

## Rivals in Ireland agree to further power-sharing talks

**BELFAST:** The leaders of Northern Ireland's dominant political and religious parties, Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein and the Protestant leader Reverend Ian Paisley, held face-to-face negotiations on Monday and agreed to work toward a resumption of the province's power-sharing authority by May 8.

The agreement, announced by the two men sitting close together at a diamond-shaped table in the Stormont Parliament building, meant that the province will not meet a March 26 deadline set by Britain and Ireland to end a four-year suspension of the local government and assembly.

But it was welcomed in London as a "moment that we will remember," a spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair said, speaking in return for customary anonymity.

"Let us be clear - if there's a consensus about the way forward, the British government isn't going to stand in the way of that consensus," the spokesman said.

After reading statements in front of a live television camera, Adams and Paisley shuffled their papers but did not shake hands. Nonetheless, the notion of the two men, who have been bitter rivals and adversaries over the long period of Northern Ireland's sectarian strife, sitting almost side by side was seen by many analysts as historic.

"This meeting represents an important step on the road to the setting-up of a power-sharing executive in six weeks," Paisley said.

The two sides who struck the agreement remain deeply opposed in their political aims. Paisley's party wants to continue the links between Northern Ireland and mainland Britain, while Sinn Fein seeks a united Ireland.

Both men said their agreement could herald the beginning of what Adams called a "new era" after decades of bloodletting before the Good Friday agreement of 1998. Since then, Britain has been pressing the rival groups to cement the agreement by abandoning long-held mutual antipathies.

Between now and May 8, the two sides would hold meetings on the details of restoring the power-sharing executive, they said, and would jointly press the British government for an improved package of incentives to bolster the province's economy, which is heavily dependent on British subsidies.

Referring to his party, which is affiliated to the Irish Republican Army, and to Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, Adams said: "There are still many difficulties to be faced but let it be clear - the basis of the agreement between Sinn Fein and the DUP follows Ian Paisley's unequivocal and welcome commitment to support and participate fully in the political institutions on May 8."

It is not totally clear why that date has been chosen. It would place the restoration of a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland between local elections in Scotland and Wales and a national election expected several weeks later in the Irish Republic.

Eamon Quinn reported from Belfast and Alan Cowell from London





# Sinn Fein's deputy leader confident of power sharing in Northern Ireland

The Associated Press

Published: March 14, 2007

**WASHINGTON:** Sinn Fein's deputy leader said Thursday he was confident that rival Catholic and Protestant leaders in Northern Ireland will strike a historic compromise for power-sharing by a March 26 deadline.

Martin McGuinness told an audience of Irish-Americans that the process was difficult for both his party and for the party of Ian Paisley, who represents most of the British province's Protestant majority.

The British and Irish governments say Paisley must share power with Sinn Fein. But Paisley has refused to commit to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's March 26 deadline to strike an arrangement.

Still, McGuinness said he expected to take the No. 2 power-sharing post in Northern Ireland's government.

"If this happens, and it now looks very, very likely to happen," McGuinness said, then "the massive injustices and discriminations and inequalities and dominations that have happened since the partition of Ireland will have been consigned to the dustbin of history."

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Paisley's Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein were the twin victors of last week's assembly election. The Democratic Unionists won 36 seats in the 108-member legislature; Sinn Fein won 28.

This week marks the annual pilgrimage to Washington by top Northern Ireland political figures for St. Patrick's Day. It has been more lightly attended than usual this year, as talks to form a government in Belfast approach the deadline.

Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern was on Capitol Hill Thursday seeking support for the peace process with members of Congress. In a St. Patrick's Day tradition, he will

visit the White House Friday to present a bowl of shamrocks to President George W. Bush. McGuinness will also attend the event.

Speaking Thursday during a lunch with the leader of the House of Representatives, Democrat, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Ahern said that an agreement that would deliver peace to Northern Ireland was close.

"Time is now pressing," he said. "It would be unconscionable if this opportunity of a generation were to falter at this final moment."

Ahern also appealed for the United States to grant residency to about 50,000 Irish citizens living illegally in the United States.

"The resolution of this issue would mean an enormous amount to those Irish men and women who continue to live in the shadows in this country," he said. "I hope, therefore, that your efforts at immigration reform will reach successful finality in the not too distant future."

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# Protestant party says Northern Ireland power-sharing with Sinn Fein must be temporary

The Associated Press

Published: March 3, 2007

**DUBLIN, Ireland:** Forming a government with Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland will be uncomfortable and must be temporary, a senior Protestant politician warned Saturday just days before an election designed to promote power-sharing.

Democratic Unionist deputy leader Peter Robinson said his party, which is favored to win most seats in Wednesday's elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly, was prepared to ignore a March 26 deadline for the assembly to elect a Catholic-Protestant administration.

Britain insists it will shut down the newly elected assembly if its members refuse to elect a full 12-member, four-party administration by the deadline.

But Robinson said Sinn Fein leaders had failed to begin supporting the Police Service of Northern Ireland, a predominantly Protestant force undergoing wide-ranging reforms. Both power-sharing and police reform were important parts of the complex Good Friday peace accord of 1998.

Robinson noted that senior Sinn Fein officials were telling supporters to help police solve certain crimes — but to withhold help on crimes involving members of the Irish Republican Army or IRA dissident groups.

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Even if Sinn Fein does convincingly embrace law and order in the British territory, Robinson said, the Democratic Unionists should not be expected to govern Northern Ireland in coalition with the Catholic-backed party indefinitely.

"It will be a difficult working relationship. There will be no love lost between Sinn Fein and the DUP," Robinson said. "This is why this cannot be a permanent structure. It can only be a temporary situation to deal with our emergency circumstances."

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams retorted that the Democratic Unionists would be the losers if they refused to cooperate by

March 26. He noted that Britain had already committed to giving the Irish government a bigger role in Northern Ireland if the assembly was dissolved.

"Irish republicans have been enormously patient with the DUP ... but this strategic and tolerant approach should not be mistaken for political weakness," Adams told more than 1,000 supporters at his party's annual conference in Dublin.

"If the DUP refuses to join with the rest of us in the political process, then the process will move on without them. They have no veto," Adams said to applause.

Adams also lauded Sinn Fein's Jan. 28 decision to open normal relations with the Northern Ireland police. He called it "without doubt the most difficult, most problematic, most historic initiative Sinn Fein has taken during the course of the peace process."

Power-sharing failed in October 2002 when a coalition led by moderate Protestants and



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