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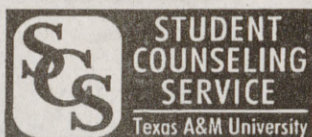
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Barak promises peace deal will bring security

KFAR SABA, Israel (AP) — Trying to chip away opposition to a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Prime Minister Ehud Barak promised yesterday Israel would enjoy unprecedented peace and security once he signs peace deals with Syria and Lebanon, both possible within a few months.

With his speech to a Labor Party conference, Barak launched a campaign to sell Israelis on the price for peace after the surprise announcement long-suspended negotiations with Syria will resume next week.

Barak has pledged to present a peace deal with Syria to a national referendum — and he could lose amid strong opposition against returning the Golan to Syria.

Golan settlers, who presumably would face removal if the strategic plateau were handed over, said they would rally public opinion to block a withdrawal. "Governments come and go, prime ministers come and go," Uri Heitner, spokesperson of the Golan Settlers Council, said. "We won't budge from here."

Still, Barak said he was sure of a "sweeping" referendum victory once Israelis see top military commanders back land concessions and the public's security concerns are soothed.

The optimism in Israel came after President Clinton announced Wednesday the Israeli-Syrian peace talks would resume in Washington following a bitter three-year hiatus.

In Damascus, state-run newspapers said yesterday Syrian President Hafez Assad was as determined as ever to regain all of the Golan, which Israel captured from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981.

Commentaries warned against too much optimism. *The Al-Baath* newspaper said Syria had done its part, and now everything depended on Barak's acceptance of assurances made by a previous Israeli government.

Syria said the late Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin promised to withdraw to the pre-1967 war frontier between the two countries, a claim Israel denies.

Israeli officials said Assad dropped his demand that Barak renew the alleged pledge and that talks would resume without conditions. But they have admitted a handover of most of the Golan is necessary for a deal and say negotiations will focus on only a small area Israel seeks to retain.

Pollster Rafi Smith said a majority of Israelis are against giving up all of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, but noted the opposition has been shrinking.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, refused yesterday to resume comprehensive peace talks with Israel, despite their growing concern Clinton, eager to secure a place in history as Mideast peacemaker, will become preoccupied with the promising Israeli-Syrian track.



Millennium bug nipping at heels of tardy Pakistanis

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — In Pakistan it is not so much a question of whether anything will go wrong at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31 — it is how much will go wrong.

With the millennium around the corner, the people whose are preparing key services, like air traffic control, power supply and hospitals, are worried.

The Y2K glitch, the result of

computer programming that express years with two digits, means uncorrected computers could interpret "2000" as "1900" and crash or garble data.

In Pakistan, the correction process is way behind schedule.

Lack of money has hurt Pakistan's efforts to upgrade its computers, national Y2K coordinator Ijaz Khawaja said. The Oct. 12 military

coup, which overthrew an elected government, also has added to Pakistan's woes.

In a worst-case scenario, airports could shut down, hospitals could be left trying to get their patients on manually operated life-support systems and Karachi could be left completely in the dark.

All that is unlikely to happen, Khawaja said. With time running

out, systems untested equipment only partially tried, no one knows for sure.

With few exceptions, the staff in most Pakistani hospitals are underqualified, and those who use the equipment lack technical know-how, Khawaja said.

A lot of hospital equipment was purchased from European countries and have long since lost their manuals, he said.

In the country's most populous Punjab province, where 60 percent of Pakistan's 140 million people live, doctors are doing better than that. They have carried out emergency surgery in 30 until Jan. 1.

Khawaja said aviation is the gravest concern.

The Civil Aviation Authority missed every Y2K compliance deadline so far, but said it expects to be ready by mid-December. Radar systems will be tested and ready for testing.

That leaves just two weeks to test, considered too little by most experts.

Khawaja said the defense industry in this fledgling weapons state claims to be compliant but has not produced any documentation.

Another worry for Khawaja is the southern port city of Karachi, which he said is having problems with embedded chips in its big electric plants.

Officials at the Karachi Electric Company said they have made alternate arrangements for power to the city's 14 million people, including tapping into the national power grid and buying power from private companies.

For the Dec. 31 rollover, Khawaja is trying to organize a military monitoring desk with links to major industries and utilities. Most countries already have such command centers in place.

News in Brief

Humanitarian program expected to be OK

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — A sponsored resolution to extend U.N. humanitarian program in Iraq for six months is expected to win approval in the U.N. Security Council, but a U.S.-backed resolution on new Iraq policy still faces tough opposition from Russia and China.

Washington is holding high-level contacts with key capitals in an effort to reach a broad consensus on a comprehensive resolution to U.N. weapons inspectors to return after nearly a year's absence — pushing for a vote by Saturday.

The 15 council members discussed the comprehensive resolution for the first time in a meeting Wednesday.

They were expected to hold another round of talks yesterday when the United States also expected to introduce a six-month extension for the oil-for-food humanitarian program.

Muslims begin fast for month of Ramadan

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — The holy month of Ramadan began yesterday, requiring devout Muslims to abstain from food, water and sex as an act of sacrifice and purification. They recite passages from Islam's holy book, the Quran, and pray at mosques.

The cycle of fast and prayer continues for the next 28 or 29 days, depending on the sighting of the moon, which determines the start of the holy month. It will be followed by the three-day Eid al-Fitr, or the breaking of the fast.

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