

Secession bill advances as Lithuanian standoff continues

MOSCOW - A delegation from the rebellious Baltic republic of Lithuania met Tuesday with a major adviser to President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, and a Lithuanian legislator later called it a sign of hope in the confrontation.

"We are very, very encouraged," legislator Egidius Bickauskas, Lithuania's representative in Moscow, told The Associated Press. "If there are people who at least want to listen to us, it's very good."

He earlier told reporters a three-member delegation, including Deputy Premier Romualdas Ozolas of Lithuania, was meeting with Alexander N. Yakovlev, a Politburo member recently appointed to Gorbachev's new Presidential Council.

Also Tuesday:

●The Supreme Soviet parliament approved a bill setting procedures for secession from the Soviet Union. The law, which goes into effect when it is published in the Soviet press, requires approval by a two-thirds vote in a referendum and a waiting period of up to five years. Lithuania, forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940, declared its independence on March 11. The Moscow government refused to recognize this and a crisis ensued.

●The Kremlin restricted traffic at Lithuania's border with Poland, the republic's only border that does not adjoin Soviet territory. Soviet officials told Polish border officials the crossing from Ogdroniki, Poland, to Lazdijai, Lithuania, was "temporarily" closed, the Polish news agency PAP said.

●Lithuania's chief diplomat in Washington, Stasys Lozaraitis Jr., told reporters there he believes the Soviet army may have taken the lead role from Gorbachev in dealing with the crisis. He said the Soviet military show of force in Lithuania made him more pessimistic than before about his homeland's fate.

●Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze arrived in Washington for talks with President Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker III, pledging to hold "honest dialogue" with secessionist Lithuanians.

Shevardnadze promises 'honest dialogue' with Lithuania

WASHINGTON - Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrived Tuesday for wide-ranging talks with President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker III and pledged to hold an "honest dialogue" with secessionist Lithuanians.

Shevardnadze is expected to give Bush and Baker a message from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Administration officials hope it will spell out Moscow's promise to deal peacefully with the independence movement in the Baltic republic.

While Shevardnadze's remarks on arriving at Andrews Air Force Base had a conciliatory ring, the foreign minister emphasized the significance the Kremlin attaches to the Soviet Constitution and laws in the face of the Lithuanian challenge.

"You must understand the importance of that question for the Soviet Union and the Soviet people," Shevardnadze said as he

set the stage for talks with Baker beginning Wednesday afternoon and with Bush on Friday.

"Our main weapon in resolving any issue . . . is dialogue, honest dialogue," he said. "And this is the dialogue we are looking forward to with the Lithuanian people and the Lithuanian leadership."

Shevardnadze was met at Andrews by Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

The foreign minister's agenda here reaches beyond Lithuania to the war in Angola between U.S.- and Soviet-backed forces, to ways of limiting cruise missiles in a U.S.-Soviet arms control treaty nearing completion in Geneva and to trying to set a date for Gorbachev's summit meeting here with Bush in June.

Bush and Gorbachev hope to sign an accord at that meeting to limit their long-range nuclear missiles, bombers and submarines. However, claims that the overall cutback would amount to 50 percent were being challenged.

A senior Bush administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press that the United States would wind up with only slightly fewer deployed warheads than in the current arsenals.

When warheads kept in storage are taken into account, he said, the U.S. total actually would exceed today's level.

The official said the principal virtue of the treaty from the U.S. standpoint would be to force a reduction in long-range Soviet SS-18 missiles.

Meanwhile, Margaret Tutwiler, the State Department spokeswoman, said the treaty would cut the SS-18 force in half and reduce the total deployed Soviet missiles by roughly 50 percent.

"The treaty is based on equality," she said, reading from a statement. "Since Soviet force levels exceed our own in the most dangerous and destabilizing systems, their reductions will be somewhat

larger."

Still, Tutwiler said Soviet actions in Lithuania were at the top of the agenda for Baker's sessions with Shevardnadze.

When they met last month in Namibia at independence ceremonies for the new African nation, Shevardnadze offered assurances the conflict in Lithuania would be dealt with peaceably.

Baker subsequently sent a message to Shevardnadze and Bush wrote Gorbachev. Neither has received a reply, but U.S. officials said that was not a cause for concern.

"They may have felt it was not necessary in view of Shevardnadze's visit coming up so soon," an official said.

Bush told reporters during a Republican fund-raising trip to the Midwest on Tuesday that his Friday meeting with Shevardnadze "will be the chance . . . to see how that message went down in Moscow."

Administration officials hope he brought a message from Gorbachev that will spell out Moscow's promise to deal peacefully with Lithuania's independence movement.

Yakovlev is seen as a key aide to Gorbachev and is considered the architect of his policy of glasnost, or greater openness.

Yakovlev led a parliamentary commission that last year reviewed the secret Soviet-Nazi pact under which the three Baltic republics - Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia - were absorbed into the Soviet Union. The commission's work led the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies in December to condemn the 1939 pact.

Tuesday marked the first high-level personal contact between Lithuania and Moscow since just after Lithuania declared itself independent last month.

The talks, which Bickauskas de-

scribed as "consultations . . . a conversation," lasted for more than three hours. He could provide no details.

"It is likely there would be no concrete decisions but the very fact that they heard us is very good," he said.

Gorbachev says he will not negotiate with Lithuania, but will hold discussions on any topic as long as the republic renounces the declaration of independence.

"Independent states are not created in such a way in an overnight takeover," presidential spokesman Arkady Maslennikov told reporters Tuesday.

The meeting came amid increasing conciliatory signals from the two sides.

The clash of wills included Gorbachev's orders to Lithuanians to hand over their weapons; the arrest by Soviet troops of some Lithuanian deserters;

takeover of several buildings in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, by Soviet soldiers; movements of army reinforcements, and a war of words.

Bickauskas said Lithuania had no means of implementing its proclaimed independence if Soviet soldiers continue to interfere in the republic.

"We have declared independence but we very well know that tanks are moving on our soil every day and night, and they take over one building after another," he said.

"We realize the Soviet Union has economic, political and military interests in Lithuania that cannot be cut all at once. These problems involve not only the Soviet Union and Lithuania but Europe and the whole world. So we need to talk. We want somebody to hold a dialogue with us."

Anatoly I. Lukyanov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet Parliament, spoke

of "friendly ties" with Lithuania and said Moscow does not question its right to secede, as long as the republic follows proper constitutional procedures.

But Gorbachev also met Tuesday with a leader of Lithuania's 35,000-member Communist Youth movement, who urged him to impose presidential rule in the republic. The appeal was broadcast on Soviet TV's national news.

Soviet news media continued supporting attempts by Lithuania's minority pro-Moscow Communist Party to halt the printing of at least four pro-independence newspapers at Vilnius' central printing plant.

Lithuanian journalists said the newspapers appeared as usual Tuesday, despite the building's being controlled by Soviet Interior Ministry troops.

Israelis rocket satellite into orbit, deny charges of spying on Arabs

JERUSALEM - Israel sent its second experimental satellite into orbit Tuesday and showed off its advanced rocket technology at a time of rising Middle East tensions.

Israel denied the Ofek-2 satellite was part of a program to spy on its Arab neighbors, but Israeli leaders boasted that the launch showed the country's scientific and military superiority over Arab countries.

Military analysts have long noted that Israel's space program could give it immediate intelligence on Arab military moves and the rocket technology involved also could carry more lethal payloads.

Witnesses said the rocket that hefted the 352-pound satellite into space lifted off at 3:02 p.m. (8:02 a.m. EDT). The Ofek-2 -- "Ofek" is Hebrew for "horizon" -- was launched from an undisclosed site in the center of the country and entered orbit 90 minutes later.

It was fired westward over the Mediterranean to avoid giving Arab countries a look at the rocket. Despite the secrecy of the launch, civilians including a busload of school children stopped to watch the rocket arch into partly cloudy skies.

Israeli officials refused to discuss the rocket involved in the launch.

The satellite's orbit will range from 130 miles at its lowest point

to 923 miles at its highest, according to Israel Aircraft Industries, which developed the satellite.

The launch came a day after President Saddam Hussein of Iraq threatened that any Israeli assault on his country would prompt a chemical warfare attack that would "make fire eat half of Israel."

But Israel Space Agency director Yuvaal Neeman denied the long-rumored launch was a response to the Iraqi warning.

"We don't send satellites because of threats," he said.

He described the new satellite as experimental and similar to the Ofek-1 launched aboard a three-stage rocket Sept. 19, 1988.

"The only difference is that we can call the satellite and send it messages and receive answers back," Neeman said, adding: "It is not a spy satellite and has no military significance."

Neeman said on Israel television that Ofek-2 would remain in orbit for two months, adding there is "no reason for it to stay longer because it has no real purpose."

Ofek-1 remained four months in orbit although it was scheduled to spend only a month in space.

Neeman said Tuesday's launch was expected to lead to a third test launch in 1992 and an eventual communications satellite that would remain in space for 10 years.

The purpose of the program is to build a scientific satellite "to see stars, galaxies . . . and black holes, with detectors for X-rays, ultraviolet rays," said Akiva Bar-Nun, the space agency's coordinator.

He and Neeman said the advances in Ofek-2 over the previous craft included an improved gyroscope, better protection against cosmic rays, a larger computer memory and the ability to both send and receive messages.

While space officials always discuss the Ofek program in terms of scientific and commercial possibilities, Israeli politicians were quick to point out the political and military significance of Tuesday's launch.

"I think the proof for the high level of technology in Israel was given today, with the launching of Ofek-2," Foreign Minister Moshe Arens said on Israel television.

"I think the Israeli public knows that Israel's security technology is on a much higher level than that of Iraq," added Arens, a former defense minister.

Shimon Peres, the Labor Party leader who has been picked to form Israel's new government, told reporters the launch should remind Iraq's president "that if he wants to deal with Israel, he should look for other means than the military one."

House approves \$270 million to aid Panama and Nicaragua

WASHINGTON - The House on Tuesday approved a \$2.4 billion spending bill that includes money President Bush is urgently seeking for new democracies in Panama and Nicaragua.

The bill, with \$720 million for the two Central American nations, would mark the first use of a "peace dividend" from reduced Pentagon spending. It still needed Senate action, which appeared unlikely by the Thursday deadline Bush had set for completion of the measure.

Lawmakers approved the bill on a vote of 362-59 after defeating a series of amendments that would have cut foreign aid amounts in the bill. Those amendments brought caustic reactions from the bill's supporters.

"I am amazed at the number of flat-headed members in this House who are all too happy to spend whatever it takes" to support wars "but wouldn't spend a penny to prevent the necessity to fight those wars in the first place," said Rep. David Obey, D-Wis.

Rep. James Traficant, D-Ohio,

sought to cut 5 percent from the foreign aid portions of the bill, charging the measure was "busting the bank . . . Before we ship money overseas, let's take care of our own country first."

Countered Rep. Mickey Edwards, R-Okla.: "This amendment shows why people are fed up with Congress -- because we're looking at the little bitty 'Did I get mine' . . . instead of taking care of the security of our people."

The Senate's Democratic leaders had not yet scheduled consideration for the money bill, and it was unlikely Bush would get the money he sought for the two fledgling Central American governments before Congress leaves Thursday for a 12-day Easter recess.

Because of budget rules, most new spending added during a fiscal year must be made up by cutting elsewhere in the budget. This spending measure is counterbalanced by \$1.8 billion in cuts in Pentagon spending agreed to by Bush and House leaders.

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