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**PEACE TALKS RECONVENE IN WASHINGTON
AMID EXPECTATIONS OF A BREAKTHROUGH**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- The 11th round of Middle East peace talks has begun here amid high expectations for a breakthrough on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating track and possibly significant progress on other fronts as well.

The assumption here is that an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on limited Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank city of Jericho will be signed by the two sides within the next couple of weeks.

Progress is also expected on the long-stalled Israeli-Syrian negotiating track.

In the wake of historic news from the Middle East that the Israeli Cabinet had approved an agreement worked out over the past few weeks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, an almost palpable air of excitement surrounded the State Department on Tuesday as Israeli and Arab negotiators arrived to begin their new round of meetings.

As they came in and out of the State Department, where the talks are talking place, the negotiators uttered far more optimistic statements than they had in previous rounds.

Israel has been involved in bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan since the fall of 1991, but to date little substantive progress has been made.

The Clinton administration had warned the parties that it would have to see significant advances made before the end of 1993 if it were to remain deeply involved in the process.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who has been shuttling between Middle Eastern capitals this summer in an effort to achieve progress, welcomed the Israeli-PLO plan on Tuesday.

"We strongly support the agreement. I believe it is a conceptual breakthrough," Christopher said at a photo opportunity Tuesday morning.

He added that he would like to see the agreement formalized at an early date.

The secretary of state also said that the United States had not changed its own policy of not talking directly to the PLO, but added that "this is a rapidly changing environment."

Positive Signals From Syria

Itamar Rabinovich, who serves in the dual capacity of Israel's ambassador to Washington and chief negotiator with the Syrians, said he thought the Israeli-Palestinian agreement could be signed within the next two weeks.

Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi, appearing Tuesday morning on the ABC-TV program "Good Morning America," called the Gaza-Jericho plan a "good beginning" to a larger process of Israeli withdrawal from the territories.

Ashrawi, one of the Palestinians who threatened to resign in early August over differences of opinion with PLO leader Yasir Arafat, said that if the agreement "were only to be limited to Gaza and Jericho, I would be the first to oppose it."

Although the focus was on the Israeli-Palestinian talks Tuesday, there were also hopes for movement on the Israeli-Syrian track.

Rabinovich told reporters Tuesday that he

thought an Israeli-Syrian declaration of principles could be signed within the next two negotiating rounds.

Earlier in the day, Rabinovich said that Israel had a sense, based on Christopher's mission to the Middle East, that the Syrians have changed their perceptions of what is required for an agreement to be reached.

Israelis now believe that the Syrians "understand that for what they demand, more than non-belligerency is required -- that a peace or a full peace is a requisite for the type of massive concessions that they require from us," Rabinovich said.

The Syrian track had been stalled in previous rounds as the Israelis waited for Damascus to define how far-reaching a peace accord it was prepared to strike with Jerusalem. The Syrians, in turn, waited for Israel to specify the extent to which it was prepared to withdraw from the Golan Heights.

But on Tuesday, Syrian chief negotiator Mowaffak al-Allaf told reporters that progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks could have a positive effect on other negotiating tracks as well.

"I believe any genuine progress on any track should affect positively the other tracks because, as you know, all tracks are interdependent," Allaf said, in a statement that was welcomed in Jerusalem.

Protests Outside State Dept.

Israelis had been concerned that a cool reaction from Damascus to the Israeli-PLO agreement could set back progress on the Syrian track.

There was also concern that Jordan might take a negative view of the self-rule agreement. Jordanian negotiator Fayez Tarawneh said Tuesday that Jordan still had to "look into the matter" further.

One negative note was struck by Uri Lubrani, Israel's chief negotiator with the Lebanese, who emerged from his morning meetings Tuesday saying that the positive momentum on the other tracks had not carried over into his talks.

Lebanese negotiator Souheil Chammas said after Tuesday's meetings that he had asked Lubrani whether the recent Israeli operation in southern Lebanon met the goal of trying to achieve peace.

"Lebanon cannot be a free game for the Israeli military might," Chammas said.

While the negotiators convened Tuesday inside the State Department, demonstrators staged protests outside the building.

A group of approximately 20 protesters from the militant Kahane Chai organization sat down in the driveway of the main C Street entrance to the building, chanting "Rabin is a traitor," and "No retreat from Jewish land."

Around the corner at the 23rd Street entrance, where the Syrian negotiators come in and out for their talks, another group staged a protest calling attention to the plight of Syrian Jews.

About 150 demonstrators from a variety of groups, including the National Task Force on Syrian Jewry, marched up and down the sidewalk shouting, "Let our people go."

The demonstrators said they hoped to encourage Syria to let more Jews leave the country.

LABOR TRYING TO BUILD COALITION SUPPORTING PEACE PLAN IN KNESSET

By David Landau and Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- Having won the Cabinet's backing for the landmark Israeli-Palestinian agreement on self-rule in the administered territories, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is scrambling to shore up support in the Knesset.

Rabin hopes to amass a comfortable majority of 70 Knesset members to support the plan, which is expected to come up for a vote in the 120-seat legislature on Sept. 9.

The agreement, which would establish limited Palestinian self-rule first in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, was approved by the Cabinet shortly after midnight Monday, in what was hailed as a historic move.

The ministers arrived at Rabin's office at about 7 p.m., where they had a briefing on the security dimensions of the agreement, which was conducted by Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, the Israel Defense Force chief of staff.

All the ministers voted in favor of the plan, except for Interior Minister Aryeh Deri of the fervently religious Shas party and Economics Minister Shimon Shetreet of Labor, both of whom abstained.

With the Cabinet vote behind him, Rabin is trying to convince politicians from some of the opposition parties in the Knesset to support the plan, in the hope of receiving the broadest possible mandate to push forward in the peace process.

The Labor Party, meanwhile, is busy laying plans for a publicity blitz to counter right-wing opponents of the peace package.

Reserve Gen. Avigdor Ben-Gal has been put in charge of a party task force whose job it will be to organize demonstrations, student activities and billboard advertisements supporting the government's policy.

Labor Wooing Religious Parties

In the Knesset, Labor's strategy for winning the crucial vote is now focused on members of the religious parties.

Political insiders say the four Knesset members belonging to the United Torah Judaism bloc -- comprising the Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah parties -- are likely to abstain when the plan comes up for a vote next week.

But it is still possible that the three Agudah Knesset members will vote with the government.

The six Knesset members belonging to the Shas party, which is a partner in the governing coalition, are likely to support the government in the crucial vote, whether or not Deri has by then quit his ministerial post.

Deri, who faces bribery charges, is under mounting pressure to step down as interior minister.

Deri himself voiced support for the peace agreement after reading it Monday, despite his decision that night to abstain during the Cabinet vote.

Shas sources insisted that Deri's abstention did not mean he would do the same when the plan comes up for a vote in the Knesset, which members of both the coalition and opposition have formally agreed to regard as a vote of confidence for or against the government.

But political sources say the Likud party is unified in its opposition to the peace plan, meaning there is little chance of getting an overwhelming Knesset majority to endorse it.

NEWS ANALYSIS:

A SECOND PEACE AGREEMENT IS SEEN IN TRUCE BETWEEN RABIN AND PERES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- The pursuit of peace sometimes creates strange bedfellows.

Israel has found itself in recent weeks dealing directly with its former implacable enemy, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

And this week, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin found himself congratulating his longtime Labor Party rival, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, on his success in hammering out the historic agreement with the Palestinians.

Political pundits here found the rapprochement between Rabin and Peres almost as amazing as the thaw between Israel and the PLO.

Ever since the establishment of the Labor government a year ago, the "experts" have been counting the days until the Rabin-Peres time bomb would explode.

But something happened to both men's thinking.

From the start, Peres has accepted the seniority of Rabin, who had trounced him in the spring 1992 Labor Party primary. For over a year now, he has had to live with the political reality that it is Rabin who now calls the shots.

But as the lack of progress in the formal peace talks became clear to him, Peres began seeking alternative ways to reach an agreement with the Palestinians.

Rabin, in turn, gave him the green light, realizing that 1993 might end with no progress in the talks -- which was contrary to all the political promises he had made.

Rabin did not believe much could be done, but he realized he should give Peres the chance.

And Peres pursued the challenge. One could not hear a word of criticism against Rabin from him, and Peres instructed his aides to stress at every chance the full cooperation that existed between the prime minister and him.

Talking With The Messengers

Peres kept talking about the need to pursue the peace process, no matter what difficulties lay ahead. And he radiated optimism, even when the peace process seemed to be in deep trouble.

It was Peres who carefully built up the "Gaza-Jericho First" plan at a time when Rabin believed that the real option was Damascus-first -- an agreement with Syria.

It was likewise Peres who eventually convinced Rabin to strike a deal with the PLO before it was too late.

Eventually, it was Peres who returned from the alternative route -- several rounds of secret negotiations with the PLO in Oslo, Norway -- and delivered a peace agreement.

And Rabin bought the agreement. He understood a truth that he admitted this week for the first time: that during the official bilateral negotiations in Washington, the Israelis had been talking with the messengers, rather than with those who wrote the messages.

After years of rivalry, Rabin and Peres understood, at a historic crossroad, that they needed to work together if they wanted to achieve anything.

And when the two men joined ranks, they had the entire Cabinet behind them, which in turn provided them with a good chance for rallying wide public support.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: SETTLERS IN THE JERICHO REGION ARE ANGRY, WORRIED ABOUT FUTURE By Michele Chabin

MITZPE JERICHO, West Bank, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- The "Gaza-Jericho" peace plan has stunned residents of Jewish settlements in the Jericho region, who are angry about the surprise agreement with the Palestinians and worried about their own future.

They are afraid of the unknown -- fearful that Israel will ultimately withdraw from the region and leave them behind to fend for themselves.

In this mountaintop community nine miles from Jericho, the news is only now beginning to sink in. While a few residents have joined protest demonstrations in Jerusalem, most are still debating how best to deal with the situation.

Established in 1977, Mitzpe Jericho is a non-agricultural settlement of religious Zionists, numbering about 125 families. Many of the adults work in Jerusalem, a 35-minute drive from the heart of Jericho. The rest work in nearby settlements.

"We were really shocked when we heard Jericho was part of the peace agreement," said Jerry Boaz, the settlement's security chief. "I think we're just starting to realize the enormity of the situation."

The settlers' first priority, he said, is to learn exactly what the plan entails. "Will only Jericho be affected, or will the surrounding areas be affected as well? I've heard rumors that the plan could encompass territory right up to Jerusalem," he said.

"As disturbed as we are by the peace proposal, what really hurts is the way it was formulated," Boaz said. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin "pushed through the plan without our knowledge."

"I'm not just talking about the people who live in the territories," he continued. "It came as a big shock to all Israelis, regardless of where they live. How could this be done without the vote of the people?"

Ruti Klein, a resident of Mitzpe Jericho for the past 14 years, was equally surprised by the peace proposal.

"To put it simply, I was shocked," said the mother of five. "People always spoke about giving back Gaza, so I was prepared for that. Rabin gave a lot of attention to the Golan. But in the end, it was Jericho he was discussing under the table."

Feels 'Cheated By The Subterfuge'

Klein said she feels "cheated by the subterfuge. The least the government could have done was inform us ahead of time."

While she cannot foresee a time when Jewish settlers will be physically forced to leave the West Bank, as was the case at the Sinai settlement of Yamit, "I'm afraid that living here will become so dangerous, so difficult that we will have to leave."

By way of example, she recalled how as a teen-ager she used to walk to the Western Wall every Saturday night. "I used to feel so safe going to the Kotel, but now I'm afraid to go there at night. No one has told me I can't go, but it's dangerous, so the result is the same."

She has not yet decided on a course of action, but stressed, "I don't see any of us taking up arms against other Jews. That is our red line.

Of course, I can't say how we'll react if the government comes and forces us out."

"This is our land," she said. "If that's not worth fighting for, I don't know what is."

The members of Vered Jericho, a secular settlement two miles from Jericho, are equally dismayed by the proposed autonomy plan.

Established in 1979, the settlement now has 35 families. Many of the settlers work the land, while others commute to Jerusalem or nearby settlements.

Miriam Sarid, who has lived at the settlement for 11 years, said she moved to the West Bank for a variety of reasons, not all of them ideological.

"We were looking for a place within easy commuting distance to Jerusalem, where we could afford to buy a house with a garden," she said. "My husband, Motti, wanted to try his hand at growing grapes, and the area was perfect."

"We also wanted to live in a place where we would make a difference to the security of the State of Israel," she added. "I feel we are doing that."

Sarid said she is worried about what the future will bring. "Some nitty-gritty issues have to be worked out, and fast," she said.

"If this area is under Palestinian autonomy, where will I shop? Will I need a visa every time I want to go to Jerusalem? Where will my children go to school? What happens if there's an accident on the road? Who do I call, the Israelis or the Palestinians?"

Whether she and her family will remain is uncertain. "I don't see myself as a Jew living under Jordanian rule," she said, referring to the possibility of an eventual Jordanian-Palestinian confederation in the West Bank.

She added: "I guess we'll decide when the time comes."

DINITZ MAY AGREE TO LEAVE POST, BUT FINAL DECISION IS POSTPONED By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- The Executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel met Tuesday night but put off at least until Wednesday a decision on the fate of its embattled chairman, Simcha Dinitz.

Jewish Agency officials had no public comment on the meeting. But behind-the-scenes efforts to reach a compromise plan were at a high pitch throughout the day Tuesday and well into the night.

Sources said it was likely that Dinitz would take a leave of absence if the attorney general recommends he be indicted for embezzlement.

But they said it was not out of the question that Dinitz would temporarily step aside even before such an indictment, possibly as soon as October.

If Dinitz does stay on board, however, sources suggested there might be a reduction of his responsibilities.

Dinitz is accused of embezzling thousands of dollars through improper use of his Jewish Agency credit card. A police investigation of the case was concluded last week and handed over to the attorney general, reportedly with a recommendation that he be indicted.

Meanwhile, Dinitz also has come under investigation by the tax authorities after documents handed over by police show a possible failure to properly report spending abroad.

COURT REJECTS APPEAL OF RULING ORDERING DEMJANJUK RETURN TO U.S.

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- The chances that accused Nazi war criminal John Demjanjuk would return to this country increased this week when a federal appeals court refused to reconsider an order saying that he must be allowed to return to the United States.

Israel's Supreme Court, meanwhile, was expected to decide Thursday whether to release Demjanjuk or hold him for further prosecution. He is currently being held in Ayalon Prison outside Tel Aviv.

On Tuesday, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati rejected without comment a Justice Department request for a hearing on the matter by the full panel of 14 judges.

The court also rejected a motion for a stay of the order, which was issued Aug. 6 by a three-judge panel of the court.

Government sources were not surprised by the federal appeals court decision.

The Justice Department opposes Demjanjuk's return on the grounds that he lied about his wartime activities when he entered the United States after the war and again when he later applied for U.S. citizenship.

It was on those grounds that the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations had Demjanjuk denaturalized and later extradited to Israel to stand trial for war crimes.

But it remains to be seen if the department will now appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court to bar Demjanjuk, who was acquitted July 30 by the Israeli Supreme Court of war crimes committed at the Treblinka death camp as the so-called "Ivan the Terrible."

Oral Arguments Still To Be Heard

The Israeli high court, in its decision, said it found compelling evidence that the 73-year-old former Cleveland autoworker, who was extradited to Israel in 1986, was an SS guard at the Sobibor death camp and the Flossenburg and Regensburg concentration camps.

The court has been considering petitions by several Holocaust survivors and their supporters to prosecute Demjanjuk on charges stemming from those alleged activities.

Oral arguments in a related matter were still scheduled to be heard by the original three-judge Cincinnati court on Friday.

The matter to be heard will be the June 30 ruling by Judge Thomas Wiseman Jr., who was designated as special master to look into reports that the Justice Department had withheld exculpatory evidence in the original 1986 extradition case against Demjanjuk.

Wiseman found that Justice Department lawyers did not deliberately withhold evidence and that the extradition case should be considered closed.

When this oral argument was scheduled, the Israeli Supreme Court had not made its decision acquitting Demjanjuk and the Cincinnati court had not ordered that Demjanjuk be allowed back into this country.

Debra Nagle, public information officer for the appeals court, said, "Since the Israeli Supreme Court has made its decision, and this court has ruled that Demjanjuk should be allowed back into the country, I don't know what will be discussed" on Friday.

JEWISH PRESENCE FELT IN WASHINGTON AT COMMEMORATIVE CIVIL RIGHTS MARCH

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31 (JTA) -- Jewish organizational representatives were among the estimated 75,000 people participating in events here last weekend commemorating the 30th anniversary of the historic civil rights march on Washington.

This year's march was held on Shabbat, which limited official participation by Jewish groups.

But the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism was represented Saturday afternoon at the events at the Lincoln Memorial.

Rabbi David Saperstein, the center's director, spoke Saturday afternoon, and Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, the associate director, was one of several clergy offering invocations as the events at the memorial began.

In his remarks, Saperstein referred to the stirring words of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered at the 1963 march being commemorated.

Saperstein said that King would not have given up hope despite the vast problems facing the world today.

"Take heart, for if you will it, the dream lives on. If you will it and do not despair, the dream will yet come to pass," Saperstein said.

Also limiting participation in march-related activities was the almost-suffocating late-August heat and humidity blanketing Washington.

Small crowds turned out last Friday afternoon for two gun-control rallies organized with the backing of the American Jewish Committee.

Controversy Over Farrakhan

AJCommittee, together with African-American groups here in Washington, has been coordinating a series of rallies outside the National Rifle Association's headquarters here.

On Friday, there was one rally on the Mall, followed by one at the NRA building.

Jeffrey Weintraub, AJCommittee's Washington area director, also noted that AJCommittee officials were present at the march events Saturday afternoon.

And Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress, said in a statement last Friday that he supported the aims of the demonstrators calling for stricter gun-control laws.

The original 1963 march, best remembered for King's speech, ushered in the era of civil rights and voting rights legislation backed by the administration of President Lyndon Johnson.

Among the themes of this year's march were job creation and an end to discrimination.

The Washington Post reported Sunday that the Religious Action Center was involved in a controversy surrounding Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam minister regarded by many as anti-Semitic.

The Black Muslim minister did not speak at the march, and organizers said that he had not been invited to do so, the Post reported.

The Post reported that Nation of Islam representatives at the march were distributing a letter from Saperstein saying the Religious Action Center would withdraw its support for the march if Farrakhan spoke.

The center said the Nation of Islam was distributing a private message sent before it had learned Farrakhan had not been invited to speak.