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A: INTRODUCTION

The Alliance Party conference was held in Belfast on 15 and 16 April. On 20 April, the UUP won the Assembly by-election in Armagh caused by the disqualification of Seamus Mallon. SDLP leader John Hume visited Dublin for meetings with Dr FitzGerald, Mr Haughey and Mr Spring aimed at finalising arrangements for the all-Ireland Forum.

B: NORTHERN IRELAND

2. On 15 and 16 April, the Alliance Party conference was held in the Forum Hotel, Belfast. In his address as party leader, Oliver Napier launched a scathing attack on the intransigence of the two major unionist parties which, in his view, had prevented any prospect of political progress in the last decade. He called on the SDLP to end their boycott of the Assembly and deplored what he described as their continuing drift towards nationalist politics. He explained that the Alliance Party were unable to participate in the all-Ireland Forum because, despite Dr FitzGerald's denials, its aim was simply to devise a blueprint for British withdrawal. Finally, he reiterated his Party's commitment to power-sharing and to breaking down the "barriers of mistrust and misunderstanding" in Northern Ireland.

3. On 20 April, an Assembly by-election was held in the Armagh constituency to fill the seat made vacant by the disqualification of Seamus Mallon. The SDLP decided not to contest the election and Mr Mallon urged nationalist voters to boycott the polls. In the event, only the UUP and the Workers' Party fielded candidates so that the result became a foregone conclusion. With a turn-out of only 34%, Jim Speers won the seat comfortably for the Official Unionists increasing the size of their Assembly contingent to 27.

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INTERNATIONAL

4. On 14 and 21 April, meetings were held in Dublin to finalise arrangements for the all-Ireland Forum. The meetings were attended by the party leaders of the Fine Gael (Dr FitzGerald), Fianna Fail (Mr Haughey), and Irish Labour Party (Mr Spring) and the SDLP (Mr Hume). The first formal session of the Forum was fixed for 30 May and will take place in Dublin Castle under the chairmanship of Dr Colm O hEocha, a biochemist from University College, Galway. It was agreed that the Forum would consist of 27 delegates, nine from Fianna Fail, eight from Fine Gael and five each from the SDLP and the Irish Labour Party. After the meetings, Mr Hume said he was pleased with the progress made and the choice of chairman and that the Forum would aim to finish work by the end of the year. Although the first meeting will be in public, no decision has been taken about subsequent meetings.

5. The Lord Mayors of Dublin and Belfast visited the USA under the auspices of Co-operation North between 16 and 24 April. The itinerary included, Washington, Chicago, New York and Boston and meetings with the mayors of these four cities as well as with Kenneth Dam, US Deputy Secretary of State. The visit attracted low key but approving comment in the Dublin and Belfast Press.

D: MISCELLANEOUS

6. On 18 and 19 April, a crowd of youths attacked the Belfast home of West Belfast MP, Gerry Fitt. A can of bitumen paint was thrown at the front door and Mr Fitt's wife was reported to have suffered an asthma attack. The RUC arrived quickly on the scene and a number of arrests were made. The attacks were apparently prompted by Mr Fitt's appearance on the BBC television programme, "Panorama", during which he asserted the innocence of Guiseppe Conlon who was convicted in 1974 of charges related to bombing incidents in London and subsequently died at HMP, Wormwood Scrubs.

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

28 April 1983