Israeli Cabinet approves transfer

BY SARI BASHI ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — A land transfer that stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks for five weeks easily cleared a final hurdle Sunday with Israel's Cabinet approving maps for the withdrawal from 6.1 percent of the West Bank.

The transfer will take place Tuesday, just before negotiators convene near Washington for peace talks, and will leave the Palestinians in control of 41 percent of the West Bank.

The Palestinians had suspended the talks last month after it became clear Israel was not going to give them populated suburbs of Jerusalem as part of the troop withdrawal. The revised maps approved Sunday give the Palestinians three suburbs near, but not abutting Jerusalem.

The maps were approved by a vote of 16-6. Ministers from two religious parties and an immigrant party opposed the withdrawal, which will give the Palestinians full control of 5.1 percent of the West Bank where they now have civilian control. A further 1 percent will go from full Israeli control to full Palestin-

"From this week on, 60 percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank will live under full Palestinian authority," Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said. "This is the real change."

Under the new map, Israel will also withdraw from areas near the West Bank towns of Jericho, Jenin, Bethlehem and Hebron, pullbacks that bring Arafat closer to the territorial continuity he wants

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Israeli Deputy Defense Minister

to create a state.

Right-wing critics said giving the Palestinians suburbs near Jerusalem will threaten the security of nearby Jewish neighborhoods and the unity of the city. Jewish West Bank settlers held protests Sunday near the areas from which Israel is to with-

Also Sunday, Israel released five Palestinian prisoners jailed for anti-Israel activity and promised to release ten more

Monday as a goodwill gesture for the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha, which ended Sunday evening.

The five prisoners were members of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction who were convicted of killing Palestinian collaborators and injuring Israelis over the last two decades. All five prisoners were from traditionally Arab east Jerusalem, claimed by the Palestinians as the capital of a future state.

McCain returns to Senate

BY DAVID ESPO ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Nevermind that John McCain often joked with his campaign audiences - in pride, not in sorrow about never winning a Miss Congeniality award in the Senate.

Public displays of graciousness will mark his return to the Capitol this week, a more formidable political force than when he left it. It's the Senate's way, even though he ran a reform-based presidential campaign that rocked the Republican establishment and used fellow lawmakers as foils.

"Senators are in conflict every day with each other, in committee, over issues, in letters, in the media, on the floor," said Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., Senate point man for likely GOP presidential nominee George W. Bush. "But it has a fraternal nature to it and you have to set the battles ... aside."

Beyond the displays of senatorial courtesy, the Arizona senator's allies say test," Duberstein sad.

fellow Republicans will ignore his new political clout at their own peril.

"There are only two United States senators who have a truly national constituency. One's name is Ted Kennedy and one's name is John McCain," says former White House chief of staff Ken Duberstein, a McCair friend and senior

Republican pollster Ed Goeas said a recent national survey pointed in the same direction, and that McCain can help GOP candidates in terms of fund raising and voter support.

"The congressional [campaign] committee ought to put him on right away to start doing these swing congressional districts," Goeas said. "He can be a real asset in keeping Congress.'

Duberstein predcted McCain will be the "No. 1 Republican" asked to campaign for Republicans this fall.

"He still may not win Miss Congeniality, but he will win a popularity con-

Paper: Feds have begun criminal investigation into crash

SEATTLE — What began months ago as an inquiry into maintenance practices at an Alaska Airlines facility has become a criminal investigation into the deadly crash of Flight 261, The Seattle Times reported Saturday.

Citing unidentified sources, the newspaper said the FBI and Department of Transportation investigators have been questioning Alaska Airlines employees as part of an inquiry that has been underway for several weeks.

No criminal wrongdoing has been established in connection with the Jan. 31 crash off the coast of California that

killed 88 people, the Times said.

The criminal investigation grew out of a 15-month-old inquiry into practices at Alaska's maintenance facility at Oakland, Calif., the Times said. In that inquiry, a grand jury in San Francisco is investigating whether supervisors signed for repairs that weren't done or that they weren't authorized to approve.

The Times said the FBI, which usually plays an advisory role to the NTSB, is conducting a separate, parallel investigation — a course of action reserved for cases where there is evidence or suspicion of crime.

The newspaper cited three sources

in two federal agencies as confirming the have been."

FBI spokeswomen Roberta Burroughs in Seattle and Debbie Weierman in Washington, D.C., on Saturday would not confirm or deny the existence of any

Alaska Airlines said it was not aware of a criminal probe.

"The FBI has been involved in the investigation of Flight 261 since the beginning," airlines spokesman Jack Evans said Saturday. "Currently, we are unaware of any change in their role since the beginning. If there is a change in that role, wo'll cooperate with them as we

Earlier in the week, the airline said it put a top manager on leave while it investigates claims by 64 Seattle mechanics that they were "pressured, threatened and intimidated" to cut corners on

Alaska Airlines said it had notified federal prosecutors and the National Transportation Safety Board of the claims. It also said it would immediately ground any planes found to be potentially unsafe. No such action had been deemed necessary as of Saturday, Evans said.

TAIWAN

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what the loss meant for their party's future. They also looked for someone to blame.

"Don't get us wrong. We respect Chen's victory, because that's what democracy is all about. But things have to change," said a bank employee who would give only his surname, Yang.

The protest, which left several people with minor injuries, contrasted strongly with the tone of Chen's triumphant first day as president-elect.

As he prepared to embark on the awesome task of forming a new, minority government, Chen spent Sunday visiting government agencies and offering thanks at temples and to his supporters, while avoiding any mention of specifics on Chi-

In a deeply symbolic round of political ancestor worship, Chen stood at tion in 1996. He will leave office May the grave of Huang Hsin-chieh, an earry 20

leader of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party, burning incense and telling the "founding father" of Taiwan's democracy about the "great victory yesterday."

Chen and the vice president-elect, pioneering feminist Annette Lu, held out a conciliatory gesture toward the Nationalists.

"I will exert all effort to learn from the success and experience of Lee Tenghui to lead Taiwan and the entire Taiwanese people," Chen said.

Chen also praised Lee for his plan to form a small transitional working group to oversee the charge in government that comes in May. The Nationalists will relinquish power for the first time since Gen. Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan after losing mainland China to Mao Tsetung's Communists in 1949.

The 77-year-old Lee presided over Taiwan's evolution from an authoritarian state to a democracy with direct presidential elections during his 12 years as the island's leader. Lee won the first elec-

REMINDER

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OF THE WEEK: How Many Empresses Named Catherine Ruled in Russia? ANSWER: There were two Catherines One - Catherine I- was murried to Peter the Great and ruled in Russia after his death from 1726 until her death in 1728. The second Catherine-Catherine the Great- was the originess of Russia for 34 years from 1762 until 1796.

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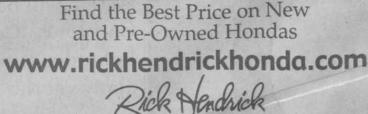


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