

Labor Party drops opposition to independent Palestinian state

TEL AVIV, Israel — Swiftly answering the PLO's decision to end its call for Israel's destruction, the governing Labor Party on Thursday abandoned its long-standing opposition to a Palestinian state.

With its landmark vote, Labor discarded what was once a bedrock tenet and became the first major party in Israel to at least tacitly accept the idea of an independent Palestinian state, once unthinkable for most Israelis.

The move came a day after the Palestine National Council annulled clauses in the PLO charter that called for Israel's destruction.

The momentous exchange of gestures is expected to bolster the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, frozen since a series of suicide bombings by Islamic militants in February and March killed 59 victims in Israel.

Yet Israel still faces the threat of attack from Muslim extremist groups

such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres told about 1,000 Labor Party delegates who had assembled in Tel Aviv to vote on the new platform that it would help him "achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East" if he is re-elected in May 29 balloting.

Israel-Syria peace talks have been snagged for years over the Golan Heights issue.

Peres said the new platform "gives the government a free hand to negotiate."

While Peres did not explicitly say he now accepted the Palestinians' goal of statehood, he stressed that the current autonomy arrangement in the West Bank and Gaza "cannot remain."

"With the Palestinians, we wish to arrive not at yet another interim settlement but a permanent settlement, a fundamental solution ... total elimina-

tion of the conflict between us and the Palestinian people," he said emphatically.

In Gaza, Yasser Arafat praised Labor's move. "It will help a lot in the negotiations for the final status," the PLO chief said.

Talks on a final Israel-Palestinian settlement, to begin May 4, are to address the most difficult issues dividing the sides: the PLO's demand for statehood, final borders, and the future of Israeli settlements and the disputed holy city of Jerusalem.

Labor's platform, approved overwhelmingly in a show of hands, does maintain some hard-line points on those issues: It says that Jerusalem, including the eastern sector claimed by the Palestinians, will remain united under Israeli rule; it calls for eventual Israeli sovereignty over parts of the

West Bank such as the Jordan Valley; and while promising no new settlements will be built, it pledges most settlers will remain under Israeli rule.

In Israel, Labor's vote was widely seen as a turn towards accepting the idea of Palestinian independence in the West Bank and Gaza, which Israel seized from Jordan and Egypt, respectively, in 1967.

Columnist Yosef Lapid wrote in the Maariv daily that "Peres' vision of a New Middle East is taking shape ... Peres and Yasser Arafat agree on the establishment of a Palestinian state that recognizes the right of Israel to exist."

On Wednesday, the council, which has served as the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile for three decades, voted 504-54 with 14 abstentions to revoke all clauses in the 1964 PLO founding charter that called for the elimination of Israel.

Compromise spending bill moves forward

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency will get 10 percent less money, and job safety spending will be down a bit. Schools with many low-income children will get about the same as a year ago.

In a gauge of how the federal budget climate has changed, Democrats considered those winners in the huge compromise spending bill for fiscal 1996 that Congress prepared for President Clinton's promised signature Thursday. The House approved the legislation 399-25, and Senate passage was expected quickly.

The \$159 billion measure, covering nine Cabinet-level departments and dozens of agencies for the remaining five months of the fiscal year, will provide additional services for some Americans and less for others. There is \$1.4 billion to help hire 100,000 local police officers, but \$278 million — about a third less than last year — for the Legal Services Corp., which provides lawyers for the poor.

The bill was the product of grueling talks between the White House and Congress. In the end, the administration had won \$5 billion more than the House had approved months ago — still leaving spending for all federal agencies a whopping \$20 billion below 1995 levels, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.

"The world has changed and we're headed in the right direction," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston, R-La., a leader in the GOP drive to slice federal spending and shrink government.

Democrats preferred to focus instead on the money they restored. That included \$350 million for Clinton's prized Goals 2000 education reform program, down \$22 million from last year but originally targeted for elimination by the House. And the Occupational Safety and Health Administration would get \$305 million — a 2 percent cut from last year instead of the 11 percent reduction the House initially approved.

Republicans said the measure would eliminate more than 200 programs, though most of them were relatively tiny and obscure. Among them was a favorite of Vice President Al Gore, the Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment, a year-old program aimed at teaching students about the environment.



Prisons to start women chain gangs

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — The Alabama prison system is preparing to snap shackles around the ankles of women prisoners, creating female chain gangs in the state that revived male leg-iron crews last year.

Alabama Prison officials said the women chain gangs would help resolve lawsuits from male inmates challenging the exclusively male work units.

"There's no real defense for not doing the females," said State Corrections Commissioner Ron Jones.

Stephen Dees, the warden at Julia Tutwiler State Prison for Women near Montgomery, is developing the chain-gang policy. Women could be working in leg irons as early as June, Jones said.

"We have done a lot of historical research, and I have never come across a female chain gang," said Rhonda Brownstein, a lawyer with the Southern Poverty Law Center. "They have previously said it's not practical or feasible to have chain gangs for women."

The civil rights watchdog group is representing inmates in a lawsuit contending that chain gangs represent unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment.

Ford recalls 7.9 million cars

WASHINGTON — Ford Motor Co. is recalling about 7.9 million cars, minivans and pickups in the United States with the same type of ignition switch that has caught fire in hundreds of vehicles. It is the second-largest recall in U.S. history.

The No. 2 automaker also is expanding its Canadian recall of vehicles with the switches from the 248,000 announced late last year to a total of 859,000 to match the makes and models being fixed in the United States.

That brings the total recall number to about 8.7 million vehicles — the largest recall by a single automaker. The largest recall was last year when 10 automakers had to fix seat belts on 8.8 million cars because of concerns the buckles sometimes failed to latch or unlatch.

The total cost of the recall was expected to exceed \$200 million, Ford sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Officer suspended in fake jail fight

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — A plan hatched by a jail guard to scare two touring juveniles by staging a fight among three inmates backfired when the show was canceled and nobody told the prisoners.

When the fake fight broke out, guards at the Duval County Jail subdued one of the inmates with pepper spray and put him in a restraining chair.

The officer who came up with the idea, Sgt. Joseph J. Wollitz, was ordered suspended for 20 days. Another guard was reprimanded, and a third resigned.

"We can't ask inmates to perform violent acts with each other to impress anyone," Corrections Director John Rutherford said Thursday.

Wollitz wanted to arrange a fight Jan. 23 to "scare some juveniles straight," Rutherford said. When Wollitz asked for permission, a superior said no. The prisoners were never told that the show must not go on.

When the inmates began fighting and wouldn't stop, Wollitz sprayed prisoner Antonio Lovely and had him put in a restraining chair for several hours.

"I assume his motives were good," White said. "I assume he did it to try to teach a lesson to the kids, and that he was thinking it was a good lesson. Obviously, it blew up in his face."

Rutherford said investigators found that Wollitz had staged at least one similar show before.

New Chechen rebel leader vows revenge on troops

MOSCOW — The new leader of Chechnya's separatist rebels vowed revenge for the death of his predecessor while the war ground on relentlessly with a Russian attack Thursday on another Chechen village.

Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev ruled out peace talks with Moscow until Dzhokhar Dudayev's death was avenged and the culprits found, Russian television said. He said the rebels were "prepared to continue the war until Chechnya gains its freedom."

Russian warplanes continued their assault on Shali, a village 16 miles southeast of the Chechen capital Grozny.

Russian forces claim to have surrounded Chechen guerrillas in Shali. The Interfax news agency said at least one woman was killed and 29 people — including two children — were wounded in the air raid.

Russian troops in the mountains were fortifying their positions and security was being beefed up in Grozny, Russian television said.

Chechen fighters kept up their hit-and-run attacks against Russian troops in Grozny, news agencies said, and there were reports of scattered fighting elsewhere.

The death of Dudayev, the guiding

force of the separatist movement, has created new uncertainty in the 16-month war.

The separatists said Dudayev was killed in a Russian airstrike Sunday and buried late Tuesday in a secret location in the foothills of the North Caucasus Mountains.

They claim his dying words were "not to give up our cause — bring it to an end." But some officials and analysts hope Dudayev's death might give new impetus to peace talks.

Pavel Felgenhauer, military analyst with the Russian daily Segodnya, said Dudayev's death was a boon to Russian President Boris Yeltsin ahead of the June 16 presidential elections. Confusion in the rebel camp could "freeze" the fighting in Chechnya, he said.

"This is good for Moscow, as the Yeltsin government has made clear its strategic objective: to keep the Chechens out of their hair until after the elections," he said.

However, the rebels appeared to be anything but conciliatory Thursday. In a move sure to enrage the Kremlin, the separatists' representative in Moscow said the hard-line guerrilla commander, Shamil Basayev, would represent the rebels if peace talks ever materialize.

White House voices concern over use of testimony tape

WASHINGTON — President Clinton said Thursday he hoped his videotaped testimony in a Whitewater trial wouldn't "be abused in any way" and suggested that he agreed with criticism of prosecutor Kenneth Starr.

The president spent part of the day preparing for Sunday's videotaped questioning. Before he uttered even a word on tape, his administration began arguing against the release of the videotape outside the courtroom.

A big concern: that snippets could end up in Republican TV ads next fall.

"I think that the American people and the press should have access to my testimony, but that it shouldn't be abused in any way," Clinton told reporters.

His aides were more direct. "We don't want to see it in a campaign ad," said press secretary Mike McCurry. "It should not be misused by those who would try to take politi-

cal advantage of the president's appearance, because he's coming forward in good faith to deliver the truth."

The president's testimony Sunday could take up to eight hours. His videotaped responses will be played back in a Little Rock courtroom for the fraud and conspiracy trial of Gov. Jim Guy Tucker and James and Susan McDougal, who are accused of misusing nearly \$3 million in government-backed loans in the mid-1980s.

Clinton has not been charged in the case. The McDougals, who were once Clinton's partners in the Whitewater real estate development, subpoenaed him to testify. Defense lawyers will question the president, followed by a cross-examination by prosecutors.

But aides were most edgy about custody of the tapes. They fear that a copy of the tape could wind up in the hands of Republican opponents, to be used in a campaign ad.

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