

# World and Nation

## Officials: Plan to request rebel aid may prompt U.S. policy quarrels

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan plans to ask for a watered-down military aid package for Nicaragua's Contras, but congressional Democrats said Thursday that even the scaled-back request will provoke a confrontation over U.S. policy when it votes in two weeks. A senior administration official said Thursday that the aid request which Reagan will argue for in his State of the Union speech Monday will be close to \$50 million, with the bulk of that amount earmarked for non-lethal items for Contra rebels.

But White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said no final decision has been made on the amount to be sought, and he cautioned re-

porters against using a \$50 million figure.

Any such amount would be far less than the \$270 million military aid package the administration had prepared last year but abandoned in the face of a five-nation Central American peace accord signed Aug. 7.

Congressional strategists of both parties said the White House appears to be searching for a package that will sustain the rebels but will appear innocuous enough to win a majority vote. The issue of whether to support the Contras is one of the most closely divided matters Congress has dealt with in recent years.

"We want to tailor our request to

the situation we find ourselves in in Nicaragua," Fitzwater said, "so we would be tailoring ourselves to keep the (Contra) resistance as a viable force and would seek to do that with as much humanitarian aid as possible and as little lethal aid as possible."

In a speech to backers at the White House on Wednesday, Reagan said: "The majority of the aid that I will be requesting from Congress is for non-lethal assistance to keep the freedom fighters a viable force until democracy is irreversible in Nicaragua."

Both Republicans and Democrats are focusing lobbying efforts on a "swing" group of about 30 to 50

members of the House and about half a dozen senators, who would vote the following day if the House approves the package.

Rep. Tony Coelho, D-Calif., third ranking member of the house leadership, said the administration aid request is "a moving target. As they count their votes and they're short, I assume they'll change their request."

But he said no matter how much aid is requested, it will still precipitate a showdown on U.S. policy in the region.

In a related development, U.S. intelligence sources said Soviet arms shipments to Nicaragua in 1987 provided that government with weaponry valued at over \$450 million.

## Date set for cease-fire talks with Contras, Sandinistas

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP) — Contra leaders met with peace mediator Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo on Thursday and announced they will open direct cease-fire talks on Jan. 28 with Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

They assailed as a publicity stunt the unexpected arrival in San Jose Wednesday of a negotiating team from the Sandinistas.

The Sandinista group, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco, said it came to Costa Rica to begin negotiations with the

Contras, although the talks were set for next Thursday.

Adolfo Calero, a director of the rebel group known as the Nicaraguan Resistance, told a news conference following the Contras' two-hour meeting with Obando y Bravo: "The cardinal had no knowledge that the Sandinista commission would be here. We do not know and the cardinal did not know how this confusion occurred."

The Sandinistas may want to hold the talks early in an effort to reach an agreement in time to head off ap-

proval of more U.S. aid for the Contras.

Alfredo Cesar, another Resistance director, said Thursday of the early arrival, "They (the Sandinistas) are simply playing games around a serious subject — the gaining of peace in Nicaragua."

Tinoco said earlier Thursday the Sandinistas wanted to take advantage of the presence of both Obando y Bravo and the Contra leadership to get the cease-fire talks under way.

"After trying for five months to have a meeting with Cardinal Obando, we had it today," Calero said.

## Potato farmer finds diamond while digging

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — A potato farmer dug up one of the largest diamonds ever found in this mineral-rich country, but it was broken into three pieces in a dispute over whether it was real, a government official said Wednesday.

The unidentified farmer found the 307-carat gem Friday while digging up what he thought was a stone in his potato patch in the eastern Kono district.

The man and a friend broke the stone into three pieces following an argument over whether it was really a diamond or not.

Officials of the National Diamond Mining Corporation confirmed it was a diamond. The pieces were deposited in the central bank in the capital, Freetown, while government officials tried to sort out the ownership claims.

The corporation said the stone belonged to them since it was found on their leased property. The farmer and a third party, a group calling itself "supporters" of the farmer, both claimed they were the rightful owners.

Assessors from the Government Gold and Diamond office did not put a monetary value on the pieces.

## Millions of Soviets to lose jobs

MOSCOW (AP) — About 16 million Soviets will be laid off by the year 2000 under Mikhail S. Gorbachev's reform drive, and some people are already worrying about a return of mass unemployment, *Pravda* said Thursday.

The account in the Communist Party daily gave more hints of the widespread concerns raised by Gorbachev's drive for "perestroika," or the wholesale revamping of the Soviet economy and society.

Along with a more effective use of the labor force, the Soviet Communist Party general secretary said an increase in retail prices is needed to

pay the real cost of producing milk, bread and other food staples and reduce the \$97 billion the government pays in annual subsidies.

*Pravda* was the first official publication to publish the number of workers authorities believe will lose their jobs as a result of the Kremlin's drive for greater labor efficiency and discipline.

Joblessness officially ended in the Soviet Union in the 1930s under Josef V. Stalin with the inauguration of centralized economic planning, and the 1977 constitution proclaims that each citizen has a right to a job.

However, a new law went into ef-

fect Jan. 1 that forces many state-run factories and economic organizations to pay their own way, and that empowers local managers to trim employment rolls. All civilian production is to be functioning under the new rules by 1991.

The anxiety with which some Soviets regard the possible loss of their jobs, in a society where unemployment was officially eradicated more than a half-century ago, was indicated by one reader's letter to *Pravda*.

"It's like long-forgotten times are repeating themselves," wrote S. Sokolov of Moscow.

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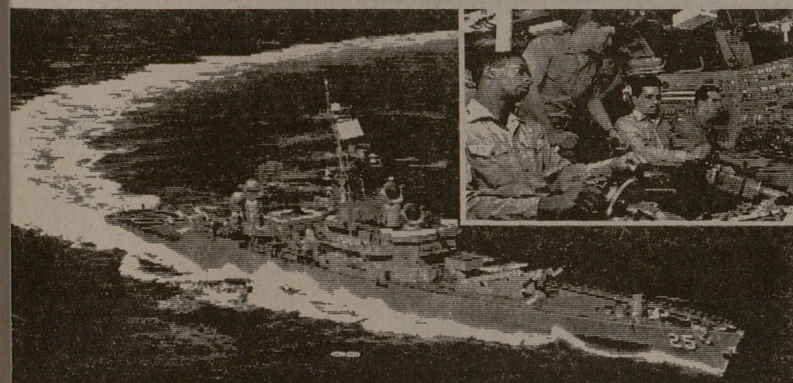
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