

## Jersey lawmakers hail Colombia's resolve

By ROBERT COHEN  
Star-Ledger Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—Two New Jersey congressmen returned from Colombia yesterday convinced the leaders of that South American government are committed to winning the war against cocaine traffickers, but they said it is clear the U.S. needs to do more to help them win the fight.

Reps. Frank Guarini (D-14th Dist.) and William Hughes (D-2d Dist.) said they and four other congressmen took part in meetings with Colombian President Virgilio Barco this week to get a first-hand sense of the serious problems in that country, and to underscore U.S. support for the war against cocaine cartels.

The lawmakers, both members of the House Narcotics Abuse and Control Committee, met with Barco as well as Colombia's defense and justice ministers, the national police director, the attorney general, Colombian presidential candidates and U.S. Ambassador Thomas McNamara.

Both said President Bush's plan to attend the Feb. 15 drug summit with leaders of the Andean nations in Cartagena, Colombia, is extremely important from symbolic and substantive points of view.

Guarini said he found Barco "resolute, determined... and unwavering in his commitment" to



Rep. Frank Guarini  
Praises Barco

win the war, and to save the Colombian democracy that is under attack.

But Guarini said it is clear that the U.S. must provide Colombia with more military and communications equipment, and work to stop the export from the U.S. of assault rifles used by the "narcotics terrorists." He said the U.S. also must take steps to improve money-laundering enforcement here and get other nations to do the same.

He also said Barco and other Colombian officials believe the U.S. must act more vigorously to stop the diversion of chemicals from this country that are used to produce cocaine in Colombia.

Hughes, in addition, said he came away with the sense that the U.S. must find a way of helping Colombian officials protect their families, who have been threatened and in some cases killed by the cocaine kingpins. He said a program could be set up to bring some family members of key officials to the U.S. for periods of time.

Hughes said there is a strong resolve and a great deal of courage apparent among Barco and other Colombian leaders, but he added there is also some "despair, frustration and apprehension" within the society. He said there are a lot of people giving up, but emphasized that Barco is clearly committed.



Rep. William Hughes  
Urges more U.S. aid

## U.S. issues rare alert on threat of terror attacks

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to guard against what officials there described as a distinct possibility of terrorist attacks over the holiday season.

The American advisory also came just six days before the first anniversary of the terrorist attack that blew up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 aboard as well as 11 people on the ground.

In the ensuing investigation, it was revealed that U.S. authorities had received warnings about the possibility of a terrorist attack but had not made them public, believing they were not necessarily reliable and might unduly spread alarm.

This time, the U.S. government decided to issue a public advisory at the same time it began briefing foreign governments about such a threat, a department official said.

A brief statement issued by the department cited "recent reports of movement of Middle Eastern terrorists in Western Europe" and suggested "terrorists may be planning near-term attacks against a variety of targets, possibly including U.S. interests."

It did not say specifically where attacks might occur, but added: "If credible, specific information or a threat to the public is received, the Department of State will provide additional information for travelers and other concerned parties."

In addition, the Federal Aviation Administration advised airlines to step up security.

"Certainly it enhances our vigilance," said Jeff Kriender, a spokes-

## Visitors to Europe, Africa warned on anniversary of Pan Am blast

man for Pan American World Airways. But he said he did not believe the alert would impede holiday travel. "We do have a system in place which we think we can handle the flow," he said.

In New York, Pan Am spokesman Alan Loflin said, "Largely because of the anniversary we have coming up, and also because of the incredible amount of passenger traffic, we have enhanced our security system-wide. Mostly, this involves using more (security) people."

He declined to give specifics on additional security.

Yesterday's announcement "is significant because it's the first time I'm aware of that there is a public announcement," said Robert Kupperman, a terrorism expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

In the case of Pan Am 103, "we warned some government officials and left the public naked. This time it appears we're not going to get caught in that way."

The warning was triggered in part by the Nov. 24 discovery of 440 pounds of explosives in Valencia, Spain, and the arrest by Spanish police of eight men.

French police said the men and explosives had been destined for France. Spanish authorities said at least three of those arrested are mem-

bers of Hezbollah, an Iran-backed group of extremist Shiites based in Lebanon.

In addition, cases against various terrorists are pending in several European countries.

A verdict is due soon in the case of Mohamed Abu Talb, who is accused of leading a guerrilla cell based in Sweden and has been linked with the Lockerbie attack, officials said.

Also, a trial in France is expected in January of Fouad Abdallah Saleh, a defendant in a case involving the planting of bombs in Paris in 1985 and 1986 that killed 12 people and wounded hundreds.

"A variety of Lebanese groups—those who are pro-Iranian and those linked to Syria—oppose French involvement in Lebanon just now," said Matthew Freund, a senior analyst with Business Risks International, which monitors terrorism for U.S. corporations.

Numerous Hezbollah (Party of God) convicts remain in French jails, and this has spawned long-standing threats against France with the danger extending to Spain, Italy and Belgium, in addition to such west African nations as Senegal and Ivory Coast with ties to France, he said.

"There are Hezbollah cells in Lyons, Marseilles, Paris and Grenoble," Freund said.

"But just because there are cells does not necessarily mean the attacks will be there. However, one has to assume that Paris is a logical area for these operations to be carried out—there are any number of targets they could hit: The French government, airline offices, business interests."

Major French department stores that were targets of previous bombings were under tight surveillance yesterday as crowds of Christmas shoppers coursed through the aisles.

Security patrols were increased in subways and at railroad stations, public buildings, border crossings and airports. Travelers have been warned of delays.

"These holidays, which bring with them large movements and groupings of people, along with the present situation, justify this reinforcement of police surveillance," said Interior Minister Pierre Joxe.

Increased police activity is evident all over Paris, and Roger Lejeune, director of border police, said: "There will be more car trunks opened, more suitcases opened, even if that slows the flow of passengers."

At U.S. Military European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, West Germany, a spokesman said: "We are aware of the State Department advisory. Beyond that, we do not discuss specific security measures."

Cornelius Walsh, spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Bonn, said: "Everyone has been urged to be more cautious and more alert."

In London, the U.S. Embassy said it was trying to get the information out to Americans living in Britain.

## Drug cartel's No. 2 killed in Colombia shootout

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following the August slaying of a leading opposition presidential candidate.

Eleven bodyguards were among those reported killed during the gunbattle, police said. There was no immediate word on police casualties.

"The operation to locate Rodriguez Gacha was an intelligence operation of great care," Casadiego said in a live radio broadcast with the Caracol network.

Authorities say Rodriguez Gacha and Escobar masterminded the Dec. 8 bombing of the federal investigative police headquarters in downtown Bogota. The blast, which left a huge crater, killed 63 people and injured more than 800.

The bombing was the most deadly during the crackdown on traffickers, who have mounted dozens of attacks to retaliate the extradition of 10 drug suspects to the United States.

The two men were also blamed for the Nov. 27 bombing of a Colombian domestic jetliner just outside Bogota that killed all 107 people aboard.

In October, the government offered \$600,000 for the capture of either of the two men.

Rodriguez Gacha, a billionaire, was a pig farmer before he got into the cocaine business.

Escobar started out in Medellin, Colombia's second city and about 200 miles from Bogota, as a pick-pocket and car thief. Forbes magazine ranks him as being worth an estimated \$2 billion to \$3 billion.

The Medellin cartel together with a smaller, rival group from Cali process about 80 percent of the cocaine sold on U.S. streets, according to American officials.

Meanwhile, in New York, a Colombian drug suspect, who was extradited to the United States yesterday, pleaded not guilty in Manhattan federal court to charges of bringing 244 pounds of cocaine into this country.

Nelson Cuevas Ramirez, 55, was indicted in November by a Manhattan federal grand jury on three counts of violating U.S. narcotics laws. The charges also include conspiracy to import 330 pounds of cocaine into the United States.

If convicted, he faces a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison on each count and a maximum of a life term. He could also be fined as much as \$4 million on each count.

Cuevas Ramirez, who does not speak English, told a federal magistrate through an interpreter, "I'm not guilty."

Ruth Chamberlin, a court appointed lawyer representing Cuevas Ramirez, said her client agreed to

remain in jail without bail until the next hearing set for Monday.

Cuevas Ramirez was indicted along with Luis Hernando Garces-Restrepo and Jose Jesus Blandon, who both remain as fugitives, the Manhattan U.S. attorney's office said.

A spokeswoman for the Drug Enforcement Administration in New York said the agency has not yet confirmed if the men were associated with a drug cartel.

Cuevas Ramirez, a native of Colombia, was turned over by Colombian authorities to a team from the agency's Special Operations Group Thursday evening in Bogota. He was flown to New York.

Colombian President Virgilio Barco reinstituted extradition to the United States last Aug. 18 as part of a sweeping anti-narcotics offensive against Colombia's multibillion-dollar cocaine trade.

Cuevas Ramirez was the 10th drug suspect extradited to the United States from Colombia since then.

In Colombia, the war between the government and the country's drug lords has escalated with a Dec. 6 truck bomb in Bogota that killed 63 people and the bombing of a jetliner Nov. 27 that killed all 107 people aboard. Barco's administration has blamed drug traffickers for the attacks.

## Shore police agencies reap drug-cash dividend

By GEORGE BERKIN

Law enforcement agencies in Ocean and Atlantic counties yesterday were given \$715,000 in cash seized during a drug bust, officials said.

The money was distributed under the "forfeiture" law that gives confiscated drug money and valuables to police agencies to pay for beefed-up enforcement.

The cash was collected earlier this year during the single largest seizure of apparent drug money in Ocean County, Terrence Farley, Ocean County first assistant prosecutor, said yesterday.

Because a criminal case is still pending, the authorities cannot disclose the names of suspects from whom the money was seized, Farley said.

However, police did seize \$715,000

in the arrest of two persons in a single case on Aug. 23.

According to previous Star-Ledger articles, Little Egg Harbor police stopped Christopher Mannery, 32, of Houston, Texas, for speeding on Route 9 in the township.

Mannery, who described himself as a self-employed contractor, had a bag in the car which was found to contain \$600,000 in cash.

When police searched his room in the Seaview Country Club, a motel in Galloway Township, Atlantic County, they found an additional \$115,000, according to news reports. They also found 400 pounds of marijuana, with an estimated street value of \$800,000.

Both Mannery and his roommate, Kimberly Ann Fowler, 31, of LaJolla,

Calif., were arrested and charged with conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance.

The confiscated money will be distributed according to a formula which rewards extra efforts in drug enforcement, said Farley. "It's absolutely an incentive" to more careful police work, the first assistant prosecutor said.

The money will go towards the purchase of special equipment such as police scanners, Farley said. By law, it cannot be used for salaries or other ordinary budgetary purposes.

The largest slice of the confiscated money will go to the Little Egg Harbor police department (\$325,000) followed by the Ocean County prosecutor's office (\$225,000) and the Atlantic County prosecutor's office (\$115,000).

The rest of the money will be dis-

tributed among the Ocean County sheriff's office (\$20,000) and the Dover Township police department (\$10,000). The Long Beach, Brick Township, Berkeley Township, and Manchester Township police departments will also get \$5,000 apiece.

Although a resolution of the criminal charges is still pending, a civil court has upheld the confiscation of the money, Farley said.

The rules of evidence in a criminal case are stricter than in a civil case, making it possible that the civil judgment will stand while criminal charges may not, Farley added.

The confiscation of money believed to have been acquired in drug sales has been upheld in the courts, Farley said.

## Panama declares 'war'

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Panamanian people in its attempt to oust Noriega and that the resolution "recognizes a known fact."

"It's to make people more aware," he said.

The resolution designating Noriega head of government will grant him legal powers similar to those of Gen. Omar Torrijos, Panama's leader during the 1970s.

Like Torrijos, he will be able to appoint an array of top government officials, including ministers and vice ministers.

He will also have the power to convene Panama's Council of State, the

country's highest executive body, as well as the Cabinet and the national assembly.

Members of the assembly had said earlier that Noriega would be granted wide powers to assist him in what they said was Washington's policy of aggression against Panama.

"In a state of war... authority has to be consolidated," said Ramon Ashby, one of several assembly members who have been outspoken in their support of the move.

The Bush administration has said it wants Noriega ousted and Washington has imposed a series of economic sanctions which have hurt the country's economy.

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### CHRISTMAS TREES

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## Drug raid nets 10 in Orange

Seven adults and three juveniles have been arrested in an Orange housing project apartment for narcotics trafficking and selling cocaine near an elementary school, authorities reported yesterday.

The suspects were nabbed when police and members of the Essex County Sheriff Department's Bureau of Narcotics raided a fourth-floor apartment at the Father Rasi Homes on Mechanic Street, according to Police Director Charles Cobbett.

Cobbett identified the suspects, all jailed pending grand jury action, as Orange residents Mary Huntley, 47,

who lived in the raided apartment; Robert Holloway, 21, Monica Watts, 18, and Charles Jones, 20, all of Ogden Street; Eric Steele, 29, of South Essex Avenue; and Tarika Graves, 18, of Mechanic Street.

Also, Maurice Holloway, 19, of North Harrison Street in East Orange was arrested, as were two 17-year-old males and a 16-year-old female, not identified because of their ages.

Police also confiscated 32 vials of cocaine and \$552. The raid, the result of a three-week investigation by Police Detectives Todd Bertolini and Michael Gannon, took place 7 p.m. Thursday.

## Authorities probe heroin-injection death

By JEAN BRANDES

Authorities in Mercer and Hunterdon counties are investigating the death yesterday of a Hopewell Township man, apparently after he injected himself with heroin while in a car with two friends, who then drove the victim to Lambertville police headquarters.

Michael Van Fleet, 32, was pronounced dead at Hunterdon Medical Center in Raritan Township at 2:53 a.m., authorities said.

According to Hopewell Township Lt. Michael Chipowsky, Van Fleet died while in a car with Clifton Darnell Snell, 30, and Eugene Thomas Haldeman, 33, both of Lambertville.

The three men "apparently obtained some heroin from an unnamed source and while in Hopewell Township they injected themselves with heroin," according to Chipowsky. "Mr. Van Fleet complained of feeling ill, lapsed into unconsciousness and died," while riding in Haldeman's car

in Hopewell Township, he said. Snell and Haldeman then took Van Fleet to Lambertville police headquarters to seek help, he said.

Authorities are awaiting the results of an autopsy scheduled today to determine the cause of death.

"It appears to be drug-related, but we won't know for sure until after the autopsy is completed and the toxicological tests are done," Chipowsky said.

Snell and Haldeman were charged in Lambertville with possession of cocaine, according to Hunterdon County Prosecutor Neil Cooper. Haldeman also was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia, he said.

Snell and Haldeman were being held on \$10,000 bail by Hopewell Township police.

"We're still investigating the circumstances of how they came into possession of heroin and what actually occurred in the car," Chipowsky said.

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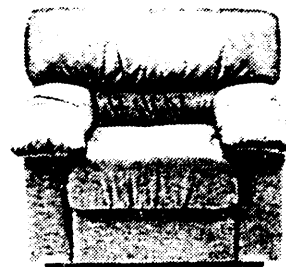
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