

Likud, Labor hold coalition discussions

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- Negotiators for Israel's Likud and Labor parties were seeking agreement Monday on joining forces in a national unity government, officials said.

The talks were to be focused on diplomatic and socioeconomic issues that were important to Labor, whose future could be hanging in the balance, The Jerusalem Post reported.

Likud chairman Binyamin Netanyahu has until April 5 to establish a national unity coalition, and negotiations were being held ahead of a Tuesday Labor Party convention, during which Labor Party members unhappy with the prospect of joining forces with a right-wing government could bolt to form a splinter party.

Some Labor members of the Knesset say party leader Ehud Barak, Israel's defense minister, is negotiating with Netanyahu without the proper authority or permission from the rank-and-file, the Post reported.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert also slammed a possible alliance between Netanyahu and Barak, saying Sunday that anyone not supporting idea of an independent state for Palestinians was "deluding themselves and the public."

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