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Wire Report

National and international news from the Reuter News Report

Nicaragua sets talks, continues war alert

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — Nicaragua said Wednesday it has set a date for fresh talks with the United States but was continuing preparations for a possible U.S. invasion. The dates have not been announced.

Nicaraguan Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco and President Reagan's special envoy for Central America, Harry Shlaudeman, have talked previously seven times in an attempt to resolve their differences, but little news of progress has emerged from the secret meetings.

Earlier Wednesday Managua sent military reinforcements to northern provinces. State Council President Carlos Nunez said Tuesday night that intelligence reports indicated U.S. military strategists had picked the two northern provinces as possible sites of attack. The provinces, vitally important in Nicaragua's farming economy, are near the border with Honduras, the closest U.S. ally in the region, and near the Gulf of Fonseca, where the United States is carrying out naval exercises with Honduras and El Salvador.

The United States has denied any intention of invading Nicaragua, but a Pentagon spokesman warned Managua that it would take whatever steps necessary to prevent an attack on its friends in Central America. The warning came after U.S. officials said Soviet ships were on their way to Nicaragua carrying more weapons in a build-up they said was beyond the country's legitimate defense needs.

Strained relations between Managua and Washington flared into a crisis last week after leaked U.S. intelligence reports said a Soviet freighter unloading in Nicaragua's Pacific port of Corinto might have carried MiG-21 fighters. U.S. officials said later it was unlikely that combat planes were in the cargo although other weapons were probably delivered to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua, fighting U.S.-backed rebels, has the most powerful land force in Central America with an army of 60,000 and militias totalling 300,000.

Mexican drug bust yields record

MEXICO CITY — Anti-drug sweeps by Mexican police have yielded a world record 13,000 tons of marijuana and led to the release of some 7,000 peasants held as slaves, the attorney general's office said Wednesday. The marijuana is estimated to have a U.S. street value of \$6.5 billion.

Spokesman Manuel Mondrago said the peasants had been kept as slave workers on remote desert ranches in the northern state of Chihuahua where the marijuana was grown, dried and packaged for sale in the United States. Soldiers Tuesday burned about 4,000 tons, making smoke which could be seen and smelled for miles, the said.

North, South Korea resume talks

PANMUNJOM, Korea — North and South Korea began unprecedented economic talks at this border village Wednesday, with the South saying it was ready to discuss trade and joint ventures. The talks, 25 miles north of Seoul, marked the first government-to-government contact between the two sides since political talks broke down in 1979.

A senior Seoul government official, Songhan-Ho, said the Seoul delegates would present a "shopping list" to the North, including anthracite, iron ore and zinc ore.

Both sides have been in a state of confrontation since they fought a three-year war that ended in 1953. Seoul officials said Wednesday's talks marked a significant step towards reducing tension on the peninsula.

2 Soviet pacifists, child deported

MOSCOW — Two founding members of an unofficial Soviet peace group were apparently thrown out of the country Wednesday in a move seen as part of an official attempt to disband the group.

Vladimir and Maria Fleishgakkter and their 18-month-old daughter were put aboard an Aeroflot flight for Vienna Wednesday after being given brief notice that they should prepare to leave the country, group member Vladimir Brodsky told Reuters.

Their unexpected departure came a day after the group reported that another of their number, Nikolai Khramov, had been drafted into the army despite his refusal to serve and sent to a remote outpost on the Chinese frontier. Another founding member, Olga Medvedkova, was forced to drop her activities last March when she was given a 30-month labor camp sentence suspended on condition of good behavior for three years. She was five months pregnant at the time.

Navy pays \$120 million for F-18s

WASHINGTON — The Navy Wednesday paid \$20 million to McDonnell Douglas Corp. as part of the cost for building 84 sophisticated F-18 jet fighters. The Navy already has 336 of the planes and work on the new ones at the firm's St. Louis plant is expected to be completed by September 1987.

Total construction and support equipment cost of the 80 fighters and four trainer models is expected to be \$1.4 billion. The Navy earlier paid \$173 million to the firm as the first increment of the contract.