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FLORIDA

Official says coups can be prevented

Latin America military aid urged

WASHINGTON — This country should do more to train and advise Latin American military officers and promote more talk between their and our civilian governments to counter the potential for coups, says Bernard Aronson, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

"I think democracy is here to stay in the region, but that doesn't mean there aren't dangers and threats, and they clearly are in some quarters," Aronson told the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel.

In recent months, some analysts have concluded that coup attempts, such as the one in Venezuela on Feb. 4, are more likely now than they were in the past.

Travis in the hemisphere to restore Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted from office last year by the Haitian military, is a key reason.

Aronson said that after decades of military rule and Cold War tensions, the armed forces of Latin American are undergoing a fundamental, difficult, redefinition of their mission in society.

"One of the lessons of the Venezuelan attempted coup is that it is very important that Latin America carry out sustained and sustained civilian-military dialogues that the military institutions are not simply left isolated," he said.

Aronson also said the United States needs to do more to promote military stability in the region by expanding its relationships with Latin American armed forces to help them through the transition.

"Frankly, we need to rethink military education and maybe even find ways to expand that to maintain contact with the military," Aronson said.



Who are these guys? Members of the Ku Klux Klan, left, take part in a "Meet the Klan Day" Saturday at Key West's Bayview Park. The Klan is seeking to recruit new members. Jabba Greene, right, was one of many members at the park, but he said he wasn't sure what the KKK is.

Castor says job cuts to yield \$5 million for district schools

TALLAHASSEE — Cutting Department of Education jobs in Tallahassee will yield more than \$5 million to school districts for such such as teacher training and classroom technology, Education Commissioner Betty Castor said.

Castor quietly gathered employees late last week to tell them of a major reorganization that will eliminate nearly 200 of their jobs, about one-third of the department.

"I don't think we'd want to say that this will save money," she said. "But if we shift some of our functions to the district level — I think we'll be maximizing services."

Gov. Lawton Chiles, the Legislature and the public have clamored for less government bureaucracy. Castor supported decentralizing government to her widely publicized initiative last year to give local districts more authority.

The executive director of the FTE-NEA teachers union, Alan Rye, said there may be some risk in eliminating core oversight functions the department has over local districts.

The Legislature already cut 200 positions from the department in the past year, leaving 2,170. Thirty-two more would be cut under the no-new-taxes budget the Legislature has approved, though Chiles has said he'd veto that spending plan.

Castor said she'll eliminate the 200 positions over the next two years through retirement incentives, attrition or layoffs.

For example, the department has 50 employees with 30 or more years of experience, and she said they'd get an annuity to help with insurance costs if they volunteer to retire early.

Castor said she hoped, but couldn't promise, to find jobs for anyone laid off. She said she'd talk to local school officials about the plan this week.

More than half the department employees earn less than \$25,000 a year and another one-fourth get less than \$20,000. If each of the cut positions paid \$25,000, the move would save \$5 million.

Spill wouldn't ruin tourism, study says

Associated Press

KEY WEST — A \$220,000 federal study says from that a major oil spill would wipe out tourism in the Florida Keys as a possibility.

But officials and environmentalists along the chain of islands say it's the study that's wrong.

The fear of what a spill would do to the tourist-attracting reefs and mangroves that frame the keys was a significant part of the public opposition that eventually led President Bush in 1990 to impose a 12-year ban on drilling off the Keys and southwestern Florida.

But the survey for the U.S. Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service says it found that even with a spill the size of the 1989 Exxon Valdez accident in Alaska, the tourism effect would be short-term.

questioned said they would still visit the Keys the year of the spill, and tourism would rebound to full strength the next year, according to the government.

It said beaches would be clean enough for tourists to return after an average of 94 days.

"That's preposterous," it says. "It's biologically inaccurate," said Capt. Ed Davidson, who runs charter boats and advises the government on coastal protection.

"It's utterly contrary to known disastrous effects of these kinds of spills on an organic coastline. It would shut down the industry," Keys biologist Art Wetner agreed.

"People wouldn't come to the area," he said. The Miami Herald, Alaska, the tourism effect would "who wants to swim or dive or walk along the beach in the middle of an oil spill?"

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Parents, teachers decry crisis in gifted program

Associated Press

DAVIS — A rigorous program that stresses complex and innovative computer science to provide world-class math students has run into local budget reality.

Howard County school officials complained their district cannot sustain the small number of gifted students and decided the numbers don't add up.

Nine-year-old Project MEGSS (Mathematics, Education and Gifted Secondary School Students) will soon be history, hurting success in an effort to fast corporate sponsors.

The decision has brought an outcry by letter and electronic mail from academics around the nation, many of them pointing out the contradiction in cutting a program that meets goals

exposed to both President Bush and Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles to boost U.S. math and science standards.

"It is one of the true shining beacons in the rather dark state of American mathematics and science education below the college level," said Daniel Frielman, Indiana University professor of computer science.

Parents and students mounted a campaign to help the county school district, parking school meetings and a Chiles "open meeting" in Tallahassee.

But the budget axe fell at a Feb. 25 school board meeting. Officials said the \$72,000-a-year program doesn't help enough students

justify its cost as the Howard system faces a \$60 million budget problem because of Florida's overall budget problems. They cited the program's high attrition rate — only one student will graduate this year.

"I wish we were in a situation where we could provide the money," said Dominic Hertzbecht, administrative assistant in the superintendent's office. "But what about the kids on the other side?"

Parents complained that school officials are sacrificing "the best and brightest," making Project MEGSS the latest casualty in what is a national trend, according to a recent study by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut.

Neighbors' shootout leaves one dead

Associated Press

TAMPA — A man who looked out for his neighbor after the older man suffered a stroke was fatally shot by him in a gun battle, authorities said.

Augustine Puttana was in front of his home Saturday fitting up an old car when Oscar Alinga came out of his house over low-slung on the concrete porch and fired several times at Puttana, police said. Then he calmly went back inside.

"I heard the shots, Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang," Augustine said. "Look, I'm hit. Call an ambulance."

neighbor Elfin Goerre said. Puttana, who was shot seven times, died late Saturday afternoon after surgery at Tampa General Hospital, a nursing supervisor said.

Alinga, 62, who was shot once, was in stable but guarded condition Sunday at St. Joseph's Hospital.

Neighbors said Alinga suffered a stroke about a year ago and was excited from his home about a block away.

Puttana arranged for the older man to move into the small house next to his.

No Lotto winner; jackpot rolls over to \$15 million

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — Florida's Lotto jackpot rolled over to an estimated \$15 million dollars Sunday when state computers showed no big winner in last week's \$7 million game.

The game ended late Saturday when 16-19-40-42-43-45 were drawn.

Lottery officials said 216 tickets matched five of the six and are worth \$1,750 each. There were 12,115 tickets with four correct numbers, and those tickets are worth \$1,125 each, while 298,177 three-of-six winners can be cashed in for each.

Jackpots are estimated each Sunday based on game projections. Funds from rollovers aid projected long-term interest rates.

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