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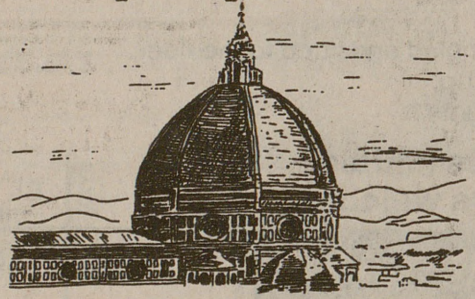
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Contraband traffickers possess rare plants Officials seize cacti samples

LA PAZ, Mexico (AP) — Environmental officials have reported seizing 1,500 samples of rare and endangered cactus species from traffickers in contraband, the government news agency Notimex said.

Graciela de la Garza, director of ecological conservation said traffickers intended to ship the plants out of the country, Notimex reported Sunday.

She said more than 600 plants were seized in Cuautla, 50 miles south of Mexico City. The cacti had been uprooted in five states around the country, the news agency reported.

De la Garza said another batch of stolen cactus was confiscated in Cuatro Ciénegas in the northern state of Coahuila.

Gorbachev

(Continued from page 1)

the republics' independence campaigns.

Gorbachev has said the republics are free to pursue independence, but insists they do so in accordance with Soviet constitutional guidelines

"Moscow is sort of trying to find common ground. The very fact that they (Soviet leaders) are conversing with us on the basis that we are not revoking the 11th of March (declaration) is the movement."

— Algimantas Cekoulis, Supreme Council consultant

that were set down in April and require a referendum, legislative approval and a wait of up to five years.

Presidents Vytautas Landsbergis and Lithuanians into the Soviet army, a Lithuanian spokesman said.

Landsbergis and Gorbunov met Monday in the Lithuanian city of

Poindexter

(Continued from page 1)

false testimony and preparing an inaccurate chronology to conceal U.S. involvement in a 1985 shipment of missiles to Iran.

Six other men, including retired Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, a former Poindexter aide, have been placed on probation after being convicted or pleading guilty to crimes in the Iran-Contra affair.

Poindexter showed little emotion, except to smile at his wife Linda, after the sentence was announced.

The couple kissed and walked arm-and-arm out of the courtroom after the 40-minute proceeding. As the Poindexters left the U.S. Courthouse, they briefly joined a throng of 30 supporters who were carrying banners and chanting, "Full pardon now."

Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said there would be no White House comment on the sentence. Asked if he could rule out a pardon by President Bush of his colleague from the Reagan administration, Fitzwater said, "I can rule out having any comment on this matter while the case is under appeal."

Greene said that Poindexter, North and others involved in the Iran-Contra affair "carried out their own private policy" by helping arm the Nicaraguan rebels after Congress passed legislation forbidding further U.S. military aid.

"Admiral Poindexter and his associates obstructed the Congress, nullifying the decisions that body had made on the issues of supplies to the Contras," Greene said.

"They decided the policy of the Boland Amendment was wrong —

they went about to violate it on a large scale and for a lengthy period, and then to lie about their activities to prevent the public from finding out," Greene said.

Prosecutor Dan K. Webb had urged the judge to ignore any argument that lying to Congress "is a technical violation of the law."

"This case is a classic example of what happens when these laws are violated," Webb said. "We literally had this admiral and one very misguided and confused lieutenant colonel operating a private war in Nicaragua and Congress didn't know about it."

Afterward, Webb said Greene had imposed "a very fair and very proper sentence" that would be a warning to other public officials.

Defense attorney Richard W. Beckler urged Greene to spare Poindexter a prison term, saying the retired rear admiral "has always put his devotion to the country above any selfish interests of his own."

While he held a high office, "I don't think anyone can appreciate the power and pressure that bears on that," Beckler said.

"Every step can be a misstep," the defense lawyer added. "Clearly missteps were taken here."

Webb disputed Beckler's argument that Poindexter should be placed on probation because North and others were not given prison terms.

"John Poindexter is the superior and he, unfortunately, has to be held accountable for the events that made up Iran-Contra," Webb said.

of Lithuania, Arnold Ruutel of Estonia and Anatoly Gorbunov of Latvia will meet with Gorbachev, as well as his Federation Council, a new presidential advisory body, according to spokesmen from the three republics.

Also on Tuesday, Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene will meet with Soviet Premier Nikolai I. Ryzhkov to discuss the economic embargo and her government's halt of the conscription of

Tanker

(Continued from page 1)

the water around the ship appeared to be covering an area about 5-by-7 miles Monday afternoon.

The spills were estimated to contain 10,000 to 100,000 gallons, according to Officer Mark Sedwick. A plane dropped 4,000 gallons of oil dispersant on one of the slicks late Sunday and it appeared to be working, he said. The larger slick had shrunk early Monday to 15 miles

with the black smoke at times changing to white and gray.

"As the fire goes down, they'll put teams on board to fight it," said Chief Petty Officer Rich Muller. "They'll work step by step until the fire is out. They attack it from the edges and then move in."

Calm seas and good weather aided firefighters, he said.

"They expect to have something positive within an hour after the foaming starts, and about four to six hours after that, they'll have pretty good control if it's successful," said Coast Guard Capt. Tom Greene.

Earlier, officials had expressed concern that the intense heat of the fire could cause the vessel to warp, break apart and sink.

By Sunday, the superstructure at the rear of the tanker and the stack over the engine room had buckled in the heat. By midday Monday, the superstructure was obscured by thick clouds of black smoke and flames.

Before it slipped to the surface, the rear of the tanker had dropped 58 feet since the first explosion, indicating either the cargo shifted or the ship was taking on water, officials said. Coast Guard Rear Adm. William Merlin said the aft deck was just 5 feet above the water.

The fire-fighting foam could not

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Rasmussen

(Continued from page 7)

NFL," Stautner said.

Why not use a league to farm younger, more inexperienced players with the potential to become an NFL starter?

The idea of a minor football league has been tossed around, but no affiliation between the NFL and any other league has been established. Some type of organized scouting into a minor league benefit teams by giving them depth in key position and still maintain the allotted number of players on the roster.

At the same time, it would allow athletes such as Morris, who has the skills, but need time to develop an opportunity to continue fighting for a dream that they've harbored since high school — that of playing in the NFL.

nia to be unconstitutional on March 14.

Algimantas Cekoulis, a Supreme Council consultant who was accompanying Prunskiene to Moscow along with Deputy Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, said he believed he saw some "movement" of the Kremlin's position.

"Moscow is sort of trying to find common ground," he said. "The very fact that they (Soviet leaders) are conversing with us on the basis that we are not revoking the 11th of March (declaration) is the movement."

Cekoulis said that Ryzhkov spoke of the Soviet Union as "bruises" from their own economic blockade — hurting not Lithuania but other republics as well.

"If Russia has the bruises that that blockade, that is the reason these movements," he said. "They have shot their own feet."

Although Estonia and Latvia have taken a more cautious path toward secession, Lithuania declared its independence March 11 and immediately began passing laws to back up the declaration. Among those laws was one suspending conscription of Lithuanian youths into the Soviet army.

The Soviet leader declared independence moves by Latvia and Estonia to be unconstitutional on March 14.

Flag

(Continued from page 1)

ning flag burning.

"The flag uniquely symbolizes the ideas of liberty, equality and tolerance — ideas that Americans have passionately defended and debated throughout our history," he said. "The flag embodies the spirit of our national commitment to those ideals."

In the 1989 case, the court struck down a Texas law banning flag burning. It was that year-old opinion that prompted Congress to approve the federal law declared unconstitutional today.

Supporters of the federal legislation said it is different from the Texas law because the federal act does not single out flag burning as a means of expression.

The federal law forbids defiling or destruction of the flag for any purpose — except to destroy a soiled or worn flag.

David Cole, an attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights and co-counsel for defendants in the case, said, "We are overjoyed. The court has essentially said that the First Amendment means what it says. And that is that the government cannot incarcerate its citizens for engaging in political expression that the government doesn't like."

The Bush administration, with some reluctance, joined in defending the federal law.

President Bush and leading Republicans said they would prefer a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning, and Bush allowed the legislation to become law without his signature.

"I remain convinced ... that a constitutional amendment is the way to ensure that our flag is protected from desecration," Bush said.

The prime sponsors of the law were Democrats, who learned a bitter lesson from the 1988 presidential campaign in which Bush exploited patriotic values in defeating Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts.

The law made it a crime punishable by up to a year in prison for one who burns, mutilates, defaces, tramples the flag or "maintains on the floor or ground."

The latter phrase was prompted by a controversial Chicago anti-habit last year in which viewers were invited to stand on an American flag and write comments about the play in a ledger.

Today's cases reached the court after federal judges in the District of Columbia and Seattle said the federal law violates First Amendment rights. The law was challenged by demonstrators who burned American flags in the two cities.

Brennan read for six minutes from his opinion in the husband-and-wife case.

Brennan was joined by Justice Thurgood Marshall, Harry Blackmun, Antonin Scalia and Anthony M. Kennedy.

Stevens was joined by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, Brennan, White and Sandra Day O'Connor.

The cases are U.S. vs. Eichengreen, 89-1493, and U.S. vs. Haggerty, 1434.

be used earlier because the nearest available equipment to spray it was in Louisiana, the Coast Guard said.

"There is an equipment and technology shortfall," Lt. Cmdr. Frank Whipple said. "I don't think that is a secret."

Over the weekend, fireboats confined their efforts to keep the cargo holds cool nearest the blazing superstructure and containing the flaming oil on the water's surface. Water, however, was of little help in dousing the fire aboard the vessel.

The Norwegian ship was hit by an explosion and fire early Saturday

while some of its cargo was transferred to a smaller tanker.

Little if any of the African crude spilled initially or during explosions later Saturday and Sunday. But on Sunday afternoon five powerful blasts within 20 minutes ripped through the ship, sending flaming crude into the air and water.

The Mega Borg carries more than three times as much oil as was spilled by the Exxon Valdez off Alaska March 1989 in the nation's worst spill.

But authorities noted that the spilled in Alaska was heavy oil which doesn't dissipate nearly as rapidly as the light crude aboard Mega Borg. Also, much of the spilled off Texas was being consumed by fire.

Currents and winds were expected to push the oil toward a 10-mile stretch of coast between Corpus Christi and Port Aransas, Texas, said Coast Guard's Greene said the tanker was expected to keep moving from coming ashore.

The tanker, operated by Moss Shipping of Farsund, Norway, bound from Palanca, Angola, is scheduled to travel to Aruba and Galveston.

"They expect to have something positive within an hour after the foaming starts, and about four to six hours after that, they'll have pretty good control if it's successful."

— Tom Greene, Coast Guard Capt.

long from 21 miles, Coast Guard officials said.

The firefighting operation appeared to be having some effect,

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