

Bush says he's dedicated to Mideast peace process

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SHARM EL-SHEIK, Egypt — Heading into two days of talks on Middle East peace, President George W. Bush said Monday that he was prepared to devote whatever time was needed to reach a solution to the bloody Israel-Palestinian conflict.

"The first message is I will dedicate the time and energy to move the process forward. And I think we'll make some progress," Bush said. "My expectations in the Middle East are to call all the respective parties to their responsibility to achieve peace. And to make it very clear that my country and I will put in as much time as necessary to achieve the vision of two states living side-by-side in peace."

Bush is to take part Tuesday in a summit in Sharm el-Sheik with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas. He then travels to Aqaba, Jordan, to meet with Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Observers say the meetings offer

the best hope of movement toward ending Palestinian-Israeli bloodshed that has claimed more than 3,200 lives, mostly Palestinians, since September 2000.

"I fully understand this is going to be a difficult process. I fully understand we need to work with our friends ... to achieve the process. I know we won't make progress unless people assume their responsibilities," Bush said.

Joining the president in Egypt, Secretary of State Colin Powell described "a moment of opportunity for peace." The Sharm el Sheik meeting, he said, "is important to make sure that the Arab leadership is behind and in support of the road map and the president's efforts, and will play their part."

Powell predicted that Bush would travel to Aqaba "with the strong support of the Arab nations."

The meetings could give the so-called "road map" to Middle East peace a crucial boost in its early stages. The plan, drafted by the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, envisions an independent Palestinian state by 2005.

Bush's visit is his first to the

Middle East, and represents his deepest venture into Middle East peacemaking. If successful, the meetings could help soften anger at the United States among Arabs, who believe that America favors the Israelis in negotiations.

To reach the road map's end goal of a Palestinian state, Israelis and Palestinians must make a series of increasingly difficult concessions, beginning with reciprocal statements accepting each other's right to exist.

In the early stages, Palestinians must crack down on terrorist groups and continue reforming the corruption-ridden Palestinian Authority. Israelis must refrain from violent incursions into Palestinian territories, freeze the expansion of Jewish settlements in those territories and dismantle settlements built since March 2001.

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FCC

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overall, we want to be cautious and see how the financial markets sort out the rule-making. I don't think there will be as many transactions as opponents of this rule-making fear."

Media General Chairman and Chief Executive Officer J. Stewart Bryan, whose company already owns a newspaper and a TV station in common in six cities, said the agency's vote validates his company's "convergence" strategy merging broadcast and print news gathering. But he criticized the FCC for leaving intact a ban on such mergers in the nation's smallest markets.

"Local news is expensive to produce, and television stations in markets of all sizes are curtailing or eliminating local news," he said. "If the new rule stands, more local news will be lost in smaller markets."

Media General owns 25 newspapers in the Southeast and has a 20 percent stake in The Denver Post.

Opponents of the new rules said they would wage national campaigns opposing big media to bring heat on Congress and to pressure the FCC to change course. Democratic Commissioner Michael Copps said the agency "awoke a sleeping giant."

He said the FCC received nearly 750,000 comments from the public on the rules change, with "99.9 percent" opposing the changes.

Adelstein urged opponents to keep fighting.

"This is far from over," he said. "Congress may prove more responsive to the citizens who passionately plead for the independence and diversity of their media."

Democratic Sens. John Kerry of Massachusetts and John Edwards of North Carolina, who are both running for president, faulted the FCC for relaxing the rules. Many other Democrats in Congress joined them, and the issue has irked some Republicans as well.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., plans to lead a meeting of the Sen-

ate Commerce Committee with the five FCC commissioners on Wednesday to discuss the media ownership rules.

But Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., who heads the House Energy and Commerce Committee, applauded the FCC for relaxing most of its rules. He scolded the agency for tightening its regulation of radio ownership.

The FCC changed its definition of the local market in a way that will restrict the number of radio stations one company can own. That ruling was a setback for Clear Channel Communications Inc. of San Antonio, which owns more than 1,200 radio stations across the country.

"Clear Channel is deeply disappointed with today's FCC vote to re-regulate the radio industry," said company president and chief operating officer Mark Mays.

Market analysts say the new rules will probably lead newspaper companies to buy and swap more TV stations. Analysts' speculation has centered on companies like Gannett Inc., Tribune Co., Media General Inc. and Dallas-based Belo Corp., which owns The Dallas Morning News and three other daily newspapers, along with 19 television stations.

Congress voted in 1996 to require the FCC to justify its broadcast ownership rules every two years. Last year, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., struck down one rule, sent two others back to the commission and said the FCC failed to demonstrate a rationale for the way it limits broadcast ownership.

Susan Ness, a Democrat who was on the commission when it conducted its last review, said the agency went too far Monday in responding to the courts.

"They used a meat ax instead of a knife," she said. "The court slapped us for gradualism. It doesn't mean the rules could not be justified."

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