

CNN reports Gorbachev considered resignation

WASHINGTON (AP)—Secretary of State James A. Baker is rescheduling talks in Moscow with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze to avoid interfering with a meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee, Baker's spokesman said Tuesday.

The postponement coincides with a report by the Cable News Network that Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev had spent the past eight days at his country home, considering his resignation as head of the Soviet Communist Party.

Bush administration officials and intelligence sources told the Associated Press that there has been speculation for weeks that Gorbachev would yield his post — while retaining the presidency — but that they had no information he would take the step.

Asked about the CNN report, White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater said, "I have no idea. We've never heard of it before, have no information."

He said of the Baker trip to Moscow, "It was just delayed one day."

Communists in East Germany endorse future reunification

EAST BERLIN (AP) — East German Communists angling to boost their popularity before parliamentary elections on Tuesday endorsed eventual reunification with West Germany.

An East Berlin court rejected the Communist-dominated government's request to keep its ousted leader, Erich Honecker, behind bars until his treason trial in March. Honecker was freed because of his ailing health, and the official news agency ADN said he was taken to a nursing home.

Honecker's successors in the once-mighty Communist Party launched their uphill campaign Tuesday for the March 18 elections by acknowledging a national fever for reunification, and party leader Gregor Gysi conceded that the movement is unstoppable.

In Moscow, Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev also acknowledged mounting pressure for a single German state, while warning that Germans "should not decide this important question on the streets."

He referred to the growing number of demonstrations in East Germany in support of reunification.

Gorbachev's statement was his most tolerant yet on the subject of a single Germany, which has been opposed by Communists for more than 40 years.

East German party ideologist Peter Brie told a news conference that the Communists support "the togetherness of the German nation," and urged a thoughtful and measured approach to reunification.

"It must not occur as fast as possible, but as slowly as is required," Brie said.

In an interview with the West German Bild newspaper, party leader Gysi complained that the reunification drive is moving too quickly.

Asked if the Communists oppose reunification, Gysi was quoted by the newspaper as replying: "No, not at all. This process cannot be stopped any more. But it is irresponsible to do things in such a way now as if it were possible tomorrow."

The reunification issue promises to dominate the upcoming election campaign.

Increasing numbers of East Germans have been demonstrating for union with wealthy and prosperous West Germany as their own economy tumbles and an exodus of skilled workers continues unchecked.

More than 340,000 fled East Germany last year, having lost hope that their spartan living conditions would improve.

The Communists are widely distrusted because of corruption scandals that have surfaced since the peaceful pro-democracy revolt last fall, and because they carry the blame for leading East Germany into its current economic and political crises.

The nation is also in the throes of an anti-corruption backlash that has jailed nearly two dozen senior officials.

"This process cannot be stopped any more. But it is irresponsible to do things in such a way now as if it were possible tomorrow."

— Gregor Gysi, Communist Party leader

Honecker's release was ordered after an East Berlin court refused to issue a detention order, heeding the advice of doctors that Honecker remained too weak to withstand jailing even in a prison hospital.

Honecker underwent surgery on Jan. 8 to remove a malignant kidney tumor. He was jailed Monday following his release from Charite hospital. Doctors at the hospital had argued against his imprisonment on humanitarian grounds.

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