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SF SPURNED TALKS OFFER

Corporals' case man is freed

A STUNNED Patrick Kane walked free today after spending almost nine years behind bars.

West Belfast man Kane was surrounded by cheering but tearful family and friends as he left the Court of Appeal.

Three judges had unanimously quashed the 39-year-old's conviction for his part in the murder of two British Army corporals in 1988.

As he left the court, he said: "I was set up for something that I did not do. We are another case just like the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four."

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By Desmond McCartan at Westminster

THE Prime Minister's anger at the Lurgan killings was heightened by his belief that republicans spurned a fresh effort to get inclusive talks going, it was learned today.

Tony Blair, who intends to make a keynote statement next week, left London for Denver, where he will discuss the issue with President Bill Clinton tomorrow.

At that meeting, which will be dominated by Northern Ireland and the impact of the RUC murders, Mr Blair will explain the full reasons for his deep anger.

He is expected to confirm to the President that the

Ulster to top agenda as leaders meet in US

IRA's killing came after the Government spelled out clearly that Sinn Fein would have a real prospect of joining inter-party talks.

That message was delivered to Sinn Fein at the end of last week — just three days before the policemen were gunned down in what Mr Blair termed a "doubly wicked" act.

It is understood that the party was told that, after an interval of about six weeks to test the credibility of a new IRA ceasefire, it could be invited to the table.

In a move to dispel all

doubts about the Government's attitude, Mr Blair decided that the position should be spelled out.

It followed the second of two "clarificatory" meetings between Quentin Thomas, the NIO's political director, and Sinn Fein's chief negotiator Martin McGuinness.

Effectively, it re-opened the possibility of Sinn Fein coming to the table, probably in September, provided the republican leadership acted decisively soon.

The move has underscored the comments made by Dr Mo Mowlam at the start of the six-

week election campaign.

Her suggestion that, provided a ceasefire was in place, Sinn Fein could get to the table on June 3 drew criticism from Tories and unionists.

But both Mr Blair and President Clinton have made clear that it is their joint desire to see inclusive talks — provided the IRA demonstrates, beyond doubt, that it has called a halt to its campaign.

Mr Blair's statement was widely anticipated yesterday, and it is understood that further details of what the Government explained to Sinn Fein would have become public.

But it was deferred, largely because the Prime Minister was sensitive to the obvious grief of the families of the RUC victims.

Earlier last week, Northern Ireland Secretary Dr Mo Mowlam said Sinn Fein was being given "one last chance" to clarify its position.

On June 11, she told MPs the aim was to resolve the decommissioning issue "in the next couple of weeks, which would allow us to move on to substantive negotiations in the talks in September".

Dr Mowlam insisted in the Commons that the NIO contact with Sinn Fein did not amount to negotiations.

But she said she was "minded to have one more meeting in order to determine the two positions."

Significantly, she added: "I believe that yesterday (June 10) Sinn Fein approached the Northern Ireland Office for another meeting."

"Therefore, my best answer is that another meeting is likely, but that will be it."

However, within hours of the murders, Tony Blair spoke of his "anger" at the IRA's apparent response — and ordered a third clarificatory meeting, expected to be held yesterday, to be scrapped.

● Continued on page 6.

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SF snubs talks offer

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