

World and Nation

Arabs hijackers force jet to land, demand release of 17 prisoners

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Arab hijackers Tuesday forced a Kuwait Airways jumbo jet to land in northern Iran, threatened to blow it up and demanded that Kuwait release 17 pro-Iranian prisoners. They later released 24 of the 112 passengers.

Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency said without elaboration that the 24 women were released early Wednesday after negotiations with Iran's deputy prime minister, Ali Reza Moayeri.

Among the other passengers were three members of Kuwait's royal family and a passenger with a U.S. passport, on a flight from Bangkok, Thailand, to Kuwait. The gunmen warned the Kuwaiti royals would be in imminent danger if Kuwait refused to free the prisoners, IRNA reported.

The hijackers, brandishing pistols and hand grenades, identified themselves only as Arabs. But their demands echoed those of Iranian-backed Shiite Moslems holding American hostages in Lebanon.

The Kuwaiti government rejected the hijackers' demand to release 17 prisoners, calling it "blackmail," but said it would listen to other demands, the Kuwait News Agency reported.

After an emergency session, Kuwait's government said it will send a three-man delegation on Wednesday morning "to help Iranian authorities" secure the passengers' release.

Iran asked Kuwait to send a high-ranking delegation to Mashhad in northeastern Iran for direct talks with the hijackers.

The hijackers earlier demanded

fuel for the aircraft and threatened to blow it up if the Iranians approached. IRNA initially said the Iranians refueled the plane, but then said the gunmen were still requesting fuel.

Iranian security forces surrounded the plane at Mashhad airport to keep it from taking off, IRNA and Tehran Radio said.

Kuwait urged Iran to handle the incident "wisely" and requested that the aircraft not be allowed to leave. Iran said it would try to resolve the crisis peacefully but said the plane would have to leave if it was not resolved quickly.

The plane was commandeered three hours after it took off from Bangkok with 97 passengers and 15 crew members.

IRNA reported that the hijackers said in a statement radioed to the

control tower at Mashhad airport: "We ask you Iranian officials to mediate between us and the Kuwaiti government if you want."

"Our rights have been usurped... We have 17 prisoners in Kuwaiti jails who are under the worst kind of torture..."

"If you do not want to mediate, we ask for fuel and other needs and then we will take off," the statement said, according to IRNA.

IRNA, monitored in Nicosia, said a Jordanian passenger with a heart condition was freed several hours after the plane landed at Mashhad at 7:30 a.m. (midnight EDT).

The passenger list included 30 Kuwaitis, 22 Britons, eight Thais, various other nationalities and one person with a U.S. and an Egyptian passport identified only as R. Attiaalaali.

Gramm gives his suggestion for judgeship

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Phil Gramm on Tuesday recommended State District Judge Melinda Harmon be appointed a U.S. district judge in Houston, and said he would seek approval to help ease the court's overloaded docket.

Harmon, 41, would fill the judgeship of John Singleton Jr., who at 70 has taken senior status, meaning his work is reduced.

The Southern District of Texas has the biggest backlog of cases in the nation.

Harmon was appointed to the bench last year by Gov. Bill Clements. She is a 1972 graduate of the University of Texas law school and worked as Singleton's law clerk after graduation. In 1975 she joined Exxon as a staff attorney and remained with the company until her appointment to state district court in Houston.

Meese names replacements to Justice Department posts

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Edwin Meese III announced replacements Tuesday for the No. 2 and No. 3 positions in the Justice Department, but was unable to fill the post vacated by last week's protest resignation of Assistant Attorney General William Weld.

Meese said he would recommend John C. Shepherd, a past president of the American Bar Association, and Francis A. Keating II, a top Treasury Department law enforcement official, for the two top-level Justice Department posts.

Shepherd would replace Deputy Attorney General Arnold Burns. He resigned a week ago along with Weld, then head of the criminal division, out of what department sources said was concern that the criminal investigation of Meese by independent counsel James C. McKay was hurting the department's operations and its image.

Shepherd, who was ABA presi-

dent in 1984-85 and currently is a partner in a St. Louis law firm, "will be a highly distinguished and most welcome addition to the Justice Department family as my second in command," Meese told a news conference.

Keating, 44, currently the assistant treasury secretary for enforcement, will replace Associate Attorney General Stephen Trott and "can hit the ground running" in the Justice Department's work in combating illegal drugs, Meese said. Trott is leaving Washington to become a federal appeals court judge.

Keating is a former U.S. attorney in Oklahoma and an FBI agent. Meese called Keating and Shepherd "two distinguished men" and said they will serve in an acting capacity until they are confirmed by the Senate.

Asked whether he had had second

thoughts about taking the job, Keating said, "Certainly the events of last week made me, as a professional, pause, but I have every confidence in the leadership of the department and the attorney general. I think with our new team here the operation of the department will continue."

Meese made the announcements after Philadelphia lawyer Arlin Adams and a Labor Department official declined to be nominated earlier in the day.

Adams said a heavy caseload at his Philadelphia law firm prevented him from taking the job that Shepherd agreed to take.

Meese said he probably will announce a recommended replacement for Weld after the attorney general returns from a week-long trip to South America to discuss the war on drugs with officials in several countries there.

Dukakis edges past Jackson in Colorado

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Michael Dukakis and Jesse Jackson, locked in a grind-it-out struggle for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination, faced off Tuesday in the Wisconsin primary. A slow ballot count in Colorado showed Dukakis won a narrow victory over his rival in the state's caucuses.

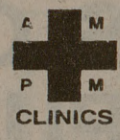
Sen. Albert Gore Jr. spent heavily in Wisconsin and sought an elusive breakthrough outside his native South. Sen. Paul Simon struggled for survival, with several big industrial states still to

come, beginning with New York on April 19. Returns from 73 percent of Colorado's 2,784 precincts showed Dukakis leading with 3,974 delegates, or 45.4 percent, to Jackson's 3,453 delegates, or 39.5 percent. The uncommitted delegates totaled 1,069, or 12.2 percent, and Gore received 236 delegates, or 2.7 percent.

The Democratic caucuses were held across Colorado on Monday night, but significant returns were not reported until Tuesday by the state Democratic Party.

The slow delegate counting brought sharp criticism from Jackson, who accused state Democratic chairman Buie Seawell of being "biased and politically unethical" and "deliberately controlling the process" by remaining as party chairman after publicly supporting Dukakis.

Vice President George Bush won Colorado handsily and faced only nominal opposition in Wisconsin as he continued his grand march toward nomination at the Republican National Convention this summer.



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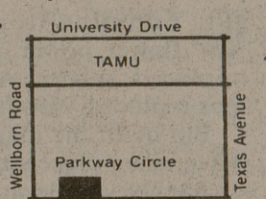
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