

Colombia peace talks not sufficient, could lead to war

LOS POZOS, Colombia (AP) — President Andres Pastrana ended the peace process Saturday, saying the 11th-hour proposal from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia "is not sufficient."

"The proposal only refers to already agreed to issues," Pastrana said in a nationally broadcast address.

Pastrana gave the rebel army, known as the FARC, 48 hours, beginning at 9:30 p.m. Saturday, to vacate the vast rebel safe haven he granted them three years ago as a condition for the peace talks.

Many feared the end of the peace talks could lead to an escalation in Colombia's 38-year civil war. Roughly 3,500 people die every year in the violence, most of them civilians.

Pastrana appeared to give the FARC another chance to save the peace process, saying the country only will accept peace talks if there is a cease in hostilities, including kidnappings.

"Only a public manifestation in that sense can stop the clock," he said.

The president had given U.N. envoy James LeMoyné until Saturday night to restart peace talks.

A few minutes after the deadline expired, FARC leaders released their proposal, in which they appeared to drop demands

that the military immediately end overflights of the zone and controls on its borders. The FARC walked away from peace talks in October after the military controls were initiated.

In the draft agreement, they proposed that complaints of "threats" along its borders be examined by a special commission.

"In this crucial moment of the history of our country, we need tolerance"

— Mauricio veteran rebel

The government has refused to discontinue the overflights and increased patrols, claiming the FARC was misusing the zone to hide hostages and run a drug business.

Earlier Saturday, a car bomb exploded near the wall of a military base a few miles north of the rebel haven, injuring 15 civilians, the army news agency said. Troops had been arriving at the base in the town of Granada

ahead of the deadline. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast.

Before the decision was announced, prayers for peace were held in the Roman Catholic church in the zone's main town, San Vicente del Caguan. The church was packed with local politicians, firefighters, businessmen, ranchers, housewives and children carrying small white paper signs saying, "Peace."

"In this crucial moment of the history of our country, we need tolerance," said the Rev. Miguel Angel Serna, who called for dialogue rather than fighting.

He lashed out at military leaders of both sides for waging war.

"Good people — humble campesinos, humble rebel fighters and humble soldiers — have died in combat, but not the big leaders," Serna said. "It is the good who fall."

At the closest military base to the zone, an army commander said reinforcements had poured in over the past few days.

Army Maj. Geraldo Cano, chief of operations for the Hunter Battalion based in the town of Florencia, said the soldiers were ready to move into the zone at a moment's notice.

NEWS IN BRIEF

President chokes on pretzel

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush fainted briefly in the White House residence Sunday after choking on a pretzel while watching a National Football League playoff game on television, White House physician Dr. Richard Tubbs said.

The doctor, an Air Force colonel, said Bush quickly recovered and is doing well.

Tubbs said Bush suffered an abrasion on his left cheek the size of a half dollar and a bruise on his lower lip, apparently from falling onto the floor from a couch.

The fainting spell occurred at approximately

5:35 p.m. EST and Bush contacted a nurse on duty at the White House five minutes later. Tubbs was paged eight minutes later and rushed to the White House to examine the president.

Tubbs said Bush, under his own power, took an elevator from the second floor of the residence to the first floor doctor's office where he underwent a thorough examination that included use of a heart monitor.

He said Bush had complained Saturday and Sunday of "being a little off his game," feeling that he was coming down with a head cold.

White House spokesman Ari Fleisher said Bush intended to keep his regular schedule Monday, which includes an early morning trip to the Midwest.

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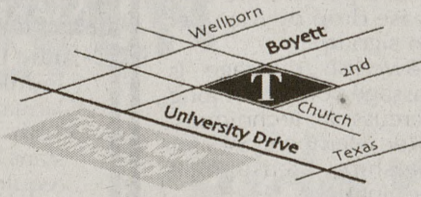


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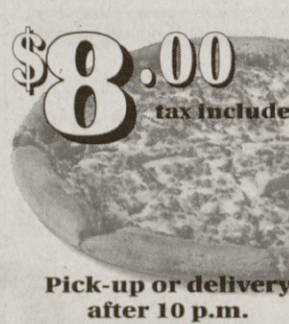
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