

Nisgaa treaty sales campaign starts immediately

NEW AIYANSH, B.C. (CP) - The ink was barely dry on the historic Nisgaa treaty last Tuesday when the mood switched from celebration to political reality.

Opponents of the first modern-day treaty in British Columbia history will not be taken lightly, said Nisgaa leader Joe Gosnell.

The B.C. Liberals and provincial, and federal Reformers have attacked the deal, initialled in New Aiyansh, about 1,450 kilometres northwest of Vancouver.

Then news of a deadly plane crash cast a pall over the festivities.

An evening celebration to mark the treaty was abruptly cancelled after five people were killed when the plane tried to land at the nearby Nisgaa village of Kincolith.

The plane had taken a nurse, two women and an 11-year-old

boy to Prince Rupert earlier in the day to visit doctors.

It has been a long road for the Nisgaa who first climbed into canoes and paddled to Victoria in 1887 seeking a settlement to their land claim. They returned empty-handed.

It was a different story Tuesday as B.C. Premier Glen Clark and Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart pledged to support the treaty.

Both rejected calls for province-wide referendums on the deal for the Nisgaa who have been living in the remote, mountainous Nass Valley for more than 10,000 years.

"This is a principle issue for me," said Clark, adding he will recall the legislature this fall or spring to debate the treaty. "I don't believe you have a referendum on minority rights."

Clark promised a free vote on the deal.

Stewart called the treaty a "good agreement for the Nisgaa and Canadians."

"We're not talking about costs here, were talking about investments", she said.

Gosnell said the Nisgaa will vote on the treaty within 90 days of Aug. 10.

The date has not been set, but the Nisgaa will not play politics, instead holding community meetings that inform people about the treaty, Gosnell said.

The Nisgaa give up future land claims in exchange for the treaty, which gives them about 2,000 square kilometres of land and \$190 million in cash.

The Nisgaa receive self-government powers akin to a municipal government, resource rights and the right to retrieve their cul-

tural artifacts from museums. They will give up their tax-exempt status and the federal Criminal Code applies on Nisgaa lands.

There are about 5,500 Nisgaa, with an estimated 2,400 living in four Nass Valley villages. Many live in neighboring non-aboriginal communities of Terrace, Prince Rupert and Vancouver.

'I don't take any of our opposition lightly,' Gosnell said. We want to be able to respond to our critics.

The provincial Liberals and Reformers say the treaty creates race-based governments and all British Columbians should be able to vote on the deal.

Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell was invited to the ceremony, but did not attend. Neither did any members of his caucus.

Bill Vander Zalm, Reform B.C. president, was not at the ini-

tialling, but Clark and the Nisgaa credited him during the ceremony for bringing British Columbia into treaty negotiations when he was Social Credit premier in the early 1990s.

Skeena Reform MP Mike Scott was criticized for returning his invitation to attend the treaty ceremony.

Anglican Rev. Robert Miles said Scott should resign or be stripped of his critics post for refusing to attend the ceremony.

"As an MP for all the constituents, it's his responsibility to be present at functions whether he's opposed to them or not," said Miles, who also operates a Nass Valley bed and breakfast.

Fifty-one B.C. aboriginal groups are in treaty negotiations with the provincial and federal governments, but are still far from signing treaties.