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NATIONAL

U.S., Soviets talk limits

HOUSTON (AP) — Secretary of State James A. Baker III took the Soviet foreign minister to his hometown Sunday and predicted they would make progress on a wide range of issues, including the search for a treaty to cut long-range nuclear weapons.

While the crisis in the Persian Gulf demands their attention, Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze hope to clear roadblocks to a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

"I have no doubt that our talks here in Houston will be productive and that we will continue to tackle some difficult issues in a constructive spirit," Baker said.

He and Shevardnadze plan two days of talks on the treaty, the gulf situation and other U.S.-Soviet issues. They also intend to visit the Johnson Space Center and talk to the Columbia astronauts aboard the Shuttle through a special telephone hookup.

But if the mission is cut short because of poor weather or trouble with disposing of liquid waste, that colorful interlude may have to be scratched.

Baker, in an arrival statement at Ellington air field, praised the Soviets for cooperating with the United States in trying to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

"On no issue has U.S.-Soviet cooperation been more necessary than on resolving the crisis caused by Iraq's brutal aggression," Baker said.

A few hours before Baker and Shevardnadze arrived on separate planes, a group of hostages were brought home by former Texas Gov. John Connally.

"They never should have been taken hostage in the first place," Baker said. "So while we are heartened by their return, we will not rest until all hostages from all nations are safely home."

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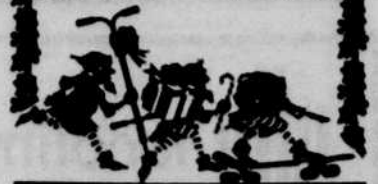
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