

E. German Parliament elects top reformer

BERLIN -- East Germany's Parliament elected a leading reformer as the new premier Monday night, but hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Leipzig to say Communist reforms are moving too slowly.

After a historic weekend in which millions of East Germans took advantage of their new freedom to travel west, Parliament also picked a non-Communist speaker in the chamber's first secret ballot and urged accelerated changes.

And the government said it was dismantling internal barriers that for three decades formed a notorious "death strip" between the Berlin Wall and the city's sealed-off eastern sector.

Deputies appealed for truly free elections, a coalition government and removal from the constitution of language declaring their nation a socialist state.

The parliament, known as the People's Chamber, then approved the Communist Party's nomination of Politburo member Hans Modrow to lead a new government as premier. The government traditionally has been subservient to the party.

Modrow is a well-known reformer within the party, which has been led by Egon Krenz since Oct. 18. Krenz has promised some reforms, including free elections.

As deputies argued into the night in East Berlin, pro-democracy activists in Leipzig pressed for continued change to prolong the spirit of hope sweeping the nation after the festival of freedom over the weekend. West German television estimated the number of protesters at between 200,000 and 300,000. The protesters urged the government to live

up to its promise of free elections and questioned the commitment of the new leadership.

At the session to approve Modrow, the first secret balloting in the Communist-dominated Parliament elected a new speaker, Guenther Maleuda, who told the assembly it was duty-bound to heed the calls of the reform movement.

Maleuda, 58, is the chairman of the Democratic Peasants party, one of the four small parties allied with the ruling Communists. The Communist Party did not propose a candidate for the post.

In addition to the parliamentary session, the party's 163-member Central Committee set Dec. 15 for an emergency party congress that will elect a new leadership and rewrite its political platform.

Modrow is an anti-establishment Commu-

nist who enjoys broad popular support. He was nominated to replace Willi Stoph, who resigned last week along with his entire 44-member cabinet.

About 100,000 more East Germans crossed into West Berlin and West Germany on Monday, but the arrivals were a trickle compared with the wave of 3 million visitors that went west over the weekend after travel restrictions were lifted.

The East German news agency ADN said more than 5 million visas were issued since Thursday, and that only about 10,000 had asked for emigration papers. They seek to join more than 200,000 who have resettled in West Germany this year.

Fewer than 1 percent of the weekend visitors stayed behind. Most people returned to their jobs and homes in East Germany.

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245 killed in fighting in El Salvador

SANSALVADOR, El Salvador -- Rebels held large parts of several poor neighborhoods Monday and battled soldiers in a third day of the worst fighting the capital has experienced in a decade of civil war.

At least 245 had been killed and 378 wounded since the rebels attacked Saturday night in their biggest offensive since 1981, according to the armed forces mortuary, civilian morgues and hospitals, and unofficial military figures.

Thousands of civilians were trapped in their homes by exchanges of gunfire between the army and guerrillas of the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. Helicopter gunships and military planes flew over the city to attack rebel positions.

Few of the city's 1 million people were on the streets and nearly all downtown stores were closed. People went to the armed forces mortuary looking for missing relatives.

Fighting also was reported outside Usulután, a major city in eastern El Salvador, but not in the city itself.

The army press office stopped providing information Monday and whether combat continued in the provinces was not clear. Telephone calls to provincial cities did not go through.

There were no new official counts of dead and wounded from the armed forces.

The armed forces funeral home said it had the bodies of 67 soldiers and military sources said unofficially 127 guerrillas had been killed.

Morgues said they had bodies of 51 civilians.

Hospitals said a total of 258 civilians had been injured. On Sunday, the armed forces said 65 soldiers and 55 guerrillas had been wounded.

President Alfredo Cristiani announced a state of siege and a 6 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew Sunday and legislators were considering more restrictions on civil rights. A photographer who tried to reach the legislature's building Monday was turned back by gunfire.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Barry Jacobs said an army counteroffensive had been slowed because soldiers were ordered to avoid civilian casualties.

The Bush administration said Cristiani's government had not requested U.S. assistance in repelling the rebel attack.

"It's our belief that they are in control of the situation at this point," said White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater.



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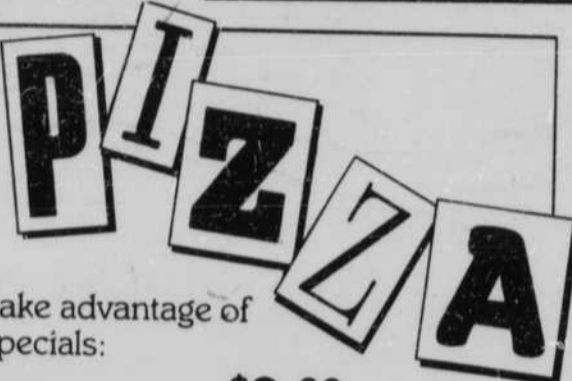
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