

Mexico's president, Vencente Fox, appeals for meeting with rebels

By the Associated Press INTERNATIONAL
MEXICO CITY — President Vicente Fox promised to meet nearly every Zapatista demand and appealed for a meeting with the rebels who have been locked in a seven-year conflict with the government. The rebels turned a cold shoulder, calling Fox a liar.

Fox's announcement Tuesday was his latest effort at luring the rebels back to negotiations that have been stalled since 1996.

Since taking office Dec. 1, Fox has sent an Indian rights bill to Congress, released dozens of Zapatista sympathizers from jail and closed four military bases in southern Chiapas state, where the rebels staged an uprising in 1994.

On Tuesday, he promised to close three more bases — the last three demanded by the rebels — and turn them into community centers. He also pledged to release more prisoners, meeting what appeared to be nearly every rebel demand to restart peace negotiations.

In an appearance before more than 1,000 enthusiastic students hours after Fox's announcement, the rebels continued to criticize the president, saying they had little confidence in his promises.

"Don't pay any attention to what Mr. Fox says," Comandante Tacho told a

cheering crowd. "He speaks with two tongues."

LIMA, Peru — Lori Berenson blew her parents a kiss and managed a smile before she was led out of the courtroom at Lima's San Juan de Lurigancho prison, as the first day of her civilian retrial on terrorism charges ended.

The 31-year-old New York native again proclaimed her innocence Tuesday against charges that she collaborated with leftist guerrillas to raid Peru's Congress in 1995.

A secret military court convicted Berenson of treason in 1996 and sentenced her to life in prison for allegedly helping the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement plot the thwarted Congress takeover.

But after years of pressure from the United States, Peru's highest military court overturned the conviction in August, leading to the new civilian trial, in which Berenson faces the lesser charge of "terrorist collaboration."

"I am innocent of all of the charges made against me," Berenson said, while standing in a concrete cell behind steel bars — a common arrangement for terrorism trials in Peru.

Prosecutors painted the former Massachusetts Institute of Technology student as a dedicated radical who came

to Peru with the purpose of collaborating with the Tupac Amaru, known by its Spanish acronym MRTA.

NATIONAL
PEARL HARBOR, Calif. — A Navy court of inquiry into the collision of the USS Greeneville and a Japanese fishing boat ended with the submarine commander's testimony and key players blaming bad information, bad judgment and each other.

Cmdr. Scott Waddle's attorney implored the three admirals presiding over the hearing not to recommend court-martial for Waddle, one of three officers under investigation in the deadly crash.

"Commander Waddle exercised his judgment, and he did his level best," attorney Charles Gittins said Tuesday. "He may have fallen short on that day, but it wasn't criminal."

Lt. Cmdr. Brent Filbert, representing Lt. j.g. Michael Coen, the officer of the deck, told the court of inquiry that Waddle had "rushed himself and rushed his crew."

The admirals are expected to take three weeks to recommend possible punishment for Waddle, Coen and the submarine's executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Gerald Pfeifer. The head of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Adm. Thomas Fargo, will have 30 days to decide what pun-

ishment, if any, the officers should face.

Nine people died when the Greeneville crashed into the Ehime Maru while the sub crew was demonstrating a rapid-surfacing drill for a group of civilians.

WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON — House Republicans are working on legislation that would go much further than President Bush in easing the tax marriage penalty and give families an immediate break by raising the child tax credit effective for this year.

The measure, which was circulated in draft form Tuesday night on Capitol Hill and obtained by The Associated Press, is likely to be considered by the House Ways and Means Committee this week and reach the House floor next week.

Led by social conservatives, Republican lawmakers have vowed to pass marriage penalty relief much broader than Bush requested in his 10-year, \$1.6 trillion tax cut.

"My feeling is that we're going to be able to do better than what the president did in that area," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said earlier Tuesday.

Lawmakers are also under pressure to give more tax relief immediately to

help the sputtering economy. The House GOP plan would raise the \$500 child tax credit to \$600 retroactive to Jan. 1 of this year, and then gradually increase it to \$1,000 by 2006.

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration is rescinding new standards for arsenic in drinking water and proposing to lift new requirements on mining interests as its latest challenges to environmental regulations issued during the final days of the Clinton presidency.

The Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management was announcing today it would seek to undo regulations forcing more hard-rock miners in the West to post cleanup bonds.

The Environmental Protection Agency, also responding to complaints from mining interests, on Tuesday suspended standards aimed at reducing the levels of cancer-causing arsenic in some 3,000 municipal water systems, primarily in the Rocky Mountains.

Mining runoff has been identified as a major source of arsenic contamination in drinking water supplies.

"This outrageous act is just another example of how the polluters have taken over the government," said Erik D. Olson, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The actions follow President Bush's reversal last week of his campaign promise to begin treating carbon dioxide emissions as a pollutant and contributor to global warming.

WASHINGTON — President Bush is promoting his vision for a patients bill of rights as negotiations continue on Capitol Hill on legislation laying out the details.

The president was presenting his views in a speech before the annual convention of the American College of Cardiology meeting in Orlando, Fla.

In the Capitol Hill discussions, the White House is insisting that whatever legislation is developed allow patient lawsuits only in federal courts, not in state courts, where damage awards typically are larger.

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