

World & Nation

South Korean government concedes to 'people's power'

Seoul, South Korea (NC) — After three weeks of violent demonstrations by the opposition plus political pressure from such groups as the Catholic Church and the U.S. government, South Korea's ruling party has bowed to what its opponents termed "people's power," and offered a package of democratic reforms.

In a televised speech June 29, Roh Tae Woo, chairman of the ruling Democratic Justice Party and President Chu Doo Hwan's hand-picked successor, announced that his party has decided to "listen to the people's voice" and to offer a wide-ranging blueprint for democracy.

The plan embraced virtually all demands made by the opposition and student pro-

testers. It includes direct presidential elections, constitutional reforms, free press, guaranteed respect for human rights, release of political prisoners and restoration of opposition leader Kim Dae Jung's long-suspended civil rights. Roh said he would resign his party post as well as his presidential candidacy if President Chun rejected the package.

President Chun was reported June 30 to have agreed "in principle" to the reform proposals and to have instructed his cabinet to carry out such proposals as the release of political prisoners.

"In order to prevent social disorder and listen to the people's voice, I have decided I

must respect the people's judgment," party chairman Roh said.

Opposition leader Kim Young Sam said he welcomed Roh's plan wholeheartedly, while his colleague Kim Dae Jung, a Catholic, described Roh's announcement as "gratifying news."

"This is the start of the victory of people's power, the result of a struggle which required the people's blood, sweat and tears," Kim Young Sam said. "I now have the hope that our country could achieve a political miracle."

The events leading up to the surprise announcement resembled the turmoil in the Philippines prior to the ouster of President

Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986. In both countries, opposition to the government cut across the social spectrum and was led in large part by the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church in the country has played an active role in the "people's struggle," which started with student demonstrations on June 10. In a prelude to recent protests,

Catholic priests staged a series of nationwide hunger strikes to protest government policy and actions. During the demonstrations, the Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul was a rallying point for demonstrations and sit-ins, providing protesters with sanctuary and support.

Lithuanian bishop says Soviet restrictions hamper anniversary celebration

By Greg Erlandson

Rome (NC) — Soviet authorities have used "severe restrictions" to hamper Lithuanian efforts to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the country's conversion, according to Bishop Paul A. Baltakis.

A Franciscan in charge of spiritual assistance to Lithuanians living outside their homeland, the U.S.-based Bishop Baltakis said Soviet authorities have imposed a "comprehensive travel ban" on Westerners attempting to visit the country during the Church's June celebrations.

At a June 26 press conference announcing a week of jubilee celebrations in Rome and at the Vatican, the bishop also said Soviet authorities continue to restrict religious rights and human rights in the predominantly Catholic Baltic country.

Other speakers at the press conference included Monsignor Algimantas Bartkus, organizer of Lithuanian jubilee celebrations at the Vatican; Father Casimir Pugevicius, executive director of the Brooklyn-based Lithuanian Information Center; and Stasys Lozoraitis, head of Lithuanian diplomatic

delegations to the United States and the Vatican.

"Although a more positive attitude to the forthcoming millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988 has been noticeable in recent Soviet government pronouncements, a different situation exists in predominantly Roman Catholic Lithuania, where severe restrictions on this year's celebrations of the 600th jubilee continue," the bishop said.

The bishop protested Soviet bans on catechetical instruction, Church confiscations and the continued imprisonment of three Catholic priests.

Father Pugevicius also expressed concern for the continued ban on catechesis. Although he estimated 66 percent of Lithuania's Catholics still practice their faith and 90 percent have been baptized, the lack of religious instruction threatens the Church's future, he said.

"Because of a dearth of information, there is bound to be a weakening" of the faith among young people, he said. They may

wear a cross as an "anti-establishment symbol" without knowing what it means, he added.

Although Pope John Paul II has not been allowed to attend jubilee celebrations in Lithuania, Monsignor Bartkus said the pope will meet with more than 2,000 Lithuanians coming to Rome to commemorate the anniversary. On June 28 the pope was to concelebrate a jubilee Mass and beatify Lithuanian Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis.

Monsignor Bartkus, rector of Rome's Lithuanian College, said a delegation of Lithuanian churchmen has been allowed to leave Lithuania for the Vatican celebrations.

He said Bishop Antanas Valcius, administrator of the Diocese of Telsiai, will head the delegation of eight priests, which includes the prefect of Lithuania's only remaining seminary.

Lozoraitis said he was pessimistic about chances Soviet authorities would allow the pope to make a pastoral visit to Lithuania. "They don't want to see the pope in Lithuania with 500,000 people around him," he said.

Neither the Vatican nor the United States accept Lithuania's Soviet occupation, and both recognize diplomatic missions representing an independent Lithuania.

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