

Colombian plane catches fire in mid-air; kills 22

ASUNCION, Paraguay — A Colombian cargo plane caught fire in the air shortly after takeoff Sunday, killing at least 22 people when it crashed into houses in a suburban neighborhood, the government said.

The plane's three-person crew and one passenger died in the crash. All were Colombians. The civil aviation office said firefighters found the aircraft's black box in the smoldering debris.

Among the victims were seven children, including five brothers, who had been playing an outdoor volleyball match in the streets of the Juan Sinforiano Bogarin neighborhood, 2 1/2 miles northwest of the airport and nine miles north of the capital.

Eyewitness Cesar Rivarola told reporters he saw the aircraft's left turbine catch fire in mid-air before the plane apparently went out of control and crashed.

"It started spinning in the air, as if it was doing acrobatics, and then fell to the ground nose-first," Rivarola said.

A couple told television reporters they had left their five children with their grandmother, who had taken them to play volleyball. On returning to look for them, the parents found all six were dead.

The plane, which was not carrying any cargo, crashed into seven houses and burst into flames, destroying the buildings. Light rain was helping to douse the fires, rescue workers said.

Parents began a desperate search for children who had been playing in the streets of the middle-class neighborhood. Firefighters searched for other victims among the debris.

Television footage showed several people raking through the debris. One man was seen stealing part of the plane's turbine.

Forbes closes in as rivals try to derail 'lopsided' campaign

WASHINGTON — As if the polls showing Steve Forbes pulling even or ahead in New Hampshire aren't worrisome enough to Bob Dole, consider this scoreboard: Forbes 516, Dole 71.

The figures aren't from any poll, or preference ballot at a GOP event. But they are troubling nonetheless, representing the number of Forbes and Dole ads that appeared the week before last on Boston television — the most important way of reaching voters in New Hampshire's Feb. 20 political primary. And for the other Republican candidates, the Forbes edge is even more lopsided.

It is an advantage that the other campaigns have no way of overcoming as they scramble for a way to derail Forbes; by using his own personal fortune to pay for his campaign, the multimillionaire publishing heir can ignore the spending limits imposed on other candidates.

"If his name wasn't Malcolm Forbes, he wouldn't be a serious candidate for mayor of a city in New Jersey," former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander complained last week.

As of last week, Forbes' was spending on New Hampshire and Boston TV at a rate that suggests the average New Hampshire resident would have already seen 135 of his ads.

By Feb. 20, that exposure will grow to perhaps 200 Forbes ads, compared to roughly 35 for Dole, according to a Dole campaign analysis.

It isn't just the sheer ad volume that has the other campaigns so frustrated by Forbes. He has used his ads to change the tenor and focus of the campaign, frustrating the strate-

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SCOTT REED

Dole campaign manager

gies of candidates who entered the race months before him.

Dole and most other candidates began the race believing Republican primary voters would be thrilled that their party had finally taken control of Congress and would view the presidential campaign as a way to finish the job.

But Forbes has tapped a powerful, lingering anti-Washington sentiment, winning over a solid core of Republicans who supported Ross Perot in 1992 and also dramatically increasing the interest of independents, who are allowed to vote in New Hampshire's presidential primary.

Polling shows Forbes beating Dole 2-to-1 among self-described independents. This trend is particularly true in southern New Hampshire, where the population has grown since the last competitive GOP presidential

primary in 1988.

"A remarkably high number of independents say they plan to vote in the Republican primary," said pollster Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center.

This is what drove Dole to enlist friends to challenge Forbes.

In New Hampshire, popular Gov. Steve Merrill asserts in a Dole ad that the Forbes flat tax will raise middle-class taxes. Former New Hampshire Sen. Warren Rudman, who remains wildly popular, plans several public events this week to warn the Forbes approach could balloon the deficit.

And in Iowa, popular Sen. Charles Grassley spent part of Sunday taping a new Dole ad criticizing Forbes' views on welfare. Forbes has opposed time limits on welfare and denying benefits to illegal immigrants.

Dole aides believe the criticisms will carry more weight if delivered by such popular local figures, and there is some evidence the strategy may be working. Forbes has complained bitterly about the Merrill ad, saying its assertions about the flat tax are "bogus." To the Dole campaign, the protest was viewed as proof one of its anti-Forbes tactics had finally worked.

"We spent a year developing a campaign to defeat (Texas Sen.) Phil Gramm and suddenly found ourselves over Christmas trying to design a campaign to stop Steve Forbes," said Dole campaign manager Scott Reed.

Serbian president permits war crimes officials access

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic agreed Sunday to permit international war crimes investigators to open an office here, a move that could accelerate the gathering of evidence of ethnic cleansing in the four-year war in Bosnia.

The gesture of cooperation with the tribunal in The Hague reverses a two-year refusal by the Serbian leader to grant investigators access.

There have been occasional meetings here between tribunal and Serb officials but no direct evidence-gathering permitted. American officials said investigators now will be able to question Serb eyewitnesses to crimes.

In another conciliatory move, Milosevic told Secretary of State Warren Christopher he would permit the U.S. Information Agency to open an office in Kosovo, a predominantly Albanian province whose autonomy the Serbian leader reversed in 1989.

Christopher said the U.S. intention in opening the office was to bolster the political and cultural rights of the people there. Many Kosovo nationalists now want to go beyond autonomy to independence, which would mean further splintering of Yugoslavia.

But Christopher failed to induce Milosevic to arrange for the extradition of war crimes suspects for trial in The Hague. Serbia has no extradition provision in its laws. Milosevic told Christopher any war criminals found in the

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WARREN CHRISTOPHER

Secretary of state

country would be tried in Serbia.

But U.S. officials, who briefed reporters under rules that shielded their identity, said that was unacceptable.

The stop here completed a three-nation visit by Christopher to the Balkans. He urged leaders in Croatia and Bosnia to free remaining war prisoners and to protect the human rights of residents of the three former Yugoslav republics as the Bosnian peace accords are implemented.

Christopher expressed optimism about the outlook for implementing the peace accords. "Peace is beginning to take hold in the former Yugoslavia," he said Sunday at a news conference.

"We are both optimists," Milosevic said in his own, separate statement to reporters. But he also signaled in diplomatic language that there were rough spots in the meeting. "We have had very frank and open talks," he said.

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