

Herald.com

FOR BREAKING NEWS, 24 HOURS



FIVE MINUTE HERALD

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HEAT WINS 8TH IN ROW

SHAQ SPARKS LATE RALLY, GIVING MIAMI ITS LONGEST WIN STREAK SINCE 1998

BUSINESS MONDAY, 22

NEW FACE OF RETAIL



SMALLER RETAILERS FIND THAT NICHE MARKETING AND CREATIVITY COUNT

ALSO INSIDE

PEOPLE, 4A

TIME'S PERSON OF THE YEAR

MAGAZINE SAYS PRESIDENT BUSH IS THE PERSON WHO HAD MOST EFFECT ON U.S., WORLD

LOCAL, 1B

COLD FRONT ROLLS INTO AREA

WEATHER NEARS 40 DEGREES TODAY EARLY IN BROWARD, DADE, FEELING COLDER WITH WIND

ACTION LINE

WHAT A PAIN! WHOSE BLAME?

THE HERALD SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON A NEIGHBORHOOD EYESORE

TROPICAL LIFE, 8E

BREAKING DOWN ART'S BORDERS

ARGENTINE TOMAS SARACENO WILL CREATE EXHIBITS FOR CORAL GABLES' MIAMI ART CENTRAL

WEATHER



Week begins with a sharp chill

HIGH 62 | LOW 50 | UV 5

● Bryan Norcross' forecast, back of Section B

● For more online, go to weather.herald.com

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OH, HAPPY DAY



CARL JUSTE/HERALD STAFF

Surrounded by other jubilant graduates, Nadine Francois, 30, blows a kiss to her family and friends after she received a bachelor's degree at Barry University's commencement exercises Sunday at the James L. Knight Center in downtown Miami. More than 1,200 students received their diplomas in the graduate and undergraduate ceremonies.

HURRICANE RECOVERY

Storms hit the poor worst



CHUCK FADLEY/HERALD STAFF

DOWNTOWN STUART: Josephine Pace, left, talks to Vivian Benzenuto during a power outage.



JOHN PINEDA/FOR THE HERALD

INDIANTOWN: Sharron Brown checks belongings after two hurricanes struck her home.

Months after this summer's storms, some communities have bounced back, and others are still struggling to their feet. The bottom line: Hurricane recovery has class distinctions.

BY AMY DRISCOLL AND GREGG FIELDS
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In the gallery-rich downtown of

affluent Stuart, the lunch crowds are back, the stores are stocked and any signs that Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne roared through last summer are almost impossible to spot.

But 24 miles southwest of Stuart, in the hard-pressed agricultural community of Indiantown, the storms continue to pummel the

economy months later.

On a drive into town, the first sight is of a field full of FEMA trailers, where 70 families still live. They're among the thousands living in temporary housing across Florida because they have no options.

TURN TO STRUGGLE, 8A

RELIGION

Activists: Save 'Merry Christmas'

Some Christians say Christmas observances by some cities and firms degrade the holiday's religious value.

BY ALEXANDRA ALTER
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With slogans like "He's the Reason for the Season" and "Bring Jesus back to Christmas," Christian activists are taking up an old battle with renewed energy this holiday season. Emboldened by the heavy turnout of "values" voters on Election Day, Christian organizations are lobbying businesses, schools and towns to include Christian symbols and messages in holiday displays.

"We are concerned about the secularization of Christmas," said David Zachary, the director of operations for South Florida's Christian Coalition. "They don't seem to have a problem with the commerce; they seem to have a



JOSHUA PREZANT/FOR THE HERALD

WON: A judge let Sandra Snowden add a nativity scene to Bay Harbor Islands' holiday display.

HERALD.COM: SHOULD CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS BE INCLUDED IN HOLIDAY DISPLAYS? VOTE AT TODAY'S EXTRAS ON HERALD.COM

TURN TO CHRISTMAS, 2A

CONFLICT IN IRAQ

Killings surge as vote nears

Three election workers were murdered in rush-hour traffic in Baghdad. Elsewhere, bombs killed 60 people.

BY HANNAH ALLAM
Knight Ridder News Service

BAGHDAD — Powerful bombs ripped through Iraq's two holiest Shiite Muslim cities Sunday, killing at least 60 people and wounding more than 100 in the worst violence yet in the countdown to next month's parliamentary elections.

In Baghdad, three election workers were shot dead in a brazen daylight ambush, and interim Iraqi Vice President Ibrahim al Jaffery warned that insurgents were trying to breed sectarian violence and instability that could lead to a delay in the Jan. 30 vote or, in the worst outcome, civil war.

"Naturally, the elections bring honorable

TURN TO VIOLENCE, 8A

HERALD.COM: FOR THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ

ADVISORY TO READERS

On Page 8A, where this story continues, is a photograph of the ambush of Iraqi election workers that some readers may find disturbing and wish to avoid.

COLOMBIA

U.S. extradition threats put heat on feared drug cartel

A war in the potent Norte del Valle Cartel has left about 1,000 dead and sent factions scrambling to find allies.

BY STEVEN DUDLEY
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ROLDANILLO, Colombia — Miguel Solano was a major player in one of the biggest drug cartels in the world when he began feeding information to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Like so many others before him, Solano was tempted by the Americans' offer of a deal: By secretly helping them build cases against the much-feared Norte del Valle Cartel, he could later get a lenient sentence in a U.S. courtroom.

His dangerous dance with the law landed him in a tomb: In November of last year, Solano was gunned down as he left a night-

TURN TO CARTEL, 11A

DEMOBILIZATION: U.S. SPENDING TO DISBAND PARAMILITARIES QUESTIONED, 10A

UP FRONT | PRO BASKETBALL

HOW TWO STARS ALIGNED: THE RISE BEFORE THE FALL

Before their falling out and separation, Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant were the major pieces in a grand plan for the Los Angeles Lakers.

BY MICHELLE KAUFMAN
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This is the tale of two men and their inability to share one ball.

Their union led to three straight NBA titles despite a stormy eight-year relationship battered by jealousy, sniping, accusations, denials, recrimination, and a highly publicized rape trial. The once placid marriage ended in a bitter divorce last July.

The two parties continue to fire cross-country verbal barbs and will meet face to

HERALD.COM: IS THE LAKERS/HEAT GAME THE BIGGEST GAME OF THE REGULAR SEASON? VOTE AT TODAY'S EXTRAS ON HERALD.COM



PART 1 OF FIVE EPISODES
'THE MATRIMONY'

face for the first time on Christmas Day, in front of a sold-out Staples Center crowd in Los Angeles and a national television audience. Tickets for this spicy reunion are going for as high as \$3,000 on e-Bay. A suite is

TURN TO SHAQ AND KOBE, 2A



THE AMERICAS

LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN BRIEFS

● CHILE

Ex-ruler Pinochet alert but remains in hospital

From Herald Wire Services

SANTIAGO — Gen. Augusto Pinochet was conscious and mobile but remained hospitalized after suffering a stroke, the Army Hospital said Sunday.

The Court of Appeals was to decide today whether to uphold Pinochet's indictment and house arrest on human rights charges. He has been indicted for the kidnapping of nine people and killing of one during his 1973-90 regime.

Relatives and associates said the stroke shows that the 89-year-old former ruler is unfit to stand trial. Prosecution lawyers called his hospitalization "an old maneuver."

● PUERTO RICO
COMMUTER TRAIN
MAKES ITS DEBUT

SAN JUAN — Puerto Rico inaugurated its long-awaited commuter rail Sunday with officials offering free service for the first few weeks on Tren Urbano, or the Urban Train, which runs between San Juan and suburban Bayamon.

The service is designed to unclog highways on the island, which has one of the highest rates of vehicles per capita in the world.

● COLOMBIA
EXPLOSIVES LINKED
TO MURDER PLOT

BOGOTA — Police said they found a cache of explosives Sunday in Cartagena that rebels planned to use in an assassination attempt against President Alvaro Uribe. It was the second time in four days that police have announced they foiled a plot to kill the president, who has already survived several assassination tries.

● HAITI
POLICE RETREAT
TO AVOID ATTACK

PORT-AU-PRINCE — Police temporarily fled their station near Haiti's capital after receiving reports that rebel ex-soldiers from the country's demobilized army planned to attack, authorities said Sunday.

The evacuation of six officers in the town of Thomazeau happened Saturday, local police chief Jean-Joras Sydne reported.

The officers returned to the town's station Sunday morning when U.N. peacekeepers from Brazil entered the town to provide protection. But the U.N. troops left by midday and Sydne said he was considering whether to retreat again.

● ETC.

PANAMA — A 5.4-magnitude earthquake shook Panama City on Sunday morning without causing significant damage, authorities reported.

CUBA



DARIO LOPEZ-MILLS/AP

DRILLS: Cubans try on gas masks in Havana on Sunday in exercises focused on a possible U.S. invasion.

Cubans complete defense drills against a potential U.S. attack

■ Cuban troops and civilians ended a week of defense exercises to prepare for a possible U.S. attack during President Bush's second term.

HAVANA — (AP) — Cubans awoke to air raid sirens Sunday, and practiced shooting, putting on gas masks and doing duck-and-cover drills as the communist nation wrapped up a weeklong series of defense exercises to prepare for a potential attack by the United States.

The activities, called the Strategic Bastion 2004 Exercise, were aimed at evaluating how prepared Cuban society is to face possible military action against Cuba during a second term by President Bush.

State-run newspapers reported Sunday that the exercises were a success and that Cuba's "capacity to resist and overcome an imperialist aggression" was demonstrated.

Since even before the United States launched its attack on Iraq last year, Cuban authorities have insisted that a similar U.S. strike on their country is possible.

"The risks of a [U.S.] aggression are real," President Fidel Castro said Sunday on Cuban television, which showed the Cuban leader checking in with officials throughout the country, via teleconference, on the

status of operations.

American authorities have repeatedly rejected that idea, saying there are no plans to attack Cuba.

Last week, the U.S. State Department said the large-scale exercises in Cuba were really meant to distract people from the hardships of their lives.

Cuban army troops, reservists and militia members spent the week firing rockets, launching grenades and practicing drills with civilians.

Thousands of Cubans took to the streets, taking their prearranged places under the doctrine of "The People's War," in which every citizen, young and old, participates in the defense of the country.

Children were sent to schools early Sunday to practice duck-and-cover drills. Civilians performed shooting exercises in makeshift ranges, as well as conducted first aid and put on gas masks. Work groups gathered to discuss how to guarantee food, water and health care for the population in the event of an attack, as well as to plan evacuations.

State media reported that a total of four million Cubans participated throughout the week in the exercise, which began Dec. 13 and was the biggest of its kind on the island in 18 years. International news organizations were not given official access.

COLOMBIA | FROM THE FRONT PAGE



PHOTOS BY CARLOS VILLALON/FOR THE HERALD

SEARCHING: Policemen from a search unit, above, survey farms thought to be owned by drug dealers in Orito Hamlet, Colombia, Nov. 23. Below, a boy cries after the farm his family worked on was raided by the search unit that day.

Cartel factions feuding

● CARTEL, FROM 1A

club in the coastal city of Cartagena.

Yet his murder touched off a war within the cartel that has left an estimated 1,000 dead — from drug capos to taxi drivers whose bodies were meticulously piled on roadsides — and sent one cartel faction rushing into an alliance with left-wing guerrillas and its rivals to side with right-wing paramilitaries.

While the increasing threat of U.S. extraditions and heavy sentences for Colombian drug lords didn't cause the turmoil, it certainly played a role. Once a suspect is up for extradition, the question becomes not if he will start cooperating with U.S. law enforcement but when. And that, authorities here say, can dramatically affect the trafficker's business.

"Anyone who is alleged to be cooperating with law enforcement is automatically seen on the other side: You are the enemy," said a U.S. counter-drug official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The origins of the internal dispute in the Norte del Valle Cartel predate Solano's collaboration and subsequent murder. But they always come back to the question of extradition.

Named after the fertile valley in the northern part of the province of Valle del Cauca from where many of its members hail, the cartel was itself born of war.

After authorities jailed Cali Cartel leaders Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela in the mid-1990s, several of their associated clan leaders filled the void, including the Henao, Urdinolas, Montoyas and Patiños.

Business immediately boomed. A U.S. indictment of nine cartel members unsealed in May in Miami and New York alleges the organization exported over \$10 billion in cocaine to the United States since 1990, much of it through Mexico and South Florida. That makes the cartel at least as efficient as the far more famous Cali and Medellín cartels that preceded it.

LINKS WITH THE LAW

The Norte del Valle group was also known for its connections in the police. Leaders Danilo González, Orlando Henao, Wilber Varela, Victor Patiño and Patiño's half-brother, Luis Ocampo, were all former policemen — a connection that gave them unparalleled refuge from the law.

Of these, González, a former colonel, kept strong contacts with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Colombian police officers long after he left the agency and joined the drug trade. Those in the force who didn't work with the cartel were eliminated or forced to retire, a former police official said.

González "maneuvers in the police as if he were a commander," a Norte del Valle



informant told Colombian authorities in 2001; the informant was killed shortly after supplying this information.

Still, as good as business was, the issue of extraditions began clouding the cartel's future. By 2001, several top cartel members, including Hernando Gómez, Victor Patiño and Diego Montoya, had U.S. indictments hanging over them.

Some of those indicted began thinking about turning themselves in, to secure shorter U.S. sentences. Gómez met with DEA agents in Panama to discuss the matter, one person who attended two such meetings told The Herald, while others sought more creative ways to end their drug trafficking careers.

In January 2002, top cartel leaders met with right-wing paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño at a farm owned by Gómez. The traffickers had given money to Castaño in the past to help his gunmen fight leftist guerrillas. And Castaño had previously helped some lesser-ranking traffickers surrender to U.S. authorities through his Miami lawyer Joaquín Pérez.

A senior Castaño aide who took part in the meeting described it as "tense" and said it failed because "none of them trusted each other or Carlos." The situation began to come apart quickly after that, the Castaño aide said.

In April 2002, Patiño met with DEA agents in Bogotá, thinking he was going to negotiate his surrender. When he was instead arrested, the rest of the cartel suspected Castaño had set him up. Patiño was extradited in December that year.

"The part where things began to unravel came with the capture and extradition of Patiño," said the head of Colombia's investigative police, Gen. Oscar Naranjo.

Not long after Patiño's arrival in Miami, fear pervaded the cartel. Patiño had the power to snitch on all of them, and he did, according to Naranjo. The U.S. indictment issued in May is believed to have been partly based on his cooperation.

Some cartel members, like Miguel Solano, began filtering information to the DEA, sources close to the cartel said. When cartel leader Wilber Varela found out, he had Solano killed and created a group that began searching

SMART
BOX

KEY PLAYERS IN THE NORTE DEL VALLE CARTEL

● **Victor 'The Chemist' Patiño:** Former policeman who worked with the Cali Cartel before joining the Norte del Valle Cartel. Captured and extradited to the U.S. in 2002, he became a key witness against the rest of the cartel.

● **Hernando Gómez:** With \$100 million in assets, Gómez is believed to have amassed a fortune that surpasses even that of the famed Pablo Escobar. Tried to arrange his surrender to U.S. authorities on several occasions without success and was arrested in Cuba this year. Havana says it may try him on charges of using a false passport.

● **Danilo González:** Former police colonel who used his contacts inside the force to protect the cartel. Killed in March, allegedly for cooperating with DEA.

● **Diego Montoya:** Launched a war against former cartel associate Wilber Varela after Varela ordered Miguel Solano assassinated for filtering information to the DEA. His picture on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted website appears next to Osama bin Laden's.

● **Wilber Varela:** Former policeman who launched a hit squad known as COPERGRIN — Colombians Persecuted by Gringos — to go after other cartel members who were cooperating with the DEA. In the fight against Montoya he's made a strategic alliance with the leftist FARC guerrillas.

high and low for snitches: He called it COPERGRIN — Colombians Persecuted by Gringos.

Diego Montoya, who had also toyed with the idea of surrendering to U.S. authorities, didn't know Solano had ratted on him and launched a war of retaliation against Varela, cartel sources told The Herald.

Since then, mistrust and paranoia have spun into full-fledged warfare.

Varela, Montoya and their estimated 1,000 gunmen have laid waste a half dozen towns in the region. In one particularly brutal case, Montoya's men ambushed Varela's, then piled the corpses in a pyramid on a road.

In January, Patiño's half-brother, Ocampo, was killed. In March, gunmen killed González. Both men were rumored to be collaborating with the DEA.

Gómez was arrested in Cuba for using a false passport and Arcángel de Jesús Henao was captured in Panama in January and extradited to the United States. Castaño himself disappeared in April and is presumed dead.

VICTIMS ALL AROUND

At the lower levels, a host of alleged cartel collaborators have also fallen, including nine drivers from a single taxi company in Roldanillo, Varela's hometown.

The Varela-Montoya fight has also spilled into this corner of Colombia's civil war, authorities say. Montoya has sought out alliance with Castaño's right-wing paramilitaries, known as the AUC, while Varela has welcomed the leftist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, to his home turf.

In an effort to regain control of the situation, the Colombian government has sent in a 500-man police search unit that makes its home in the Roldanillo police



THE HERALD

station. Posters with pictures of cartel leaders and offering a \$5 million reward, made available by the U.S. government, adorn its walls.

The bloc has successfully quelled some of the violence in the cities, but control over the countryside remains elusive and there's a sense their work will never be done.

In the past two years Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has extradited close to 200 suspected traffickers to the United States to face trial, including several leaders of the Norte del Valle Cartel and key Cali Cartel leader Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela.

And yet the price of cocaine on U.S. streets continues to drop — a sign of increasing availability.

"The only question is: How long will it take for a new [cartel] to emerge?" said Wilson Reyes, a consultant for a Valle del Cauca provincial peace initiative.

Indeed, after a recent police search-bloc raid on a farm in the neighboring municipality, bloc commander Gen. asked about a captured photograph of a suspected drug lord.

It's a picture of one of Urdinola's cousins, a policeman told Páez. "Is he dead?" the general asked.

The policeman shook his head. He's still at large.