flaws in the police investigation. And just last week the Al Hutchinson's office said it had completed its report into the atrocity.

The families had asked the Ombudsman to probe a number of controversies, particularly shortcomings in forensic techniques used to try to catch the killer gang and the RUC decision to destroy the getaway car, two years after the massacre.

The families, who have taken their case to Brussels, also expressed concerns about recent claims that a police agent codenamed the Mechanic was believed to have supplied the car.

They had called for an inquiry into the link between the Czech-made VZ rifle used in the attack and the arms shipment brought to Northern Ireland from South Africa by loyalists, including UDA member and British agent Brian Nelson. A full report on the Ombudsman's findings is expected within the next few months.

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