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As around fifty international delegations gather in Annapolis today to discuss the situation in the Middle East, world leaders are expressing cautious optimism that the talks will pave the way for a lasting peace agreement in the region. The Annapolis conference formally began at the State Department on Monday, in which the US President made a speech outlining his " vision & quot; of two states living side by side in peace and security.

Quote: *""I call upon all those gathering in Annapolis this week to redouble their efforts to turn dreams of peace into reality," Bush said in a statement. "I remain personally committed to implementing my vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security."*

...whereas at present, the Palestinian Authority is in a state and Israel is in pieces. He met separately with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert last night, and is expected to address the conference today. Olmert has also voiced optimism at the presence of the Arab League at the conference, and hopes that this may lead to the normalization of relations with Israel's enemies. Syria and Saudi Arabia are still officially at war with the Jewish state. According to Saudi sources, the US Administration has given the Saudi government assurances that it will press for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to be concluded within a year. Olmert has also expressed his wishes that a peace agreement could be established before President Bush's term comes to an end.

Quote: *""The important factor is the placement of a deadline for negotiations so they do not become endless and this is what the American government hosting the conference has promised, that the time period does not exceed one year," the newspaper quoted Prince Saud as saying. Advertisement "We felt from the United States and the international Quartet [of Mideast peace negotiators] some encouraging assurances on following up the negotiations through specific mechanisms and reciprocal commitments among all the active parties," he said.*

Israeli President Shimon Peres has also expressed optimism that the Annapolis conference could lead to a peace agreement. Peres said that peace would not come in a day, but he also believes that the presence of the Arab League at the conference is a good sign. He also reaffirmed that Israel was conducting secret negotiations with the Syrians on the issue of the Golan Heights, and that the Israeli government was ready for peace with Syria.

Quote: *"Usually, Peres said out of personal experience, such conferences are met with high expectations. "A factory is not built in a day – and thus peace is also not achieved in one day. Of course there are* ***serious birth pangs****, of course there are difficulties, but today, the Middle East looks different than it did 30 years ago as far as opportunities and risks are concerned." The president also regarded Washington's participation in the peace process positively, saying, "I think that now all sides are interested in not wasting time or potential opportunities.* ***Each one aspires to reach peace. I think this is common to all sides.***
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Shimon Peres' choice of words is extremely interesting. Last time we heard that phrase mentioned was during the Second Lebanese War. As the Western nations held off calling for a cease fire between Israel and Hizbullah, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that we were now witnessing the birth pangs of the new Middle East. It's interesting that the Scriptures use the exact same phrase when speaking of end time prophecy coming to pass. Paul states in 1st Thessalonians 5:3 that when the nations shall seek for peace and security, then sudden destruction shall come upon them as birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. Whoever thought that world leaders would one day be using the same phraseology as written in the Scriptures nearly 2000 years ago? This is testament to the days we are now living in.

1st Thessalonians 5:1-6
But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Praise God that those who have trusted in Jesus Christ are not of the night, that the Day of the Lord should overtake us as a thief. Jesus Christ is coming again. Trust in Him for salvation today.

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