

International Intelligence

Colombian youth march against kidnappings

Thousands of children from every walk of life congregated in the capital, Bogotá, on April 2, to protest the growing number of child kidnappings and the government's failure to provide protection. Under the banner of the organization "No Más" (No More!), whose founder, Francisco "Pacho" Santos, was forced to flee Colombia for his life in March, the children, wearing white shirts, their parents, government figures, non-governmental organizations, and anti-violence activists took part in the march.

Children have even been snatched from school grounds and off schoolbuses. Of the 2,800 Colombians kidnapped each year, 7% are children. The narco-terrorist gangs are major culprits.

Santos issued a communiqué from his exile in the United States, blasting President Andrés Pastrana's government for "complicity" in negotiating with the premier narco-terrorists, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The government failed to demand an explanation from the FARC for its death threats against Santos, forcing him to flee the country. He said, "This silence leaves a lot to be desired of a President and an administration that are supposedly protecting Colombia's citizens," adding provocatively: "The government is surely not going to take a stand until the President is ousted."

Farouk Shara speaks on Syria-Israel peace

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara addressed the issue of peace with Israel in an interview with the Lebanese daily *Al-Mustakbal*, asserting that his President, Hafez al-Assad, was in the best of health and that he would not accept a dishonorable peace: "There is much talk of Assad's health and of the so-called succession in Syria. Assad's health is excellent, as Clinton witnessed for himself in Geneva. . . . And, for your information, [Assad's son] Bashar has told me more than once that Assad will not bequeath him a dishonorable peace—and

nor would he accept it." This is the first official reference to the possibility that Bashar Assad will succeed his father, who has been in power for decades.

Shara also said that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had initially agreed to "a commitment to international resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, and general principles," referring to the 1992 Middle East peace negotiations in Madrid. But, she changed her mind, he said, speculating that it might have been the result of contacts with the Israeli side. He also said that the Syrians expected that U.S. President Clinton would bring positive proposals for an agreement. "We went to Geneva on the basis that we would be apprised of something important." Instead, Shara said, they were confronted with the Israeli demand that it maintain full control of not only Lake Tiberias, but also the Jordan River, going beyond their demand last year at the Shepherdstown, West Virginia talks, to retain control of just the lake.

UN intransigent over Cambodia's sovereignty

Cambodia's efforts to reach an agreement on UN support for a trial of the Khmer Rouge for genocide, again ended in failure in late March, after the UN delegation continued to insist that the UN be allowed to ride roughshod over Cambodia's sovereign right to conduct the trials. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the UN still refuse to budge from their insistence that Cambodia meet "international standards": 1) majority UN-appointed judges; 2) international prosecutor and judge; 3) guarantees that all those named by the foreign prosecutor will be arrested; and 4) no amnesties. In other words, no sovereignty.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, just before the delegation arrived, said in a speech, that Annan's predecessors Kurt Waldheim, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Javier Pérez de Cuellar, should be called to testify as to "why the Khmer Rouge continued to hold Cambodia's seat at the UN for more than a decade after they were driven out of the capital."

Backing the Prime Minister up, former

Australian Ambassador to Cambodia Tony Kevin responded to the UN stance that Cambodia "obviously lacked international standards of justice." In the March 30 *Phnom Penh Post*, Kevin wrote: "Just consider the arrogance of their position. The UN was telling Cambodia's sovereign government—a democratically elected coalition government, a member of the UN and of ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]—that Cambodia's political and legal systems could not be trusted to have any substantive input into decisions regarding indictment, prosecution, sentencing, or amnesty of Cambodia's former Khmer Rouge leaders." The UN refuses even to accept the U.S.-proposed compromise for a mixed panel of judges, he said, which Cambodia has agreed to.

EU chief Romano Prodi may soon be unemployed

Rumors are flooding the European press that European Commission President Romano Prodi may soon be the victim of political "regicide," as the April 4 issue of Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* characterized it. Prodi, Italy's former Prime Minister, rode to power on the wave of scandals that brought down Jacques Santer and the entire EC—the unelected European Union bureaucracy that makes policy in Brussels—just over a year ago. Prodi had strong British backing, and populated the Commission's posts that usually went to other countries, with either Britons or Anglophiles like himself.

"How, exactly, this Hamlet-like tragedy will unfold is still unclear," the *Zeitung* wrote. "Many signs point to some kind of regicide, whereby several officials are apparently hoping to save their own seats on the Commission by convincing Mr. Prodi to return to Italy, and selecting a successor from among their own ranks."

"Sources say they want to avoid, at all the costs, the fate of the previous Commission, led by Jacques Santer, which broke apart at its weakest link, pulled down by French Commissioner Edith Cresson. One EU diplomat rejected an internal solution of this kind, however, saying that if Mr. Prodi

FIVE MEMBER-NATIONS of the Commonwealth of Independent States began military exercises on April 2 in southern Tajikistan. The Tajik Defense Ministry called the exercise an action against "international terrorist gangs." Participating are Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Belarus and Armenia have shown keenness to participate later.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU should be indicted, say Israeli police who have completed their seven-month investigation of the former Prime Minister. Charges would include bribe taking, fraud, corruption, and obstruction of justice, which allegedly took place during Netanyahu's 1996-99 term.

NIGERIAN President Olusegun Obasanjo began a weekly radio talk to comment on national affairs on April 1. The idea "appears to have been suggested during a visit by [press spokesman] Doyin Okupe to Washington earlier this year where he was impressed by idea of the weekly 'fireside chat' begun by U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and taken up since by President Clinton."

EAST TIMOR'S situation is so bad that 10,000 refugees who had been repatriated into newly independent East Timor, from camps in Indonesian West Timor, have returned to the refugee camps, fleeing massive food shortages. There is no sign that the UN colonial government in Dili has any intention of solving its problems.

'KAGAME is holding Rwanda hostage," charged former Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu, on April 1. Paul Kagame, who was Vice President and Defense Minister, became "Acting President" in late March, when President Pasteur Bizimungu suddenly resigned. "The strongman intervened and made it clear to Bizimungu that his job was just pure illusion," Twagiramungu said. "The Rwandan state exists only to symbolize the power of one single man who has taken it hostage."

were to resign, the whole Commission would have to follow."

The growing number of critics say that Prodi's incompetent political style copies the "catchwords and methods of the consulting industry," continued the daily. "The philosophy of programs and position papers is being replaced by concepts such as benchmarking, best practice, and value for money."

Von Sponeck, women's NGO report on Iraq

Dr. Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, wife of Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, headed a delegation of ten to Iraq from women's non-governmental organizations in Malaysia. On her return, she issued an appeal to all quarters, to persuade the UN to lift the sanctions. The delegation visited hospitals, schools, and nursing homes, and met with agencies, including the Federation of Iraqi Women, the Red Crescent, and UN agencies. They observed an increase in child mortality, due to diarrhea, respiratory infections, and diseases believed to be caused by radioactive ordnance used in the war. In hospitals, she said, infants have to share beds, incubators, and oxygen in shifts. Other problems she cited included inadequate housing, insufficient power supply, and large numbers of children leaving school.

At the same time, Hans von Sponeck, the former head of the UN humanitarian aid agency in Iraq, was received by President Saddam Hussein, before leaving Baghdad. Von Sponeck had resigned and called for lifting the sanctions. The German diplomat reported: "Infant mortality has doubled, 21% of all children under 5 years of age are malnourished. Diarrhea and similar illnesses have again become the leading causes of death of children. Sixty-six percent of girls and boys cannot read or write. Because the schools are no longer able to provide for all students, and many children work, or have become street children."

Von Sponeck agreed to meet with Saddam Hussein "in order to talk to [him] personally about the situation in his country." Acknowledging that their 90-minute meeting would be exploited by Baghdad as a dip-

lomatic triumph (no UN official has met the President since 1991), von Sponeck said: "All instruments which have been created to protect man, have been forgotten in Iraq, on all sides. The linking of arms inspections with the total embargo must finally be ended. The civilian population can no longer stand the suffering."

He is being replaced by Tun Nyat of Myanmar. Saying farewell to his staff on March 30, von Sponeck said he could not bear to continue watching a population "deprived of everything . . . the right to proper life, the right to work, the right to shelter, good services, and most of all, the right to education."

Also on March 30, U.S. and British jets bombed targets in the northern provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Nineveh, and in the southern provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Nejef, Qadissiya, Missan, and Kerbala.

Sri Lanka President firm vs. Tamil Tiger terror

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga has strongly rejected calls from elements within the country's ethnic Sinhala majority to withdraw troops from areas held by the Tamil-separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The military and the Tigers are locked in a bloody campaign in northern Sri Lanka, while peace talks between them remain stalled in Oslo, Norway. President Kumaratunga, who survived a suicide-bomber attack on Dec. 18, 1999, said: "I will not allow the withdrawal of troops even if I am killed. However, as and when the talks with the LTTE progress, a de-escalation could be considered," according to the April 3 issue of the *Times of India*.

The President's remarks were preceded by an escalation of the fighting, with the Tigers pounding the government position in the southeastern part of the Jaffna peninsula in the north of the island-nation. Reports indicate that more than 12,000 people are trapped by the fighting.

At a recent meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission, Sri Lankan Representative H.M.G.B. Palihakkara called upon the international community to persuade the Tigers to negotiate peace with the government.