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Plane crashes, 18 killed

TZARARACUA, Mexico (AP) — A DC-9 jetliner fell from the sky in central Mexico, killing all 18 people on board shortly after most of its passengers had disembarked. Aviation investigators said yesterday they had recovered the "black box" flight recorders.

"This is the most important thing of all," Andres Perez Zentella, Mexico's chief of aviation security, said of the flight recorders for Taesa Flight 725.

Dozens of investigators, soldiers and police were searching the avocado field where jagged chunks of the plane had fallen, hoping to find clues on what brought the plane down.

The flight took off Tuesday from the western border city of Tijuana with 91 passengers aboard. After stopping in Guadalajara and Uruapan, it was carrying just 13 passengers and five crew members as it headed to Mexico City, 180 miles to the east.

One minute after the plane left Uruapan, the pilot radioed controllers to declare an emergency, according to Agustin Arellano Rodriguez, director of the state's Navigation Services in Mexican Airspace.

"We did not have any more contact," he said by telephone. "We never knew what the type of emergency was."

Accounts of the crash varied.

Witnesses said they saw a brilliant light in the sky and the debris fall to the mountains six miles southwest of Uruapan, inspector Juan Alfonso Lara of the Michoacan state civil protection agency, said.

Agustin Gutierrez, Taesa's manager in Michoacan,

said the plane nose-dived before crashing into the avocado plantation.

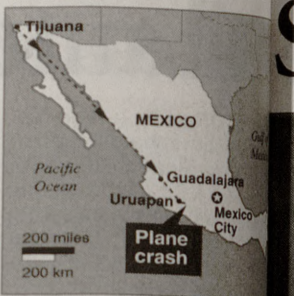
The plantation caretaker, Felipe Guzman, told the state news agency, Notimex, that the rear of the plane was on fire as it hit the ground and exploded. "After that, there were explosions," he said.

Taesa spokesperson Eduardo Cacho told a conference the airline was not aware of any maintenance problems. He also said he had no information about communications between the crew and flight control tower.

Because it was a domestic flight, the airline reported the nationalities of the passengers.

In the Mexico City airport Tuesday night, crates were led into a hangar where airline officials offered to take them to Uruapan.

Uruapan, a city of 250,000 dating back to the 16th century, is known for its avocado production. Tourists frequently stay there when visiting the Popocatepetl volcano, 20 miles to the west.



Barak keeps promise to Palestinian No.

JERUSALEM (AP) — Forced to choose between Jewish settlers and Palestinian demands, Prime Minister Ehud Barak kept Israel's commitment to the Palestinians yesterday, approving a troop pullback from 5 percent of the West Bank and sending soldiers to drag Jews off an illegal hilltop encampment.

The land handover, to take place Monday, will leave a smattering of West Bank settlements isolated and surrounded by Palestinian-controlled territory — setting the stage for more tensions.

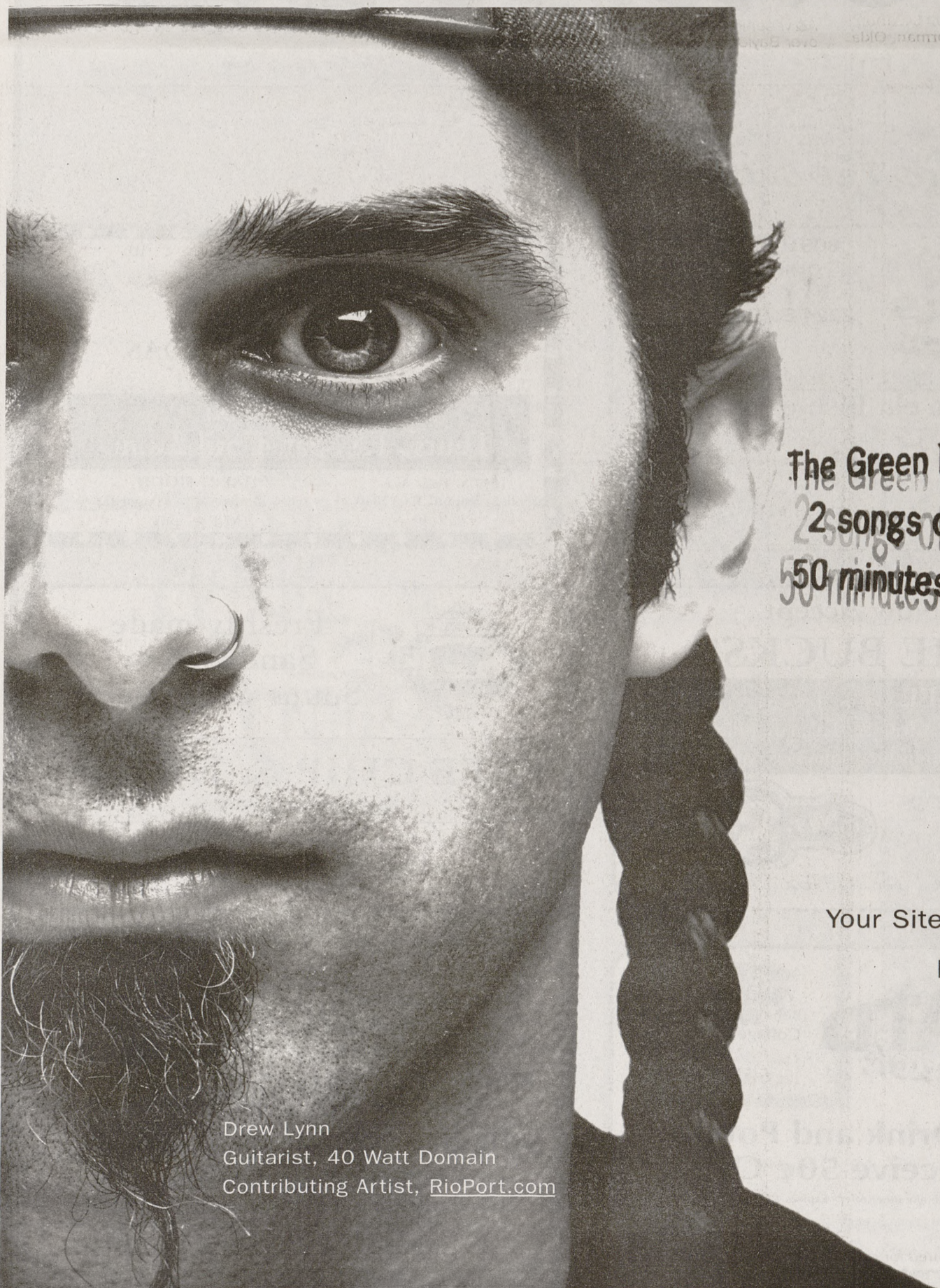
Barak has spent his four months in office making good on promises to revive the peace process, while reassuring Jewish settlers that he sympathizes with their mission to reclaim biblical lands.

Palestinian and settler claims to the same rocky hills seemed increasingly irreconcilable, however, and scenes televised yesterday of soldiers holding red-faced settlers in headlocks could be a glimpse into the future.

Soldiers moved in on Havat Maon as light crept from Israel's coast over its plains and up the West Bank's layered hills. Settlers climbed on rooftops, clung to door frames and flung themselves to the ground, making it harder for the unarmed troops to forcibly evacuate them.

"We'll be back!" the settlers shouted as they were driven away in buses.

The strongest resistance came from settlers holed up in a makeshift wooden synagogue.

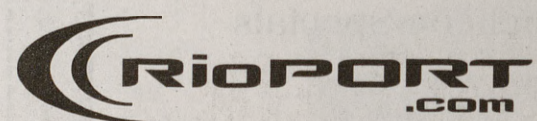


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