

WEST BANK TALKS RESUME

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Talks on autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians got underway at a summit conference between Premier Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Alexandria. But the positions of the two countries are still far apart, but there are reported differences, mainly of approach, within the Israeli delegation.

While Begin still adopts an uncompromising stand, Interior Minister Yosef Burg, leader of the ministerial negotiating team, favors a more flexible and compromising approach. The position of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, attending the talks for the first time in his new capacity, is still unclear, though observers believe his recently announced more liberal approach to the West Bank indicated his desire to reach autonomy with some degree of understanding with local West Bank leaders, thus hopefully undercutting the influence of the Beirut-based Palestine Liberation Organization.

According to reports, Sharon has already begun talks

with West Bank Arab notables, but Defense Ministry officials decline to confirm this. The Arab leaders involved are reported to have promised not to disclose the subject of the talks, or even the fact that they have taken place. His recently announced "velvet glove" policy included instructions to the army to press ahead with its campaign to combat PLO terrorism and PLO supporters but not to mistreat the West Bank civilian population.

The talks were halted some 18 months ago. Analysts say they were stopped by Egypt because Sadat hoped that Begin's Premiership was only a passing phase and he would be replaced by a Labor leader in the Knesset elections last June. He is also thought to have felt that then U.S. President Carter could not bring sufficient pressure to bear on Israel during an election year both in the U.S. and in Israel.

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FLAP OVER CITY OF DAVID DIG

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- The controversy over the archaeological excavation in the City of David near the Western Wall between archaeologists and religious circles entered a new stage as the Chief Rabbis ruled against continuing the dig and archaeologists ignored their rulings. According to the rabbis and ultra-Orthodox religious circles, the dig at the biblical city built by King David violated Jewish Law because it desecrated graves at the site. The archaeologists, headed by Prof. Yigal Shilo, maintained that no graves have been found in the four years at the site.

The controversy between the two groups has on occasion led to clashes and police have had to intervene.

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