

Lithuania's president agrees to compromise proposal

MOSCOW - Lithuania's president said Wednesday his Baltic republic would consider suspending temporarily some of the pro-independence laws that drove the Kremlin to impose an economic embargo two weeks ago.

President Vytautas Landsbergis agreed to the step in a letter to French and West German leaders who last week proposed that such a compromise would help start negotiations between the republic and Moscow.

"Everything is negotiable which does not question the matter of restored independence of the Lithuanian

state on March 11, 1990," Landsbergis said in his letter to French President Francois Mitterrand and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The letter was read to Lithuania's parliament, the Supreme Council, which gave its approval without a vote, said Aidas Palubinskas, a spokesman for the parliament.

"Putting our confidence in France and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as in other Western democracies, and in their support of Lithuanian democracy, we are asking you to transmit to the Soviet authorities our consent to consider a temporary

suspension of the effects of the decisions taken by the sovereign parliament of the Lithuanian Republic that could trouble the Soviet authorities," Landsbergis wrote.

The idea behind the proposal from France and West Germany was that if Lithuania temporarily suspended those laws, the Soviet Union, in return, might ease its pressure on the republic and also agree to talks on secession.

Palubinskas stressed that the proposal from Kohl and Mitterrand did not ask for rescinding the declaration

itself, but urged the suspension of laws passed to implement the independence declaration.

Lithuania declared independence on March 11, trying to restore the freedom it enjoyed before 1940, when the Soviet Union forcibly annexed it along with Latvia and Estonia. It has since passed laws designed to back the independence drive, including ending conscription of Lithuanians into the Soviet army, issuing identity cards for non-Lithuanians and seizing Communist Party property.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

has declared the independence declaration invalid and rejected negotiations with the republic, saying such talks are reserved for foreign countries. He demanded that Lithuania rescind those pro-independence laws.

Gorbachev imposed a partial economic blockade, cutting supplies of fuel and other commodities to Lithuania. As of Wednesday night, no resumption of any of the fuel supplies has been reported.

The republic of 3.8 million people has been struggling economically ever since the embargo was imposed.

U.S. test scores continue to decline

WASHINGTON - Despite ballyhooed efforts at education reform, student achievement is continuing a decline that began three years ago, the government said Wednesday in a controversial report.

Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos said the annual state-by-state performance chart, popularly called the wall chart, "makes it clear that, as a nation, we are still not seriously committed to improving education for all Americans."

The chart has been criticized as promoting flawed data and making unfair state comparisons. Timothy Dyer, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, said American "young people are simply too complex to hang on a wall."

The chart, he said, "has as much to offer educational improvement as the Edsel offered the automotive industry."

Cavazos, however, defended the chart.

"It is the only national measurement of educational performance," he said. "It's the best that we have. Until we develop other measures, we will have to rely on the wall chart."

Officials say the White House argued for abandoning the 7-year-old practice this year because President Bush and the nation's governors had worked to develop national education goals and still are devising more accurate forms of assessment.

The report found that the average American College Testing Program examination scores declined nationally by 0.2 of a point, to 18.6, from 1988 to 1989, while the average Scholastic Aptitude Test scores declined by one point, to 903, during the same period.

A perfect ACT score is 36; a perfect SAT score is 1,600.

The test scores are used by col-

leges and universities as one standard of admission. States administer either the ACT or SAT, not both.

Nebraska was among five states with declining ACT scores.

The report also found that the national high school graduation rate declined from 71.7 percent to 71.1 percent from 1987 to 1988; the percentage of public high school graduates who received a qualifying score on advanced placement examinations declined from 8.8 percent to 8.6 percent between 1988 and 1989.

Bill Honig, California superintendent of public instruction, said the chart "causes more mischief than benefit" because much of the data is a rehash of statistics already made public.

Keith Geiger, president of the National Education Association, said the chart "only continues to confuse and frustrate the public."

Former hostage embarrassed, angry others still held captive

WIESBADEN, West Germany - Former U.S. hostage Frank Reed revealed Wednesday he was held for months with two other American captives in Lebanon and said he was angry and embarrassed that they have not been freed.

Reed, who was released Monday after 42 months in captivity, said he also was held with two British hostages. Reed was flown Tuesday to Wiesbaden for a battery of medical exams and questioning at the U.S. Air Force hospital.

"I have not seen Tom and Terry for a while and I don't know where they are," Reed said, referring to Terry Anderson, The Associated Press chief Middle East correspondent, and Thomas Sutherland, an American educator.

"For God's sake, it's nearly the sixth year for these men. I'm absolutely embarrassed I'm out before they are."

Reed, in his first comments to reporters since arriving in Wiesbaden, said he spent "the good part of two years with Tom and Terry."

Anderson, the longest-held Western hostage in Lebanon, was kidnapped on March 16, 1985. Sutherland was seized June 9, 1985.

"I tell you, I'm very, very angry that Anderson... Tom and Terry... are not free," Reed said from the hospital balcony.

Reed, pale and dressed in his blue hospital bathrobe, said he last saw Sutherland in February 1989. Sutherland turns 59 on Thursday, marking his fifth birthday in captivity.

Reed, 57, also said he spent three years in the intermittent company of Briton John McCarthy and Brian Keenan, a dual Anglo-Irish citizen. He said he saw them just before his release and they were "well and alive."

"I have been with John and Brian since last October," Reed said. "I've spent almost three years either with John and Brian or having them somewhere in the house with me."

McCarthy, 33, a journalist for the London-based Worldwide Television News Agency was kidnapped April 17, 1986. Keenan, 39, disappeared while walking to work six days later.

"Those were the only people I knew" in captivity, Reed said of the four hostages.

The founder of a private school in Beirut, Reed was the second American hostage freed in nine days. Robert Polhill, freed April 22, went through the same medical tests and debriefing last week.

A special State Department team questioned

Reed for a second day Wednesday, seeking clues about the 16 remaining Westerners held hostage by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon. Six of the captives are American.

President Bush thanked Syria and Iran for aiding both hostages' release but has said he will make no deals for hostages. Both Syria and Iran hope to establish closer ties with the West.

But on Wednesday, Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ruled out negotiations with the United States to end 11 years of hostility between the nations. It was not known what the anti-American stance meant for the possibility of any further hostage releases.

Reed, who lost 60 pounds in his 3 1/2 years of captivity said he initially had been angry with the U.S. administration that hostages were still being held.

"But I don't think I am now," he said. "On the basis of information I have received... it appears to me perhaps we are on the right track to getting these people out."

The boisterous, lanky Reed was cheered by dozens of journalists as he appeared on the balcony for what was supposed to be a no-questions photo opportunity.

Standing on the balcony with his wife and their 9-year-old son, Tarek, Reed smiled and affectionately tousled his child's hair, saying it was "just great" to be reunited with his family.

Reed said he was "feeling good" but tired. "I'd like to stay another week or two, but they want me out of here on Friday," he joked.

Asked what he wanted to do when he gets back to his home in Massachusetts, Reed said: "Hide," but then rethought the question, and said: "I'd like to have a big Maine lobster, about three pounds."

Reed has taken advantage of his new-found freedom to telephone the kin of other hostages to relay what he knows about their condition.

Anderson's sister, Peggy Say, said Reed told her: "Terry was in reasonably good health, although he had been having physical problems... He said Terry's attitude was still feisty, as far as the guards go, and he was always screaming for something to read."

In London, a group pressing for release of McCarthy said Reed telephoned the hostage's father to say both Keenan and McCarthy are well: "They have some minor health problems. They exercise daily and read voraciously."

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