Israel, PLO Agree to Transfer Civilian Powers to Palestinians

By Mary Curtius

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization initialed an agreement Wednesday on early transfer of civilian powers to Palestinians living in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

After a negotiating session that lasted all night Tuesday, resumed Wednesday morning and finally ended at night, Israel said it would start a transfer authority on Sept. 12 to Palestinians for collecting taxes and for running health, welfare and tourism facilities throughout the West Bank.

"Today is the real start for the implementation of the peace agreement on the West Bank," Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath told reporters in Cairo, Egypt. Even as negotiators there were still finishing their accord, the first transfer of a civilian portfolio in the West Bank to Palestinians is already under way.

Israeli authorities formally turned over the Ramallah school district to Palestinians, in keeping with a separate agreement reached in Cairo last week, and promised that most of the West Bank's information system will be turned over to Palestinians by Aug. 29.

"This is a far-reaching, most important step," Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told Israel Radio about the education transfer. "I think we are acting wisely in not forcing our education on them, leaving them to educate in their own way."

The transfer of responsibility for civilian affairs is meant to give Palestinians in the West Bank — who still live under Israeli military rule — tangible evidence that Israel and the PLO are working toward an agreement to let Israel deploy its troops out of Palestinian administration centers and permit them to conduct local elections and run their daily lives.

But Israeli's military administration of the territories will continue alongside the Palestinian bureaucracy for at least a year, Israeli officials said. The Israeli administration will not be dissolved until elections are held in the territories and Israel's troops are redeployed.

"There will have to be cooperation," Shaath told reporters in Cairo. "We will need good will and a lot of cooperation; it will not work any other way."

Both Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat face rising opposition in their constituencies to the stepped-up disenagement process Israel and the PLO have committed to.

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Delta Air Lines, AT&T Announce Joint Venture for Info Technology

By Elizabeth Corcoran

Delta Air Lines Inc. and AT&T said Tuesday that they are creating a joint venture that will manage Delta's communications and computing services, except for its reservation systems.

For Delta, which reported a $408 million loss for the fiscal year that ended June 30, the venture is intended to save money, absorb about 1,200 Delta employees and eventually generate revenues. For AT&T, it is a sign that its Global Information Solutions division is gaining momentum.

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