

PM praised for letting Quebec attend summit

By Robert McKenzie Toronto Star

QUEBEC CITY — A delighted Premier Pierre Marc Johnson has praised Prime Minister Brian Mulroney for allowing Quebec to attend a planned summit of French-speaking nations.

Johnson confirmed yesterday that the decision — a bonanza for the Parti Quebecois in the Dec. 2 Quebec election campaign — is expected "within a few hours or a few days."

Speaking during a radio interview and a news conference later, the PQ Premier said "a few threads remain to be sorted out," but agreement on a Quebec role in the so-called "francophone summit" is assured.

He said Quebec's status at the summit will be something less than that of a "sovereign government," but gave few other details.

The summit, expected to group some 20 totally or partially French-speaking nations, "could be held next February in Paris or elsewhere," Johnson said.

The imminent agreement on the summit breaks a deadlock in Ottawa-Quebec-Paris relations that has existed since the idea of a "French-language Commonwealth" meeting was first launched more than 10 years ago.

Quebec wanted the same "participating government status" it has, alongside Canada, within the French-speaking Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique (ACCT), a Commonwealth-type organization of French-speaking nations.

Ottawa originally insisted that Quebec and other provinces with French-speaking minorities, such as New Brunswick, attend only as part of the Canadian delegation.

France's government has always backed Quebec's bid for a clearly identified role by refusing to go ahead with the summit until Quebec's demands were satisfied.

While Quebec will not have a

"sovereign" role, Johnson indicated that the province has won a major concession in being allowed to attend the conference "from one end to the other."

Johnson, and his new international relations minister, Louise Beaudoin, who until recently was Quebec's "delegate-general" in Paris, yesterday denounced the Quebec Liberal candidate who leaked the news of the agreement.

Gil Remillard — a Laval university professor and recent constitutional adviser to Mulroney who now is Liberal candidate in the Quebec city riding of Jean Talon — revealed Wednesday that the deal was imminent.

Remillard said it was "unacceptable" to make the announcement in the middle of an election campaign and charged that the timing was deliberately arranged to help the PQ.

Johnson and Beaudoin said Remillard was wrong in saying that Beaudoin had held up the deal by refusing to meet in Paris with Lucien Bouchard, Canada's ambassador to France.

Johnson and Beaudoin both indicated that Bouchard, a self-proclaimed Parti Quebecois supporter and close friend of Mulroney's, played an important part in concluding the deal.

Beaudoin said she spoke "at least 20 times" with Bouchard by telephone on that and other subjects before returning here Oct. 16 to be appointed to the cabinet and run for the PQ in the Quebec city riding of Louis Hebert.

Beaudoin accused Remillard, one of Quebec's most respected constitutional experts, of having "betrayed" Mulroney by leaking the news.

The impending deal on the francophone summit comes amid increased speculation here that the Mulroney government is trying to favor the PQ over the opposition Liberals led by former premier Robert Bourassa.