

News Digest By The Associated Press

Soviet dissidents to be freed Russia changes its approach to human rights

MOSCOW — The Soviet government announced Tuesday that two more dissidents have been ordered released from prison and that Jewish activist Josef Begun is likely to be freed.

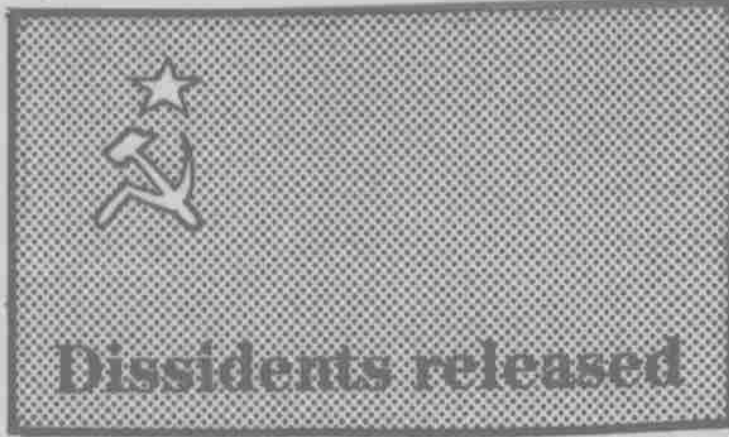
If they are released, it would be in line with Kremlin actions to free dissidents whose imprisonment has been an obstacle to better Soviet relations with the West. Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev has launched a liberalization drive and has said the Soviet Union is changing its approach to human rights "for all to see."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov said the government has ordered the release of Anatoly Koryagin and Alexander Ogorodnikov and will "most likely" free Begun.

Gerasimov told a news briefing he didn't know whether Koryagin was free yet, but he said a government decision was made Friday to pardon him from charges of anti-Soviet activity.

The official Tass news agency issued a report on Gerasimov's briefing, quoting him as saying that Koryagin was to be set free and that Begun's case was under review.

There have been demonstrations in the United States urging Begun's release and plainclothes police in Moscow



broke up a series of demonstrations on Begun's behalf last week in the Soviet capital.

Begun, 55, was sentenced to seven years in prison and five in exile in October 1983 after conviction on charges of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.

Gerasimov told The Associated Press in a telephone call after the briefing that a list of those who had been granted clemency included Ogorodnikov, 36, who founded a Christian movement in the 1970s.

In Brief

'Amerika' put Soviet to sleep

WASHINGTON — A Soviet diplomat today criticized the television miniseries "Amerika" as "the worst TV production possible" and said the programs — "one of the most unfortunate products of the Cold War" — had put him to sleep.

"This film, Amerika, is definitely aimed at instigating hatred," charged Oleg Benyukh, a counselor at the Soviet Embassy and head of its information office. "It is a production with the most malicious intent."

Benyukh spoke at a news conference that followed by a day interviews conducted by satellite between the embassy's first secretary, Vitaly Churkin, and local TV newscasters around the nation.

Yankees' Mattingly to earn \$1.975 million

Don Mattingly of the New York Yankees was granted on Tuesday the largest salary arbitration award in the 13-year history of the procedure, winning a \$1.975 million one-year contract.

"I'm very happy and very pleased with the decision," Mattingly said through his agent, Jim Krivacs. "I'm happy that it's over."

Yankees owner George Steinbrenner had offered \$1.7 million to Mattingly, his All-Star first baseman who had a .352 batting average last year with 113 RBI and 31 homers.

Fighting continues in west Beirut; whole neighborhoods set ablaze

BEIRUT — Shiites fought an alliance of Druse and communist gunmen for the third day Tuesday in a battle for control of Moslem west Beirut that has caused scores of casualties and set whole neighborhoods ablaze.

Police said at least 24 people were killed and 125 wounded Tuesday in west Beirut's fiercest factional struggle for three years.

Dozens of fires raged in residential districts because the intensity of battle kept fire engines from getting through. Several apartment buildings

were burned and scores of cars destroyed by gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades.

Grenade explosions and bursts of fire from heavy machine guns shook the city all day.

Syria backs all the factions involved. In theory they are allied in the 12-year-old civil war with Lebanon's Christians, but they periodically fight each other for domination of the capital's Moslem sector.

The pro-Moscow communists have crossed swords with the main Shiite

militia Amal since the 1982 Israeli invasion, when the Shiites began moving in on the communist power base in south Lebanon.

Last year, the communists joined Walid Jumblatt's Druse militia, the pro-Syrian Baath Party and Lebanon's leftist Syrian Social Nationalist Party in a new coalition called the National Democratic Front.

Syria called cease-fires at daybreak and sundown Tuesday, but the first had no effect and the firing continued long after the second.

Gates: I would resign if forced to hide operations

WASHINGTON — Robert M. Gates, the professional intelligence officer nominated to run the CIA, testified Tuesday he would consider resigning if ordered by the White House to conceal a covert operation from Congress for more than a few days.

But Gates said he would have been irresponsible had he relied on what he said was the "flimsy" information available to him early last October to inform Congress about the possible diversion of Iranian arms-sales profits to Nicaragua's Contra rebels.

Gates, a 43-year-old career CIA analyst, was nominated this month to replace William J. Casey, who retired at 73 after surgery for a cancerous brain tumor.

The nominee, who would become the youngest person and the third career professional ever to head the CIA, repeatedly promised to revive a relationship of candor and trust with the congressional committees that oversee the CIA's secret work.

Vietnam purges Council of Ministers

BANGKOK, Thailand — Vietnam said Tuesday it had dismissed 12 government ministers in what analysts saw as an effort to bring in specialists who can revive the communist nation's moribund economy.

One of the most sweeping political housecleanings in Vietnam's history follows a tide of self-criticism and the resignations last December of three top party leaders.

The official Voice of Vietnam radio announced the purge of the Council of Ministers and said elections will be held April 19 for members of the eighth National Assembly.

More leadership changes are expected in conjunction with the elections, including choice of a new premier to replace the 80-year-old Pham Van Dong, although the assembly itself has little power.

"You can call it the 'Gorbachev effect,'" a knowledgeable academic said privately, referring to Kremlin leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's streamlining of the Soviet hierarchy. Moscow is Vietnam's closest ally.

"It's a complete reworking of the apparatus," he said. "There has been a consensus to put technocrats into the government for the sake of efficiency." Dong, Communist Party chief Truong Chinh and key Politburo member Le Duc Tho quit their party posts during the sixth party congress in December but retained government positions.

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