

STRAUSS ASKS BOTH SIDES TO RESOLVE ISSUES

ALEXANDRIA (WNS) -- Robert Strauss, President Carter's special envoy to the Middle East, opened the fourth round of autonomy talks between Israel and Egypt by calling on both sides to "have the courage not to equivocate, but to face difficult issues and resolve them fairly."

Strauss, who was making his first appearance at the talks, was referring to the Israeli-Egyptian deadlock over an agenda. Egypt wants a declarative statement of principles that would establish the ultimate objectives of autonomy on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

It feels that this approach would provide an incentive to Palestinian moderates to join the negotiations and would improve the image of the autonomy plan in the Arab world.

Israel's position is that the talks begin by tackling the practical aspects of autonomy such as the election of an autonomous council, who may seek election and who is eligible to vote, the structure of the self-governing authority and what responsibility it will have.

Strauss emphasized at the meeting that his participation was "physical evidence of the commitment" of President Carter personally and the U.S. as a nation to the continuation of the Middle East peace process.

Before joining the autonomy negotiations, Strauss met with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat here and with Israeli Premier Menachem Begin in Jerusalem. While in Israel, Strauss was non-committal on the agenda dispute saying he would listen to both sides "and then we will begin to assess the situation." He stressed that he had not come to the Mideast with solutions to all problems. "I am not a fool to believe that we can solve problems of 3000 years and a conflict of 30 years in a few meetings," he said. He said he was in the Mideast to "listen, learn, and feel the problems." Strauss brought Begin a letter from Carter

whose contents were described as "friendly." Begin was reportedly pleased with it.

CABINET APPROVES PRICE FREEZE

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- A temporary freeze on basic commodities was approved by the Cabinet in July. The freeze had been opposed by many Ministers, including Finance Minister Simcha Ehrlich, because it implied an increase in price support subsidies. But Premier Menachem Begin had demanded the freeze to "cool the economy."

Economic observers called the decision a compromise since the freeze will last for an undisclosed period of time to be replaced eventually by a policy that will do away with subsidies of food and other basics.

That would mean the doubling of the price of such items as bread and fuel oil. The government's long range plan is

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to compensate low-income people and large families through national insurance and child benefit payments. This is in line with Likud's fundamental economic philosophy which is that the needy consumer rather than the commodity itself should be subsidized. It was not immediately clear whether fuel was to be included in the temporary price freeze or if the government would adjust its price upward in line with the new OPEC prices and the steady decline

in the value of IL. Meanwhile, Ehrlich has flatly denied media reports that he had offered to resign because of the deteriorating economy and his differences with Begin over the price freeze.

ISRAEL CLOSES AIR SPACE FOR SKYLAB

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Israel has agreed to a request from the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space

Administration (NASA) to close its air space in the event that the American Skylab, now dropping toward earth, disintegrates over Israel.

But Israeli experts say there is only a remote chance that debris from the 77-ton space vehicle will fall in the region. U.S. authorities have promised to issue three advance warnings, 24 hours, 12 hours and six hours before the fall. The fall is expected on or about July 16. Prof. Giora Shaviv,

a Haifa Technion geophysicist, said that the chance that the parts of Skylab will fall on populated areas or hit people is zero.

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