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INNAN

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WASHINGTON (UPI) -- ADM. BOBBY RAY INNAN IS GIVING UP HIS POST AS AMERICA'S FOREMOST INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL, BUT WILL STAY ON AS DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE CIA LONG ENOUGH TO PROVIDE A SMOOTH TRANSITION FOR HIS SUCCESSOR.

THE RESIGNATION OF THE 51-YEAR-OLD, FOUR-STAR ADMIRAL WAS MADE PUBLIC WEDNESDAY BY THE WHITE HOUSE AND ACCEPTED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN WITH "DEEP REGRET."

RECOGNIZED BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY AS THE COUNTRY'S MOST EXPERIENCED AND EFFECTIVE SPYMASTER, INNAN SAID ONLY "IT WAS TIME I MOVE ON TO FRESH CHALLENGES."

"THE NATION'S FINEST PROFESSIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER," HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN EDWARD BOLAND, D-MASS, CALLED INNAN. "THE NATION -- AND THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY -- IS MUCH THE BETTER FOR HIS HAVING PASSED THIS WAY."

SIMILAR SENTIMENTS WERE VOICED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

INNAN, WHO ALSO INTENDS TO RESIGN FROM THE NAVY, SAID HE WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE AS THE TOP AIDE TO CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY UNTIL HIS SUCCESSOR IS CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE. WHITE HOUSE SOURCES SAID DIFFICULTY IN REPLACING INNAN WITH A TOP MILITARY MAN WAS THE REASON HIS RESIGNATION WAS KEPT SECRET.

THE CIA TRADITIONALLY HAS HAD A CIVILIAN AND A MILITARY OFFICER IN ITS TOP TWO POSTS. MILITARY OFFICERS ARE BARRED FROM OCCUPYING BOTH POSITIONS.

THERE WAS SPECULATION IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY THAT JOHN MCHANN, THE CIA'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND NO. 3 OFFICIAL, MIGHT GET INNAN'S JOB. MCHANN, 52, WAS DESCRIBED BY INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS AS "AN EXCELLENT MANAGER."

THEY SAID MCHANN IS A CAREER INTELLIGENCE OFFICER WHO HAS SERVED IN ADMINISTRATION, TECHNICAL PROJECTS AND AS HEAD OF THE AGENCY'S CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS DIVISION.

ALSO MENTIONED PROMINENTLY AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO INNAN WAS GEN. LEW ALLEN JR., 56, WHOSE FOUR-YEAR TERM AS AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF CONVENIENTLY ENDS JUNE 30.

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