

## World and Nation

### Soldiers seize Noriega headquarters

From Associated Press reports

PANAMA CITY, Panama — Soldiers opposed to Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega seized his headquarters Tuesday in an attempt to oust him as army commander and Panama's effective ruler, but loyalists counterattacked.

The rebels' claim to have overthrown Noriega could not be confirmed, and the White House said U.S. authorities, who have tried to push him out for nearly two years, could not confirm it.

Noriega's whereabouts were not known.

Jose Blandon, a Panamanian defector and former close aide to Noriega, said in Washington a leader of the assault told him by telephone Noriega was wounded and captured.

He said officers intended to send Noriega to the United States to face drug charges, but that it would be difficult because other officers in the De-

fense Forces, which includes the military and police, also were involved in the drug trade.

There were no official reports of casualties, but residents of the neighborhood told The Associated Press dead and wounded following hours of shooting.

Troops of the U.S. Southern Command were put on Delta Alert, the highest level of readiness, and U.S. soldiers in combat gear took up positions only 600 yards from the barracks.

President Bush told reporters in Washington: "There were rumors around that this was some American operation and I can tell you that is not true. Nobody's sure what's happening there."

A broadcast on national radio at 11:30 a.m. said Noriega had been toppled, but forces loyal to him said they were "ready to give their lives" in resistance. A

loyalist spokesman said the general still controlled substantial armed forces.

Shooting began with a few bursts of fire at about 7 a.m. (8 a.m. EDT).

Rebels took control of the headquarters of the Panamanian Defense Forces in a congested part of downtown Panama City. Those loyal to Noriega then mounted the roofs of surrounding buildings, hurling grenades and firing mortars and small arms into the compound.

Several hours of heavy gunfire inside and outside the headquarters preceded the radio report, which said the entire high command was forced into retirement by middle-ranking officers led by Maj. Moises Giraldi Vega, head of the Urquiza battalion that handles security at Defense Forces headquarters.

From the U.S. Southern Command's Quarry Heights post less than a mile

from the Panamanian barracks, spokeswoman Mercedes Morris said: "The firing is continuing at this moment; right now, right now, there is firing. We can hear automatic weapons, hand grenades and other heavy detonations."

About 12,000 U.S. soldiers are stationed in Panama, many within 5 miles of Panama City. All U.S. civilian dependents were moved onto U.S. military installations July 1 because of violence that followed Panamanian elections held May 7. Noriega, who has been indicted in the United States on drug charges, nullified the results of the vote, which showed the opposition winning.

The radio said the communiqué announcing the coup was signed by Giraldi, Capt. Javier Licona of the cavalry and Capt. Jesus George Balma of the special forces.

ministrations have worked closely together during the last 10 months. They show what can and must be done to make relations between our two great nations even closer than they are today."

### Refugees try to break through West German embassy gates

From Associated Press reports

PRAGUE, Czechoslovakia — Some East Germans were left blood-spattered and unconscious at the West German Embassy Tuesday as nearly 300 of the most desperate fought police, broke through barricades and scaled a fence in their bid for freedom.

"This is pandemonium," said a Red Cross assistant helping injured refugees on the embassy grounds.

Officials closed the embassy early Tuesday, leaving nearly 1,000 people stranded outside the baroque Lobkowicz Palace that houses it.

Between 4,000 and 5,000 people, including some 1,500 children, were packed into the compound at the time, and Red Cross officials feared sanitation problems.

Shortly after noon, the desperation peaked. Witnesses saw groups of newcomers rush toward the fence of the compound, which was blocked by a police barricade.

When police tried to stop them, the refugees pulled down the barricade. Police resorted to their truncheons. "They clubbed like mad," a Czechoslovakian eyewitness reported.

In addition, the administration is urging Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko to pay a quick visit to Washington this week, in hopes of arranging a reconciliation meeting with Savimbi. Mobutu, who has helped funnel U.S. arms to Savimbi's Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), appears to have shifted his allegiance in recent weeks, openly supporting Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

The U.S. diplomatic efforts are designed to head off a final collapse of Zairean-mediated truce accords reached last June.

### News in Brief

### Soviet lawmakers reject Gorbachev plan

From Associated Press reports

MOSCOW — President Mikhail Gorbachev suffered his first major policy defeat in the 4-month-old Soviet legislature Tuesday when it rejected his call for an emergency ban on workers' new right to strike.

But Gorbachev told lawmakers he was satisfied with a compromise that imposes a selective ban on strikes in critical industries. He said it would "help restore a normal life."

Gorbachev said Monday that he wanted a ban on all strikes for the next 15 months to prevent anarchy from overwhelming the shaky Soviet economy. A wave of strikes, largely over ethnic and political conflicts, cost the country \$6.5 billion in July and August alone.

Strikes were ruthlessly suppressed

for decades until Gorbachev began his effort to turn the country from a dictatorship into one ruled by law. It was only last year that workers began to succeed in pressuring for change by walking off the job.

It was the first time the new Supreme Soviet legislature stood up to the government and opted for its own policy, though it had previously rejected several Cabinet nominees. The legislature's display of independence was particularly significant because it came on a package of emergency measures.

The compromise resolution, adopted by a vote of 364-6, prohibits strikes in the transport, energy, raw materials and metallurgy industries, but only until the legislature passes a detailed law defining the right to strike.

That could be as soon as Monday,

the next session of the full legislature. Nearly half the articles in the strike law were approved Tuesday.

The more controversial sections, which have yet to face floor debate, would ban strikes that threaten human life or health, as well as any aimed at overthrow of the government or violation of ethnic equality. It also would ban strikes in the transportation, communications, energy and defense industries, and among civil servants.

The draft also requires arbitration before a strike and allows the Supreme Soviet or its ruling Presidium to halt or delay strikes. It also says those found responsible for a strike can be fined and fined up to three months' pay to help cover economic damages. It does not define responsibility, leaving open the possibility that managers who fail to

resolve labor disputes could be held as guilty as strike leaders.

All of these points still await debate. The adopted emergency resolution also permits the country's ministries of interior, defense and transport to guarantee operation of the railroads in Armenia and Azerbaijan if necessary to get rail traffic moving again to Armenia.

Strikers in Azerbaijan motivated by ethnic demands created a virtual economic blockade of Armenia by interfering with shipments on the main rail and road lines to the neighboring republic. Armenia and Azerbaijan are locked in a conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has also been hit by lengthy strikes.

Trains ship about 80 percent of the goods Armenia receives.

Washington — President Bush and Mexican President Carlos Salinas De Gortari on Tuesday pledged mutual trust and understanding on cross-boundary issues, agreeing to conduct trade negotiations and to clean up Mexico City and Tijuana pollution.

To mark Salinas' visit to Washington, the two governments signed seven agreements on trade, the environment, investments and tourism.

Bush said the agreements "are concrete examples of how our ad-

### Angolan factions meet in U.S.

WASHINGTON — Angola's Marxist government and the U.S.-armed rebels opposing it are waging their battle in Washington's public relations arena this week.

The Bush administration is holding open house for both sides, scheduling meetings with Angolan Foreign Minister Pedro van Dunem — despite the absence of diplomatic relations with his government — and a White House visit with President Bush for Jonas Savimbi, leader of the Angolan rebels.

In addition, the administration is urging Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko to pay a quick visit to Washington this week, in hopes of arranging a reconciliation meeting with Savimbi. Mobutu, who has helped funnel U.S. arms to Savimbi's Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), appears to have shifted his allegiance in recent weeks, openly supporting Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

The U.S. diplomatic efforts are designed to head off a final collapse of Zairean-mediated truce accords reached last June.

### Repeal of Medicare expansion looks likely

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — House members moved toward a likely repeal vote on catastrophic health insurance Tuesday after months of criticism from elderly Americans upset with bearing the costs.

Although the program, the first major expansion of Medicare in two decades, was enacted just a year ago in a rush of bipartisan fervor, its main House proponents acknowledged heading into Tuesday's sundown showdown that the best they hoped for was to salvage a sliver of the new benefits.

As with most major legislation, however, the final resolution awaited negotiations with the Senate, which is expected to deal with the political hot potato on its own later in the week.

At stake were significant new hospital and doctor-bill benefits for 33 million elderly and disabled Americans covered by Medicare.

Many of the benefits do not take effect until January.

The cry for repeal came from three quarters:

- retirees who complained their former employers were already giving them additional benefits they were being forced to purchase from Medicare;

- upper-income retirees who objected to having to pay a disproportionate share of the costs — in the form of an income tax surcharge — to make up for a more modest assessment on the estimated 56 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who don't have enough money to owe any income taxes; and

- those who complained that the program did not address the main need of elderly Americans: insurance for nursing home and other long-term care, a benefit that many studies have said would be as much as 10 times as costly.

Ironically, House leaders said legislators' painful experience with this run at a major expansion of acute care health protection probably would make them

less inclined to pursue even more costly programs for the elderly in the future.

"Future programs are going to have to be more carefully considered," House Speaker Thomas Foley told reporters shortly before debate began on the proposal to repeal catastrophic health insurance.

Earlier, he had described a "mood of frustration" as settling over House health policy leaders.

Indeed, Rep. Fortney Stark, D-Calif., a major force behind the catastrophic program, said Monday, "I think they (lawmakers) feel they'd just like to get rid of this annoyance and they certainly are going to be very skeptical when I come to them in the future with a bill to help the senior citizens."

He said catastrophic care supporters "lost the information battle" to groups that preyed on the fears of the elderly.

"It's very easy to take very fragile, very insecure seniors who are easily confused and confuse them even further."

Rep. Steve Gunderson, R-Wis., illustrated that point in a brief speech explaining his intention to vote for repeal even before formal debate began. He said he had received 2,172 letters urging repeal and one supporting the program.

Rep. Bill Paxton, R-N.Y., said his office received 3,807 letters urging repeal.

The Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act was aimed at protecting the elderly and disabled from financial ruin in the event of a prolonged hospital stay or other high medical costs.

The program pays for unlimited approved hospitalization after a once-a-year deductible of \$560 in 1989.

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