

Belfast Telegraph

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GOVERNMENTS AGREE PLAN

Poll signals backing for new assembly

A BREAKTHROUGH occurred at the talks today when the British and Irish governments reached agreement on proposals to drive the negotiations forward.

The deal followed a flurry of diplomatic activity over the weekend and emerged after a 90 minute meeting between Secretary of State Mo Mowlam and Irish Foreign Minister David Andrews.

The focus has now shifted to the eight parties within the talks who were to be presented with the proposals either today or tomorrow.

Details of what is in the Governments' plans have yet to be revealed.

They will centre on a power sharing assembly and, if weekend leaks are correct, a council of the British Isles, with members drawn from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Nationalists have expressed concern that the council proposal may be an effort to water down powers they envisage for North-South cross-border bodies.

The Anglo-Irish deal coincides with a poll published in today's Belfast Telegraph which reveals that both Catholics and Protestants

By Our Political Staff

favour an assembly in equal measure.

In a poll published exclusively in today's Belfast Telegraph, 86% of Protestants deemed an assembly acceptable. And some 80% of Catholics agreed.

A quarter of Catholics and Protestants said an assembly was "essential" — with Catholics slightly more enthusiastic.

In fact, 50% of Catholics found the concept of an assembly desirable compared to 48% of Protestants.

Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies

who conducted the research, said the desire for accountable government among Catholics is strong.

He said Protestants seemed to be more lukewarm about another layer of government.

"Providing adequate safeguards can be put in place to prevent abuse of power, then an assembly could be a welcome part of an overall settlement package in both communities," he said.

The politicians have yet to agree on a plan, with nationalists concerned that it is balanced with cross-border relationships. Leaked proposals in the Daily Telegraph indicated a Council of the Isles, with representatives from Dublin, Belfast and elected bodies throughout Britain threatened to diminish the Belfast-Dublin axis.

Mr Andrews described the proposals in the leaked report as "an old document warmed up".

Ulster Unionists and loyalist politicians are known to be enthusiastic about the Council.

Despite the potential



for division over the Government's proposals, ministers were certain to have tried to word their plans in such a way that they are acceptable to most if not all of the parties.

It was clear that a key to any advance hinged on Mr Blair's contacts with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and SDLP leader John Hume.

But it was also admitted that the attitude of the parties could cause the proposed heads of agreement to unravel.

Mr Blair was on the telephone from Tokyo until 3am as he sought support for an outline settlement to be put on the table at Stormont, possibly within the next 24 hours.

Mr Blair spoke three times to Mr Ahern in an attempt to iron out problems after weekend

claims that cross-border institutions would not have executive authority.

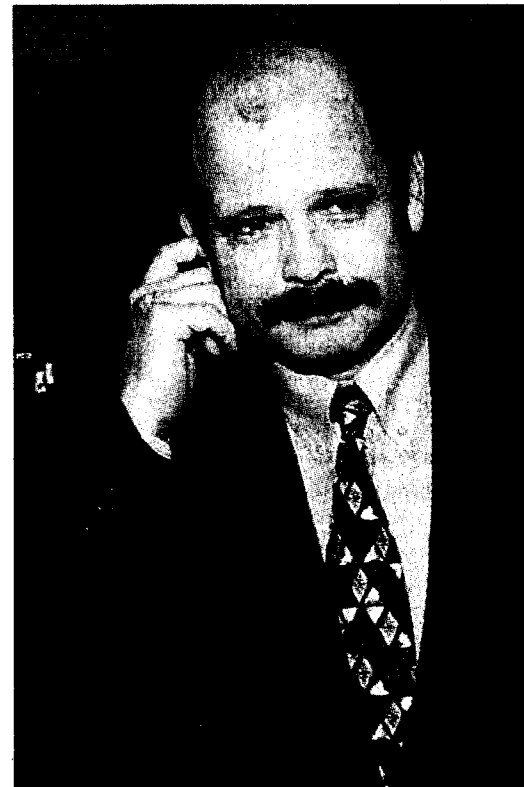
Mr Blair also spoke to Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams and UUP leader David Trimble.

The conversation with Mr Adams took place after the Sinn Fein leader was told of the murder of Terry Enright, a relative by marriage.

One of Mr Blair's aides said that reference was made to Mr Enright's killing in Belfast city centre.

Ulster Unionist Jeffrey Donaldson said he hoped there would be new momentum in the process while the SDLP warned that north-south relations could not be diminished compared to east-west issues.

Early start: UDP leader Gary McMichael arrives at Stormont this morning.



David Ervine of the DUP arriving at Stormont for the start of talks today

Pictures by Peter Morrison

NEWS DIGEST

Bitten keeper recovering

A ZOO keeper was recovering at home today after he was bitten by a drugged escaped tiger.

Doctors warn on raw meat

ALL raw meat in the UK should be treated as contaminated and a potential source of food poisoning, doctors will warn MPs today.

Wife blasts LVF 'cowards'

THE wife of LVF murder victim Terry Enright branded his killers as "gutless cowards who gunned down somebody very special".

Video could help Clegg

A THREE-minute video could help clear Paratrooper Lee Clegg whose third murder appeal opens in Belfast today.

Experts cool on 'hunger buster'

NORTHERN Ireland slimming experts today voted to give a lean time to a new 'hunger busting' yoghurt.

Licensed brothels call

LICENSED brothels should be set up in Belfast, according to a prostitute who has been on the streets for 20 years.

Hamilton 'no' to Republic

BRYAN Hamilton has turned down a top footballing job in the Republic.

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10,000 ways to honour a princess

THE memorial committee set up to advise the Government on the best way to commemorate the life of Diana, Princess of Wales, meets for the first time in Downing Street today.

The committee has the task of considering more than 10,000 ideas submitted by members of the public.

Suggested schemes include hospitals named after the Princess, a 'Diana medal' to be awarded for acts of compassion, or the renaming of established landmarks.

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Village's first pub is toasted

ONE of Northern Ireland's last "dry" villages will be pulling pints on Wednesday when its first pub opens.

From now on, residents will be able to quench their thirst as they overlook the harbour in the Co Down fishing port of Portavogie.

The Quay, at New Harbour Road, breaks with Portavogie's centuries old teetotal tradition.

Until now, tipplers had to be signed into the local pigeon club before they could enjoy a brew.

Diane Adair, who is running the venture with her husband Francis, said locals had raised their glasses to the new development.

But three years ago, when the plans were initially mooted, the froth was fairly flying.

The Free Presbyterian Church spearheaded a campaign to keep the village an alcohol-free zone and were supported by other church groups.

By Marie Foy

Shares tumble after Asian slump

MORE than £25 billion was wiped off the value of top shares today as the stock market wobbled following the overnight collapse in Hong Kong.

By midday the FTSE 100 index of leading UK stocks was down 143.6 points, crashing through the psychologically important 5000 barrier to 4994.7.

Investors and dealers in London took fright after the Hang Seng index of leading Hong Kong shares fell by nearly 9% following

the collapse of the territory's leading investment company, Peregrine Investment.

The Hong Kong market was left reeling as fears mounted that Peregrine was in serious trouble and following the close of trading it announced it was going into liquidation.

Founded in Hong Kong in 1988 by Philip Tose and Francis Leung, the bank, formerly one of Asia's most powerful finance houses, was known for taking investment risks other investment banks avoided.

See page 8

TV AND RADIO P25; FINANCE P8; LETTERS P10; CROSSWORD P10; HOROSCOPES P12; SPORT P21, 22, 24 & 26

Weather Outlook

GREATER BELFAST AREA: It will be a dry night with long clear spells developing. This will allow it to turn rather chilly with a touch of ground frost in places. There will also be mist forming which may locally thicken to fog. Wind temp 2-4C. SEE BACK PAGE

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*A condition of receiving the breakdown service is that the car loan be for at least £3000 over a term of at least 3 years. On drawdown of the loan a voucher will be provided which can be used to avail of the breakdown service from Mapfre Assistance Agency Ireland.