

Death penalty acts discussed

DALLAS (AP) — The American Bar Association's call for a national moratorium on capital punishment, made three years ago this month, once seemed destined for a quiet death. No more.

"There's growing momentum," ABA President William Paul said Saturday at his 400,000-member group's national convention. "The moratorium issue clearly is alive."

The major catalyst was Illinois Gov. George Ryan's announcement two weeks ago that no one would be executed in his state until he finds out why more death sentences have been overturned than carried out.

Since 1976, when the Supreme Court allowed reinstatement of capital punishment, Illinois has executed 12 people. Since 1987, the state has released 13 from death row after their convictions were overturned.

Nationwide, according to the Washington-based Death Penalty Information Center, 85 death-row inmates have been freed since 1973.

"Governor Ryan's decision was

really a key," said Jerome Shestack, a Philadelphia lawyer and former ABA president. Later this month, he will testify before the Pennsylvania Legislature in favor of a death penalty moratorium.

"We are learning that a lot of mistakes are made, and errors cannot easily be rectified after someone's execution," he said.

Paul, an Oklahoma City lawyer, emphasized that the ABA does not support or oppose the death penalty but is interested in ensuring that defendants get adequate legal help and that there are other safeguards.

"We've tried to be aggressive, but it ultimately is up to the people of each state," he said.

Legislatures in 16 of the 38 states with death penalty laws have considered or are now considering a ban on executions while they study whether the punishment must be meted out more fairly. Only Nebraska passed a moratorium, which was vetoed by the governor.

In Congress, Sen. Patrick Leahy,

D-Vt., introduced a bill Friday to address what he called "the growing national crisis in the administration of capital punishment."

His "Innocence Protection Act" seeks stronger guarantees of adequate legal help for capital defendants. It also provides for DNA testing of inmates who seek to prove they did not commit the underlying crime for which they were condemned.

President Clinton is considering a request by Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., to suspend federal executions. Meantime, Congress and Attorney General Janet Reno are studying the cases of the 21 people awaiting death for federal crimes.

There has not been a federal execution since 1963, but the number of people put to death by the states is growing, reaching 98 last year, the most since the Supreme Court ruling in 1976.

Nearly 3,600 people await execution. Texas leads with 463 on its death row and also has executed

more people than any state.

Cynthia Orr, a San Antonio defense lawyer, called her state "the fastest assembly line to the death chamber in the nation."

Still, ABA leaders say a corner may have been turned.

"The momentum on capital punishment has gained intensity locally, nationally and internationally," said James Coleman Jr., chairman of the ABA's Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities, in a new report, "A Gathering Momentum."

"We have made great progress in refocusing the death penalty debate and shifting momentum toward acceptance of the principles underlying the moratorium resolution ... eliminating unfairness," said Coleman, a Dallas lawyer.

In addition to Illinois, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, the number of states that have proposed, or are considering abolishing capital punishment, imposing a moratorium or scrutinizing their death penalty laws is growing.

Ethnic Albanian snipers attack NATO

■ Fighting among peacekeepers, ethnic Albanian snipers, attacks on ethnic Albanians wound 19.

KOSOVSKA MITROVICA, Yugoslavia (AP) — Fighting between peacekeepers and snipers, along with grenade attacks on ethnic Albanians, killed one person and reportedly wounded 19 Sunday in the bitterly divided city of Kosovska Mitrovica.

Two of the wounded were French soldiers, hit by ethnic Albanian snipers firing from the northern, Serb-controlled part of the city, NATO officials said.

"It was an attempt to kill our soldiers," French spokesman Lt. Col. Patrique Chanliou said. "We would like to believe it was an isolated incident of extremists, of terrorists."

One soldier was wounded in the stomach while on patrol in the Serb part of the city, Chanliou said. The second soldier was shot in the arm after NATO peacekeepers launched a

counterattack, he said.

The counterattack killed one of the snipers and wounded five others. Grenade attacks on ethnic Albanian houses in the north wounded seven, NATO officials said. And an American with the U.N. police force was also injured by glass shards, after gunfire from outside broke the windows of a train he was riding on.

Yugoslavia's state-run news agency, Tanjug, said four more people, identified as Serbs, were wounded, at least some by snipers.

Seventeen people were detained by late Sunday, NATO said, but gave no details. Peacekeepers imposed a curfew from sunset to daybreak.

Bursts of semiautomatic gunfire could be heard from the northern side of the mostly Serb city located about 20 miles north of Pristina. Occasional explosions sounded over the gunfire, which died down by afternoon.

Some sniping continued, Chanliou said, but the peacekeepers had located the positions from where

the snipers were firing.

Serb sources, who asked for anonymity, said the trouble began when several ethnic Albanians from the southern side crossed a bridge over the Ibar River leading to the Serb side and threw several hand grenades. A large number of Serbs gathered, they said, and NATO peacekeepers tried to control the crowd.

However, NATO said all the grenade attack victims were ethnic Albanians living in the north, suggesting Serbs were still trying to expel them from the neighborhood.

U.N. police rescued two ethnic Albanians, Hysen Xhershku and his wife, Sofija, after one of their houses was damaged by a grenade and the other set ablaze.

"They beat us. They set our house on fire," Hysen Xhershku said in the safety of a U.N. police building in the city's south. He said 10 Serbs entered their house and told them to leave in 10 minutes or die.

At least 10 French tanks rumbled

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Lt. Col. Patrique Chanliou
French spokesman

over the Ibar bridge from the ethnic Albanian side. Civilians on the Albanian side were warned to take cover from possible sniper fire from the Serb section. The bridge — the scene of previous confrontation — was cordoned off with barbed wire.

Democrats skewing of primary concerns Bush

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gov. George W. Bush expressed concern Sunday that Democrats are mobilizing to support Sen. John McCain in South Carolina's open Republican presidential primary.

But McCain said Bush's allegation that some Democrats believe McCain would be the easier candidate to defeat in the general election in November "flies in the face of the facts."

"The facts are that independents are also flocking in large numbers to my candidacy, as well as Republicans," McCain said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "Everybody knows that if you're going to win a general election, you have to have those independents and some Democrats."

He said it was his message that was attracting non-Republicans.

"I'm very proud that libertarians or vegetarians or anybody would consider supporting me because I have a vision of reform for America that I think is taking hold, not only in South Carolina, but all over the country," McCain said.

Still, Bush and his surrogates

claimed — without offering proof — that Democrats were trying to skew the results of Saturday's GOP primary, in which non-Republicans may vote.

"The only thing I'm concerned about is that Democrats flock into the Republican primary to decide who the Republican nominee is, and then head back for the Democrats in the general election," Bush said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition and a Bush supporter, alleged on CBS that "people who are allied with (Vice President) Al Gore are indeed making telephone calls to try to encourage Democrats to vote in the Republican primary ... I think that they consider him a weaker candidate than Governor Bush."

Gore campaign spokesman Chris Lehane dismissed the claims, saying the Texas governor was "increasingly sounding like a rattled candidate."

"I would suggest that he focus on earning the support of Republicans in his own primary rather than worrying about what Democrats are doing."

WEATHER	
TODAY	TOMORROW
Partly cloudy high 42, low 34	Partly cloudy high 49, low 28

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World and Nation Datelines

■ Washington, D.C.

Tycoon Trump decides

against bid for presidency

WASHINGTON (AP) — New York tycoon Donald Trump has decided against running for president.

The move ends a lengthy flirtation with the notion that he could tap his personal fortune to capture the White House as a third-party candidate, The Associated Press learned.

Sources connected with New York's Independence Party movement, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trump has told associates he will announce today that he is not mounting a presidential bid.

After months of speculation about a possible Reform Party campaign, Trump decided recently that the party is too fractured to support a credible presidential candidate, the officials said.

The Reform Party operates in New York under the Independence Party banner.

He met over the weekend with advisers to consider a second option, running as an Independence Party candidate, but determined there is not enough time to get on state ballots.

■ England

Passengers of hijacked plane

seek asylum in other countries

LONDON (AP) — Seventy-four asylum-seekers from a hijacked Afghan plane could be dispersed to the United States, India, Pakistan and elsewhere under a new plan being drafted by Britain, a foreign office spokesman said Monday (Sunday CDT).

"We are in touch with a number of interested countries in case passengers want to go there," the spokesman said on condition of anonymity.

The asylum-seekers were among the passengers aboard a hijacked Ariana Airlines Boeing 727 jet diverted to Stansted airport, north of London, last week.

The plane was en route from Kabul to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif when it was hijacked at gunpoint. The hijackers and the passengers left the plane peacefully on Thursday.

Nineteen people from the aircraft remained in British custody Monday in connection with the hijacking.

Essex police said the detained men were likely to be charged with hijacking or air piracy, which carries a life sentence, as well as possession of firearms.

■ Maryland

Robot space craft set to orbit

mountain-sized Eros asteroid

LAUREL, Md. (AP) — A robot craft that missed its mark a year ago is on target for a Valentine's Day rendezvous with an asteroid named for the Greek god of love.

The Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) spacecraft is approaching the asteroid Eros slowly and is expected to slip into orbit around the mountain-sized space rock at midmorning today.

If successful, NEAR will become the first spacecraft to orbit an asteroid.

Researchers hope data compiled about Eros could one day help humans defend the Earth against a "killer asteroid" like one thought to have wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.