

World and Nation

De Klerk accepts proposal for talks

From Associated Press reports

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — President F.W. de Klerk on Thursday accepted a proposal by the African National Congress to send a delegation for the first formal talks between the white government and its foremost adversary.

The ANC's commitment to dialogue "is a positive step," reflecting a desire to "search for solutions through peaceful means," said de Klerk, who lifted a 30-year ban on the guerrilla movement three weeks ago.

De Klerk also made his first public statement on a controversy involving Defense Minister Magnus Malan, who has been linked in press reports to a secret military unit that allegedly assassinated anti-apartheid activists.

The president, interviewed by the state-run TV network, said the allegations would be thoroughly investigated by a judicial commission, criticized the press for conducting a "trial by media," and praised the role of the security forces in saving South Africa from "anarchy and chaos."

Opposition political leaders demanded Malan's resignation and urged de Klerk to ensure that no cover-up

takes place. Malan, in statements this week, denied having ordered assassinations but did not rule out the possibility that the unit may have committed such acts. He pledged the military would not interfere with any investigations.

The Star newspaper of Johannesburg quoted sources as saying Malan had been aware of the unit at least since 1987.

Police investigators have said in court papers that members of the unit, called the Civil Cooperation Bureau, are suspected of involvement in the assassinations last year of David Webster, a Johannesburg human rights activist, and Anton Lubowski, a civil rights lawyer and pro-independence activist in Namibia.

De Klerk last month ordered a judicial inquiry into charges that military and police squads murdered government opponents. The commission is expected to investigate the unsolved killings of at least 60 activists in the past decade.

Three former policemen have confessed to serving on death squads.

Several police officers are under investigation. The activists allegedly killed by the death squads include

members and supporters of the ANC.

Although it was legalized Feb. 2 as part of de Klerk's peace initiative, the ANC says its guerrilla campaign remains one of its tactics in trying to pressure the government to end white-minority domination.

On Feb. 16, the ANC said from its headquarters in Zambia that it would send a delegation to South Africa to confer with de Klerk about obstacles in the way of negotiations on a new constitution.

The ANC says the state of emergency must be lifted and all political prisoners freed before such talks can start. Its office in London released a list Thursday of more than 750 prisoners it said should be freed.

No date for the preliminary meeting has been set. De Klerk said the government would first have to address "legal uncertainties" regarding exiled ANC leaders who might be liable for prosecution in South Africa.

Earlier Thursday, the government said de Klerk had postponed a meeting scheduled for Saturday in Zaire with leaders of some black African nations. The ANC had urged a boycott of the meeting, saying de Klerk's reforms

had not gone far enough.

While welcoming the ANC's decision to pursue talks, de Klerk said it was "disappointing that the ANC leadership continues to talk about an armed struggle and hostilities at a time when most South Africans, supported by the rest of the world, want peace."

The government "is committed to a new dispensation which offers peace and justice for all," de Klerk said. "An armed struggle and hostilities do not fit into this pattern."

Recently freed ANC leader Nelson Mandela helped launch the guerrilla campaign in 1961, one year after the group was outlawed. The bombing and sabotage campaign has been ineffectual in the past year and poses little threat to the government.

In the port city of Durban, leaders of the ANC and a more conservative rival movement, Inkatha, opened their first head-to-head peace talks Thursday, seeking to halt a power struggle that has killed more than 3,000 people.

ANC leader Walter Sisulu, arriving for the closed-door talks, said blacks in Natal Province were "preparing themselves for peace" after three years of savage factional warfare.

Soviets propose bilateral limit to military in Europe

From Associated Press reports

VIENNA, Austria — The Soviet Union suggested Thursday that NATO and the Warsaw Pact limit themselves to 700,000 to 750,000 soldiers each in central Europe, an East German negotiator said.

Since the Soviets and United States have agreed to 195,000 each in central Europe and East bloc nations are reducing their armies, the East will have fewer soldiers in the area than the West, said Klaus-Dieter Ernst, chief East German delegate to talks on reducing conventional forces.

Ernst said these factors would result in a maximum of 700,000 soldiers for the seven Warsaw Pact countries against about 1 million for the 16-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which he called "totally unsatisfactory."

Quayle to visit South America

WASHINGTON — Vice President Dan Quayle will travel to South America for presidential inaugurations in Chile and Brazil next month. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., will join the delegation going to Chile.

Quayle also is expected during his March trip to stop in Argentina, Paraguay and Barbados to continue U.S. efforts to overcome Latin resentment lingering from the U.S. invasion of Panama in December. Many Latin countries still have not given formal diplomatic recognition to the U.S.-installed government.

Kuwaiti tanker explodes

MANAMA, Bahrain — A U.S.-flag Kuwaiti tanker loaded with naphtha and diesel fuel exploded Thursday in the Persian Gulf and two American crewmen were believed killed.

The other 23 seamen, all Americans but one, abandoned the burning ship and were rescued by a U.S. Navy frigate.

U.S. sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said remains

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had been found in the water but it was not clear whether they were of one or two people. A U.S. military spokesman said he could not confirm the report.

Shuttle launch delayed again

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA on Thursday delayed the launch of Atlantis for a second day to let the shuttle's commander recover from a sore throat and to await better weather.

The secret military mission to put a spy satellite in orbit is not expected to take off until Saturday morning at the earliest.

The shuttle originally was scheduled for a fiery pre-dawn liftoff Thursday but was postponed Wednesday when Navy Capt. John Creighton became ill, the second time the space program has delayed a flight because of a sick astronaut.

Airlines improve infant safety

WASHINGTON — The airline industry changed its position on infant safety seats Thursday and asked the government to require them for all passengers under 2 years of age.

The proposal, if adopted by the Federal Aviation Administration, could require thousands of parents each day to buy tickets for children who now fly free. Airlines would still have the option of offering free rides or reduced fares.

"If you buckle your children up at 50 miles per hour, why not at 550 miles per hour?" asked Robert Aarons, president of the Air Transport Association, which represents major air carriers.

The association took the unusual step of filing a petition asking the FAA to impose a tougher requirement on airlines than the agency itself is considering.

Germanys mull unification defense forces

From Associated Press reports

EAST BERLIN — The two Germanys should reduce their combined military by two-thirds when they unite, and some U.S. and Soviet soldiers should remain during the unification process, the East German defense minister said Thursday.

Adm. Theodor Hoffmann said the armed forces should be purely defensive and both states should remain in their respective alliances until they are reunited under a new European security system.

West Germany belongs to NATO and East Germany is in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. About 380,000 Soviet soldiers are stationed in East Germany, and NATO has more than 300,000 in

West Germany, including about 250,000 Americans.

Hoffmann said a joint German military should be reduced to about 300,000 men initially, and later to 150,000-200,000.

All three services — army, navy and air force — should be retained because all are essential to defense, he told a news conference.

Gen. Hans Deim, East Germany's delegate to the Vienna talks on reduction of conventional forces, told the reporters anything over 300,000 men "would cause security concerns of our neighbors, especially France and Poland."

West Germany has 490,000 military personnel and East Germany says its

armed forces have shrunk from 170,000 men to 100,000 in recent months.

Until a new European system supplants NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Hoffman said, U.S. and Soviet soldiers should remain on German territory "even if this becomes symbolic at a certain time."

The United States and Soviet Union have agreed to reduce their troop strength in central Europe to 195,000 each. Most of the reductions will be made in Germany.

Keeping some U.S. and Soviet troops until unification under a new security system would promote stability in Europe, Hoffman said, and described fears of a hasty union as justified.

"Although unification is unstop-

pable, it is going faster than the process of uniting all of Europe" and Europeans have "legitimate security concerns" about it, the defense minister said.

"Our neighbors have had bitter experiences with a united Germany," he added, recalling the two world wars of this century. Talks with the West German military on merging forces could begin soon after East Germany's first free elections are held March 18 and a new government is formed, Hoffman said.

The victorious World War II Allies — the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France — have agreed on a two-stage plan for reunification.

Iranian newspaper calls for release of hostages

From Associated Press reports

NICOSIA, Cyprus — An Iranian newspaper close to President Hashemi Rafsanjani said Thursday all 18 Western hostages in Lebanon should be freed because they have become a propaganda tool for Iran's enemies.

Most of the captives are believed held by kidnapers loyal to Iran.

"Regardless of the West's propaganda ploys, Moslem forces, out of Islamic and humanitarian considerations, should work to get the hostages free with no precondition," the English-language Tehran Times said in an editorial, parts of which were carried by Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency.

It was the first known statement by an Iranian newspaper in support of freeing all the hostages, whose fate is believed linked to a power struggle within the Iranian government.

Eight Americans, four Britons, an Irishman, an Italian, two West Germans and two Swiss citizens are captives in Lebanon.

Terry Anderson, 42, has been held the longest. He is chief Middle East correspondent of The Associated Press and was abducted March 16, 1985.

Anderson's sister, Peggy Say, was in Damascus, Syria, on Thursday as part of a tour with an Associated Press delegation to seek the hostages' release.

Among leaders with whom she has met are Javier Perez de Cuellar, the U.N. secretary-general, Pope John Paul II, and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Attempts to see Iranian leaders have failed.

Asked in Damascus about the Tehran Times editorial, Say said: "I am deeply grateful. It is encouraging. I consider that Iran is not part of the problem, but part of the solution."

Arafat told Say in their meeting last week that Rafsanjani had the greatest influence with the kidnapers, but hard-liners in the Iranian government limited his room for maneuver.

In its editorial, the Tehran Times

said the struggle against Western influence in the Middle East was legitimate and should continue, but that all forces in Lebanon should work to free hostages of whatever nationality.

"They should regard the hostages as victims of imperialist policies of the West and make attempts to get them all freed. Maybe 1990 will be the year for the release of all the hostages."

It repeated Rafsanjani's demand for the release of Iran's charge d'affaires in Beirut, Mohsen Musavi, and three other embassy staff members kidnapped in north Lebanon in July 1982 by members of the Lebanese Forces, a Chris-

tian militia. All four are believed dead.

Lebanese Forces commander Samir Geagea said in August 1988 he found no trace of the men after taking over the militia in 1986. Geagea blamed his predecessor, Elie Hobeika, for their disappearance and apparent murder.

Rafsanjani has offered to help free the Western hostages.

In August 1989, he said there were "reasonable, prudent solutions" to the problem. Two months later, Rafsanjani said he would not try to get them released unless the United States freed billions of dollars in Iranian assets frozen in 1979.

Any statement with even a hint of

conciliation is condemned promptly by factions in the Iranian government who reject the reconciliation with the West favored by Rafsanjani.

Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the former interior minister and Rafsanjani's main rival, regularly encourages groups holding hostages in Lebanon. He said in a newspaper interview last month they have "a natural right to take hostages to inflict heavy blows on their enemies."

Most of the kidnapers are believed linked to Hezbollah, or Party of God, a Lebanese fundamentalist Shiite Moslem group Mohtashemi helped organize in the early 1980s.

Baker says U.S. is judge in elections

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State James Baker said Thursday that even if international observers believe the Nicaraguan government wins Sunday's elections fair and square, the Sandinistas will have to show "a substantial period of good behavior" before there can be normal relations with the United States.

He also said the Bush administration reserves the right to decide on its own if the election is fair. Baker, appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the administration would insist on "a substantial period of good behavior," including an end to support for leftist insurgents in neighboring El Salvador and reconciliation with domestic political opponents — before ending economic sanctions and restoring full diplomatic relations.

The secretary accused the government of President Daniel Ortega of intimidating opponents and poll watchers and denying visas to congressional

observers.

The leading opposition group, the United National Opposition, headed by Violeta Chamorro has received U.S. aid in its bid to govern the country.

Baker said that the United States is "prepared to recognize a government that wins a free election." However, he then set conditions that must be met for the restoration of normal relations and asserted U.S. authority to judge the elections.

"Before we talk about normalizing relations (if Ortega is re-elected) ... we must see a sustained period of good behavior."

"The government of the United States must be satisfied that there will continue to be open political space in Nicaragua. Then we can consider beginning to look at how we might normalize" relations, including lifting the trade sanctions.

Answering a question from Rep. Gerry Studds, D-Mass., Baker said, "It seems to me that if you believe in

democracy you believe in respecting the results of a free and fair election."

But he added, "The United States must reserve the right to make the judgment (as to) whether the election is free and fair."

Observer groups, including one led by former President Carter and another sponsored by the United Nations, will assess the election and "arrive at reasoned judgments" about its fairness, the secretary said. "But, in light of experience, the United States needs to make its own judgment."

The Nicaraguan government, in denying visas to congressional observers appointed by President Bush, argued that the observers could not be objective because the United States is providing money to Chamorro.

While the United States has never broken relations and maintains an embassy in Managua, it is staffed by only a handful of American diplomats. The last U.S. ambassador was expelled in July 1988.

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