

Main line faiths launching TV Network

NEW YORK — America's main-line faiths are launching a new, unprecedented ecumenical network on the nation's cable TV systems.

Plans for it were confirmed in interviews this week, with a partial start-up expected in midsummer, expanding to 18 to 20 hours daily in the fall.

"A fresh, new wind is coming across the country's television screens," said the Rev. Daniel Paul Matthews, a Manhattan Episcopalian and board chairman of Vision Interfaith Satellite Network.

Called "VISN," it will shun soliciting money, as typifies individual TV religious preachers. But it has financial backing of the industry, and projects sustaining commercial

sponsorship.

"It's an idea whose time has come in market need and consumer need," said David Ochoa of Nashville, Tenn., a United Methodist and president and chief executive officer of the enterprise.

"For years, the mainline denominations have been on the sidelines, but they've finally got off their duffs and are doing something."

Ochoa, who owns a cable channel in Los Angeles and who also is communications chief for United Methodism's board of higher education and ministry, added:

"It's the first time mainline faith groups, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish, have worked together to create a new TV

programming service for people of faith nationwide."

"We've been getting personal pietism exclusively slanted toward a narrow perspective," Matthews said.

Matthews, with extensive TV experience in Knoxville, Tenn., and Atlanta, before becoming rector of Manhattan's Trinity Church, said the new network would reflect historic faiths that have been the "backbone of America."

Actively involved are most major Protestant and Eastern Orthodox denominations, plus some evangelical and Jewish bodies. Officials said Roman Catholics are expected to join through decisions of bishops late this month.

House demands ouster of Noriega

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday overwhelmingly demanded the ouster of Panamanian strongman Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, and the opposition ambassador to the United States predicted Noriega's overthrow "within a few days."

At the same time, the Reagan administration was considering the imposition of further sanctions, including the withholding of about \$7 million in payments to Panama due by March 15 for canal-related operations. The money would go into an escrow account.

The House voted 367-2 for a non-binding resolution that noted allega-

tions of drug trafficking, murder, money laundering and racketeering against the Panamanian Defense Forces, which Noriega heads.

It also called upon Noriega to comply with an order two weeks ago by Panamanian President Eric Arturo Delvalle, dismissing him as commander of the defense forces. Instead, Noriega dismissed Delvalle a few hours later. The United States recognized Delvalle, who has been forced into hiding in Panama, as the legitimate head of government.

Members on both sides of the political spectrum lashed out at Noriega and gave the administration vir-

tually carte blanche to impose additional sanctions. Rep. Mel Levine, D-Calif., said "the government of Panama is in the hands of a thug, a common criminal."

The House vote was a strong gesture of support for the administration's efforts to pressure Noriega, who has been indicted by two grand juries in Florida on drug trafficking charges, to leave.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz, testifying before a House Appropriations subcommittee, said President Reagan was convening a meeting later in the day to decide on further action against the Panamanian regime.

Family of musicians hijack jet

MOSCOW — A family of musicians from Siberia who hijacked an Aeroflot jet hid their weapons inside their instruments, then opened fire and set off a bomb when an army assault team stormed the grounded plane, Soviet media said Thursday.

Five of the hijackers, who were led by two brothers and their mother, died in the assault and subsequent fire aboard the jetliner on Tuesday, as did three passengers and a stewardess, Tass said. Two of the sky pirates committed suicide and the matriarch, once honored as a Hero Mother of the Soviet Union, was shot dead by family members, the official news agency said.

Deputy Civil Aviation Minister Ivan Vasin told the government newspaper Izvestia that the hijacking was the most dramatic he could recall in his long career.

Eleven hijackers commandeered the Tupolev-154 jet as it was en route to Leningrad after a fueling stop in the Ural Mountains city of Kurgan, and they told the pilot to fly to London, Tass said. It identified them as the Ovechkins, a family musical group from Irkutsk, the southern Siberian city where the flight origi-

nated. "Eyewitnesses pointed to three leaders among the criminal team — Vasily and Oleg Ovechkin and their mother Ninel Ovechkin, a plump, fashionably dressed woman of over 50," Tass said.

"They had brought the weapons and explosives aboard the plane in their musical instruments," Tass reported. It gave no details of the Ovechkins' background and did not say how they managed to elude airport security.

Pre-flight checks at airports in the Soviet Union are not uniform, and range from screening by metal detectors, friskings and a meticulous search of carry-on baggage to a perfunctory glance at passengers' tickets.

About 3 p.m. Moscow time, while the Tu-154 with 76 passengers was over the Vologda region east of Leningrad, the hijackers sent a note to the cockpit, Tass said.

Izvestia, in its report on the hijack, quoted the note as saying: "Fly to a capitalist country (London). Don't fly any lower. Otherwise we'll explode a bomb."

In Brief

Company tok return \$90 million in settlement

WASHINGTON — Bell Helicopter Textron Inc. has agreed to return \$90 million to the government to settle allegations it fraudulently overcharged the Army on helicopter spare parts, Pentagon sources said Wednesday night.

The agreement was believed to be the largest settlement of a defense contracting fraud case to date. A Pentagon official speaking on condition of anonymity said it is to be announced Friday by federal prosecutors in Fort Worth, Texas.

The settlement marks the end to a four-year dispute between Bell Helicopter and the Army that grew out of findings by Pentagon auditors of numerous accounting and inventory irregularities at the Fort Worth company.

The Pentagon source said there had never been any evidence of intentional fraud on the part of the company. "This was an accounting problem," he said.

However, during the investigation, there were allegations that Bell Helicopter officials shredded documents, altered computer entries and covered up evidence of deliberate overbillings to the government.

Armenian groups claim 1,500 killed in clashes

NICOSIA, Cyprus — Armenian nationalists said Thursday that more than 1,500 Armenians were killed in ethnic clashes in the southern Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation made the claim in statements issued by its headquarters in Athens and an office in Nicosia.

There was no way to verify the report. Soviet officials have said the death toll in the unrest last week was 32. Armenian nationalists in Moscow have said the toll was much higher. Foreign correspondents based in Moscow have not been allowed to travel to the region.

The group said that, based on information it has received from the Soviet Union, "the violence against the Armenian population has reached the scale of a massacre."

Andy Gibb dies, cause of death unannounced

LONDON — Pop singer Andy Gibb, younger brother of the Bee Gees rock group, died Thursday in an Oxfordshire hospital after developing stomach pains, his record company said. He was 30.

A spokesman for Island Records Ltd. who asked not to be identified said he could not release the cause of death.

"He died in an Oxfordshire hospital this morning," the record company said in a statement.

"He was 30 years old. He was taken ill with stomach pains on Monday and was admitted to hospital for observation and then he died this morning."

"The reason for death has yet to be announced." The spokesman said Gibb signed contract with Island Records two months ago and was due to work on a new album this spring.

Last October, court papers filed in connection with his bankruptcy proceedings in Miami showed Gibb earned only \$7,755 in 1986 and lived rent-free while playing guitars loaned him by his brothers.

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