

Amid combat, Salvadorans vote at election



SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador -- Salvadorans voted for a new president Sunday as leftist revolutionaries military posts and army troops countered with rockets and rifle fire.

At least five guerrillas and two soldiers were killed in fighting in nine provincial towns, according to military officials and witnesses. Two

journalists and a Dutch television cameraman also were reported killed.

Early voter turnout appeared diminished by the combat and a rebel-imposed ban. But Roman Catholic churches were crowded with Palm Sunday worshippers, at least some of whom planned to vote later. By midday, there were long lines at the downtown polling stations.

Turnout was light in smaller towns.

"With these problems, it's better to stay home," said Jose Carlos Ortiz, 23. He spoke in front of his home in the capital as guerrillas retreated from an assault on a military post three blocks away.

Sporadic gunfire echoed from the slopes of the Guazapa north of the capital, a guerrilla stronghold, as troops from the army's elite Bracamonte Battalion pursued the insurgents. Two air force helicopters raced toward the volcano and fired rockets

into the mountainside.

Guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front are waging a 9-year-old war against the U.S.-backed government.

Salvadorans voted to elect a president from among seven candidates. Fidel Chavez Mena of the incumbent Christian Democratic Party and Alfredo Cristiani of the rightist Nationalist Republican Alliance, or Arena led the field in polls. But neither was likely to receive the more than 50 percent required to avoid a runoff next month.

Cristiani, favored to become the country's next president, pledged free-market policies and reduced state intervention in the economy. His party promised to step up the war if the guerrillas do not agree to lay down their arms.

Surrounded by a mob of supporters, Cristiani voted Sunday morning on the capital's central Roosevelt Avenue.

"I hope the United States realizes

that (Salvadorans) want democracy, with this effort they're making to vote. We don't want any more bombs," he said.

President Jose Napoleon Duarte's five-year term ends June 1. Duarte, barred by law from running for reelection, is Washington's staunchest ally in the Western Hemisphere. He is dying of liver cancer.

Chavez Mena is a lawyer and leader of the Christian Democratic Party's conservative wing.

The centrist Christian Democrats contend Arena has not changed much since it was founded in 1981 by individuals allegedly linked to death squads.

Arena denies links to death squads. Cristiani says the party's ideology is similar to that of the U.S. Republican Party.

The leftist Democratic Convergence, whose leaders maintain formal links with the guerrillas, is running third in the election, according to polls. It was the first election since

1977 in which socialist candidates have competed.

About 1.83 million people out of a population of 5 million were eligible to vote. Polls opened at 7 a.m. in 243 of the country's 262 municipalities and were to close at 5 p.m.

Nineteen towns in the north did not set up voting stations because election officials deemed those rebel-held zones too dangerous.

Ricardo Perdomo, chairman of the Central Elections Council, said preliminary results would be available early Monday. Rebel sabotage to telephone lines and electricity, which has cut or restricted power to 80 percent of the country, were likely to slow the vote count.

The rebels called a boycott of the election and last week declared a transport ban that has paralyzed bus and truck traffic in most of the country.

In San Sebastian, 30 miles east of the capital, turnout was light.

Semiautomatic gets kick

Polls find majority support ban on weapons

An overwhelming majority of Americans favor a ban on semiautomatic assault weapons, although there is no consensus on how such a ban should work, according to two polls released Saturday.

A nationwide survey conducted by the Los Angeles Times found that 80 percent of Americans favored banning such weapons. A Newsweek poll showed that 72 percent favor a permanent ban on selling them, while 21 percent opposed such a ban.

The Times poll found opposition to the sale and possession of the rapid-firing weapons across political, ethnic, gender, geographical and educational lines, said survey director I.A. Lewis.

However, given several suggestions for how to remove the guns from society, respondents split

three ways. Twenty-four percent said the guns should be confiscated from present owners, 30 percent supported buying the guns back and 30 percent would allow present owners to keep their guns but ban new sales.

More than half of the 1,158 people polled in the Times' telephone survey said only law-abiding citizens would obey the ban, leaving the weapons mainly in the hands of criminals.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 or 4 percentage points, Lewis said.

According to the Newsweek poll, 58 percent of Americans believe a ban would reduce the number of killings by unstable people, the magazine said. However, half of those polled said they did not believe such a ban would reduce drug- or crime-related killings,

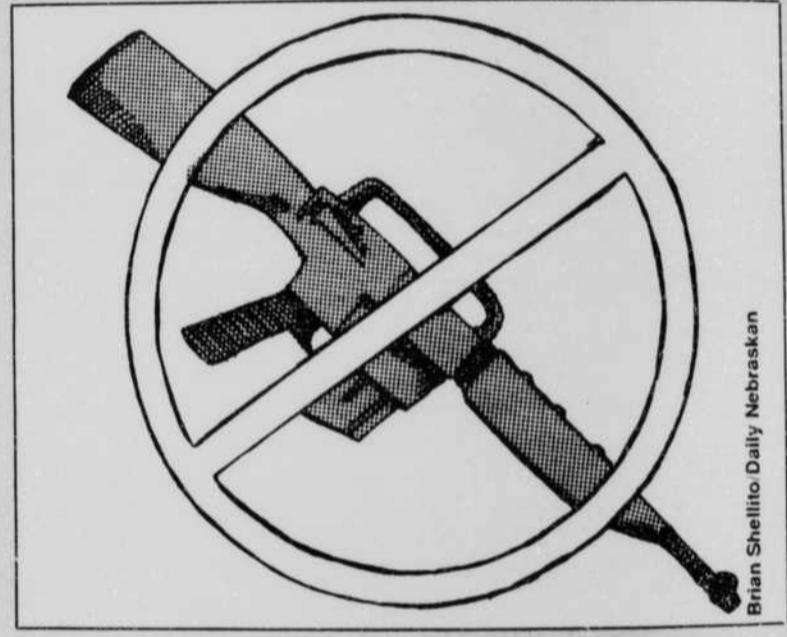
while 45 percent said they believe it would help.

Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed said they believe people should be required to provide more information to police before they are allowed to buy any kind of firearm, while 15 percent said they believe current laws are adequate.

The telephone poll of 756 adults was conducted March 16-17 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.

The issue gained national prominence in January after a suicidal gunman killed five children and wounded 30 other people in a Stockton schoolyard.

The California Assembly has approved a bill banning 40 types of assault weapons and the Bush Administration has imposed a temporary ban on the import of foreign-made assault weapons.



Brian Shellito/Daily Nebraskan

Heir stirs hope in some, but creates doubt in others

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- The selection of a shrewd, affable pragmatist as President P.W. Botha's successor is contributing to a surge of hope for a peaceful breakthrough in South Africa's political stalemate.

So far, however, the optimistic musings are coming almost exclusively from whites.

Black leaders make clear they will be relieved when Botha steps down. But they suspect his heir apparent, F.W. de Klerk, will preside over changes more cosmetic than substantive.

Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Zulu political leader denounced by many black activists as too conservative, says he will oppose de Klerk until the government gives blacks full voting rights. There is no sign de Klerk contemplates such action.

At the other end of the black political spectrum, the African National Congress guerrilla movement says changes under de Klerk will be in personal style, not National Party policy.

De Klerk and Botha "are pieces of the same carcass," spokesman Tom Sebina said from the quarters of Movement's exile headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia. "If the meat is bad, the meat is bad."

Botha, 73, resumed his presidential duties last week after an eight-week convalescence from a stroke. In the interim, he resigned as National Party leader and was replaced by de Klerk, the minister of national educa-

tion.

In a dramatic chain of events, Nationalist newspapers and politicians began newspapering that Botha should retire. Botha responded by declaring he would stay in office until next year, and the party's parliamentary caucus resolved that it wanted de Klerk to be president.

However, the party has neither the constitutional power nor the appetite to force Botha from office. De Klerk said Friday he will seek cordial coexistence with the president while urging his party to "break new ground" in pursuing political reform.

De Klerk, who turned 53 Saturday, has never been viewed as liberal. But supporters and skeptics alike depict him as more open-minded and less imperious than Botha, who has headed the government since 1978.

After becoming party leader, de Klerk called for a South Africa "free of domination and oppression."

Helen Suzman, long-serving legislator for the anti-apartheid Progressive Federal Party, said of de Klerk: "People are being too optimistic if they think he is going to throw fundamental policy overboard."

De Klerk does not have the same close ties to the military and police that Botha nurtured. But he is committed firmly to segregating neighborhoods and schools for whites who want them, and his proposal for "genuine power sharing" with blacks as yet has no substance.

Thousands march on Moscow

MOSCOW -- Thousands of Soviets took to the streets Sunday to accuse the Communist Party of sabotaging Boris N. Yeltsin's election campaign and to threaten a general strike if the maverick reformer fails to win office.

The march through downtown Moscow by 3,000 Soviets chanting "Hands off Yeltsin!" was an extraordinary outburst of passions aroused by Sunday's election for a new national parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies.

Yeltsin, 58, is running to represent the Soviet capital, where he headed the local party apparatus for almost two years before President Mikhail S. Gorbachev fired him.

At pre-election meetings and in a televised debate with his opponent, automobile factory manager Yevgeny Brakov, the stocky, white-haired Yeltsin has charged the party machine he once led of conspiring against his candidacy and restricting voters' access to his campaign appearances.

Thousands of Yeltsin supporters planned to rally after noon Sunday at southwestern Moscow's Gorky Park, where a Russian folklore festival was under way. When they were told permission for the meeting had been refused, they set off for the city's downtown.

Their anger was also kindled by a recent decision of the party's policy-making Central Committee, announced Thursday, to form a special commission to investigate charges that Yeltsin, who is still a Central Committee member, opposes some

party policies.

The campaign against Yeltsin appeared to enter another phase Sunday when the party's Moskovskaya Pravda printed an account about Yeltsin's character and politics. The newspaper claimed it was a "myth" that he was more faithful to principles than others.

Yeltsin won the hearts of many Muscovites with a campaign against corruption and spirited attacks on the privileges, from special food stores to chauffeured limousines, available to the government and party elite.

"He's against the party mafia, and that's why the party mafia is against him," declared one marcher on Sunday, Taras Osipov, 65, a retired engineer. "Yeltsin is with the people, and for the people."

The demonstrators, who carried a hand-painted banner reading "Yes to Yeltsin, no to the bureaucratic system!" glued pro-Yeltsin posters to

the walls of buildings along their route, including the Foreign Ministry Press Center, and called on passers-by to join them.

On Kalinin Prospekt, scores of gray-uniformed police officers, backed up by KGB agents in plainclothes, barred the way to the Kremlin, the seat of Soviet power. The marchers, including teenagers and people in their 60s, turned north on a tree-lined boulevard, passed the headquarters of the Soviet news agency Tass, and arrived at Gorky Street, Moscow's major shopping thoroughfare.

In unison, the protesters brandished their fists and chanted their demand to meet with Lev N. Zaikov, a member of the ruling party Politburo who succeeded Yeltsin as Moscow party boss in November 1987, and who leads the party machine Yeltsin claims is working for his defeat.

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