

Bush says release of hostages may depend on Iran's orders

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush said Tuesday he could not claim American hostages in Lebanon were any closer to freedom despite an intense diplomatic effort, but that there was "a good likelihood" they could come home if Iran wanted them released.

Renewing his appeal for assistance from the new leaders in Tehran, Bush said, "We don't have to be hostile with Iran for the rest of our lives. We've had a good relationship with them in the past" before breaking off relations a decade ago.

Iran, accused by the United States of sponsoring terrorism, is the major bankroller of Hezbollah, the radical group thought to be an umbrella for various factions of the hostage-holders.

"I think that if Iran wanted those hostages to come out of there, there would be a good likelihood that that would happen — perhaps not with certainty but a good likelihood," the president said.

He said that there were limits on possible military action to free the hostages, that he did not want to see innocent people killed and would have to weigh the risks to U.S. forces that would be involved.

"But if I could find a way to take those hostages, get them and bring them out, and that required using the military force of the United States, make no mistake

about it — I would do it in an instant," the president said.

"At some point we have to stand up for our interests even if it means military, yet I'm not threatening military action," he said.

Bush discussed the hostage situation in a half-hour news conference on the eve of his departure for a three-week vacation at his seaside compound at Kennebunkport, Maine.

He promised that after his Labor Day return to Washington, he would unveil a new anti-drug program that is "balanced, decisive, effective and achievable."

Bush said the program would require more for spending but not higher taxes, adding that the money would be diverted from other programs.

On other matters, the president:

- Refused to rule out the possibility of abducting Panamanian leader Manuel Antonio Noriega to a trial in the United States on drug-trafficking charges, but said he has an obligation to try to bring people to justice.

- Pronounced himself "very comfortable" with getting director Richard Darman's comment that the Federal Reserve was keeping interest rates too high to limit sustained growth.

Lawsuit

(Continued from page 1)

ka's response to the spill, the lawsuit says.

"We feel that Alyeska as a corporation was merely a sham, a corporate shell if you will, behind which these partners have been hiding for the last 12 or 15 years," LeResche said.

The lawsuit also charges that the oil companies misrepresented their ability to contain and clean up oil spills, violated federal marine pilotage laws and inflicted "severe emotional distress on Alaska residents."

Exxon officials in Anchorage did not immediately return a phone call for comment.

The lawsuit seeks monetary damages for destruction of the environment and harm to the region's fisheries-based economy.

The state recognizes that more than 1,000 square miles of its lands, waters and resources in or near Prince William Sound, the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island suffered severe environmental damage, including the devastation of beaches and coastal waters, the death or injury of thousands of animals, the curtailment of important commercial

fisheries, and the impairment of recreational opportunities," a news release said.

The lawsuit also seeks punitive damages, its cleanup costs, its cost of studying and monitoring the spill, and a negligence fine under a law of up to \$100 million. The suit also asks for an injunction to compel Exxon and Alyeska to continue cleanup until the environment is restored.

The state blamed "arrogant and complacent people at the top level of Exxon Shipping Co." in a report to the National Transportation Safety Board.

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