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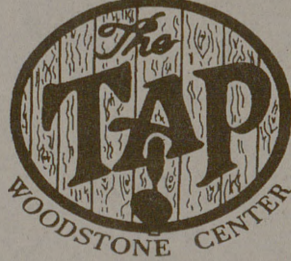
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5 killed in fireworks explosion

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico (AP) — In what was Mexico's second fatal fireworks accident in a month, an explosion in a candy store illegally selling fireworks killed at least five people in the border city of Nuevo Laredo, Monday.

The explosion, which could be heard miles away, occurred Monday in the residential neighborhood of Colonial Mirador, in the western part of the city, across the border from Laredo.

"We were in the house when we heard a strong explosion, and we felt as if we had been pushed to the floor," Patricia Diaz, a resident of Laredo, said.

Huge chunks of concrete flew in the air, destroying two homes and damaging several others. Small explosions of fireworks and gunpowder continued after the blast. An undetermined number of people were injured.

The blast follows a Sept. 26 explosion at a candy store that also sold fireworks illegally in Celaya, 120

miles northeast of Mexico City. It killed 63 people and injured hundreds.

After the explosion, federal officials said they would crack down on shops illegally storing and selling fireworks, a traditional part of Mexican celebrations.

The precise number of deaths in Monday's explosion was difficult to determine because the victims' bodies were ripped apart by the blast, some propelled as far as 165 feet.

"We don't know how much gunpowder exploded, but I'm sure it was more than 440 pounds," Guillermo Ramos, a local security official, said.

It was not known what set off the explosion.

The owner of the shop, Fermin Huerta, who was near the store at the time of the explosion, suffered an arm injury and was arrested pending the investigation, Ramiro Tellez, director of civil protection, said. Neighbors said he had sold fireworks from the store for 22 years.

Firefighters and paramedics from



Dignitaries flock to Bush

AUSTIN (AP) — Congress President Andres Pastrana today became the latest foreign dignitary to visit Texas to meet with Gov. George W. Bush, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination.

Leaders from 22 countries have come to Austin to talk with Bush.

"He is currently the front runner, and, from our perspective it is important for anybody who might be president of the United States to be establishing personal relationships that could be key in conducting foreign policy," Bush campaign spokesman Mindy Tucker told the American-Statesman.

Pastrana visited Bush about the \$3.5 billion in aid he wants to boost his country's faltering economy.

Some dignitaries would be interested in whoever held the office of Texas governor.

Others want to know about the man who consistently leads the polls in the campaign.

"I would say so," Achilles Patsenos, spokesperson for the Greek Embassy said, when asked whether Bush's international profile has soared on his poll numbers. Many Greeks follow the American campaign very closely, and will multiply when the campaign gets into high gear.

Bush has met with officials from Australia, Brunei, Costa Rica, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Slovenia, South Africa, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

Representatives draft resolution urging high court to allow pre-game prayer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Frustrated by a federal appeals court ruling that bans organized prayer at public high school football games in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana, a bipartisan group of House members introduced yesterday a resolution urging the Supreme Court to permit pre-game religious invocations.

The measure, offered by Texas Reps. Henry Bonilla and Charles Stenholm, asks the Supreme Court to uphold the constitutionality of prayer at public-school athletic events.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, ruling earlier this year in a 1995 Houston-area case, found pre-game prayers violate constitutional guarantees of church-state separation. The Supreme Court has been asked to review that ruling, which has caused turmoil for school administrators and students alike.

"If I can pull a quarter out of my pocket and read 'In God We Trust,' how can our courts prohibit our children from asking God to watch over them as they play a little football on a Friday night?" asked Bonilla, R-San Antonio. "The court's decision was wrong."

Bonilla was joined at a news conference outside the Capitol by Stenholm, D-Stamford; Rep. Joe Barton, R-Ennis, and other supporters of the resolution. If approved, the non-binding measure would serve merely as an expression of the House's will, carrying no force of law.

The 5th Circuit's ruling "has put school and community leaders in the difficult position of choosing between conflicting values and laws," Stenholm said. "Prayer and sports both have a positive impact on the moral development of our children, and I hope that Congress will act in the near future to urge quick resolution of this dilemma by the Supreme Court."

Support for the measure was not universal. The lawmakers' action was criticized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which called the resolution a "politically motivated" incursion into a constitutional arena governed by the Supreme Court.


"These members of Congress are literally using prayer as a political football," the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, the group's executive director, said. "They are obviously trying to manipulate religion to score points with the folks back home."

The lawmakers said Supreme Court intervention is necessary to clarify a confusing situation for school administrators, community leaders and students alike.

In one East Texas town, Van, the ministerial alliance is getting around the 5th Circuit ruling by bringing its own public-address system to broadcast a prayer before high-school games.

"How can our courts prohibit our children from asking God to watch over them ..."


— Henry Bonilla
Texas representative



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