

U.S. mediator confident after Irish peace talks

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Heading home after yet another unlikely success, American mediator George Mitchell predicted Thursday that a new compromise package will finally spur formation of a Protestant-Catholic government for Northern Ireland and prompt the outlawed IRA to disarm.

In an interview with The Associated Press, the former senator from Maine — who helped achieve last year's landmark Good Friday peace accord — said he hadn't wanted to return when the deal started unraveling this summer, and the prime ministers of Britain and Ireland phoned.

Then he listened to his wife. "She said, 'You've got to do it. It's the right thing to do,'" Mitchell said in a spartan office at the British government headquarters, his home away from home for the past 11 weeks of patient mediation.

The compromise package,

already being put into action, involves the Ulster Unionists, the province's major British Protestant party, dropping their longstanding demand for Irish Republican Army disarmament before the new four-party government is formed.

Instead, as Mitchell emphasized Thursday in his concluding report, the Ulster Unionists would be expected to accept the IRA-linked Sinn Féin party as government colleagues on the same day the IRA starts negotiations with a disarmament commission.

Both moves are expected in early December — but only if Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble can overcome considerable opposition within his party in a key vote late this month.

Mitchell told the AP he could not be sure whether Trimble would prevail or be ousted as Ulster Unionist leader. But he stressed that Trimble's critics, who complain that the IRA

has provided no guarantees it will ever "decommission" its weapons dumps, had no alternative strategy to make it happen.

In the past, IRA commanders have argued that to hand over even a single bullet would symbolize surrender, and humiliate and split their ranks.

"There's only one guarantee in this whole process," Mitchell said. "If Mr. Trimble is rejected and if this process fails, then I guarantee you there will be no decommissioning."

Those Ulster Unionists backing Trimble, he said, "are in a very difficult situation because it's politically very awkward for them. There are many key decisions ahead, and this process can fail at any one of several points along the way."

But Mitchell expressed total confidence that Canadian Gen. John de Chastelain, who leads the disarmament commission, will achieve the

Good Friday accord's expectation of total disarmament of the IRA — as well as outlawed pro-British groups — by next May.

"I've known John de Chastelain for many years," Mitchell said. "When he says he'll get a job done, he'll do it."

Mitchell denied media reports that, as part of the behind-the-scenes negotiations, the IRA would be expected to start destroying its hidden weapons dumps in cooperation with de Chastelain by late January.

He noted the agreement unveiled this week confirms the general is solely responsible for setting deadlines for progress.

Vindicated after flying across the Atlantic more than 20 times since September, Mitchell now is receiving praise and gratitude from all the talks participants.

But the 66-year-old diplomat emphasized that he can't be persuaded

"When (John de Chastelain) says he'll get a job done, he'll do it."

GEORGE MITCHELL
American mediator

ed to take on any new work in Northern Ireland.

He's looking forward to being back home with his wife of five years, Heather, and being awoken by their 2-year-old son, Andrew.

"This'll sound funny," he said with a smile, "but I can't wait to get up in the morning with my young son and change his diapers! It'll be nice to watch the sun come up together."

Egyptians doubt suicide theory

■ **Cairo locals say suicide of pilot is impossible due to his Islamic beliefs.**

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Many people in Cairo say they can't believe what U.S. investigators seem to suspect: A co-pilot nearing retirement uttered a few final words and then sent EgyptAir Flight 990 plummeting into the Atlantic Ocean, killing himself and 216 others.

"It's impossible," insisted Hassan Syed, an engineer.

"Of course not," said his wife, Faiza Gamal.

"It's crazy," said student Islam Zeydan, as two other buddies from the American University of Cairo soccer team shook their heads.

Many Egyptians say they suspect American investigators find it easier to blame a dead crew member than to uncover what really happened aboard the flight heading from New York to Cairo.

Some, in this nation where conspiracy theories are plentiful, believe blaming relief co-pilot Capt. Gameel el-Batouty for the Oct. 31 crash is an attempt to hide something — sabotage, a mechanical failure, an assassin targeting 33 Egyptian military officers who were on the flight.

Others say the American investigators must be misinterpreting the words U.S. officials have linked to the co-pilot. Just before the dive began, a federal law enforcement official said, a crew member uttered a phrase or phrases in Arabic that have been translated as, "I made my decision now. I put my faith in God's hands."

Muslim religious expressions are common in everyday language in Egypt. A phrase about entrusting one's faith to God comes from the Koran and is invoked before many tasks.

Some people here say they think Egypt should play a larger role in the investigation.

The United States, at Egypt's request, is handling the probe because the plane crashed less than an hour after leaving New York and because the Americans are experienced in ocean crashes and have the equipment to investigate them. But as the probe turned toward pilot suicide, Egyptian officials spoke up.

Egypt has dispatched to Washington its most senior aviation official, Gen. Abdel Fatah Qatu, head of Egypt's Civil Aviation Authority. He was heading a delegation of technical experts and security and military intelligence officers.

Airline officials said the delegation will try to find out why U.S. investigators suspect the crash was a criminal act. They are especially worried about reports that a decision — delayed by Egyptian concern — to transfer the case from the National Transportation Safety Board to the FBI was prompted

by the religious utterances attributed to the co-pilot.

Capt. Hussein el-Sayfi, a Transportation Ministry official who returned Wednesday from the United States, told reporters that Egyptian aviation officials led by Qatu want to re-examine the voice recorder's contents.

Information Minister Safwat el-Sherif said in comments carried by the official Middle East News Agency that murder-suicide reports "are mere speculation, suggestion and imagination that are far from being documented facts."

Suggestions of a mass murder-suicide by a crew member angered the Egyptian Pilots Association. "The records of the Egyptian pilots are honorable," Capt. Walid Murad, head of the association, said in a statement. "Committing suicide is not a trait that Egyptians and Muslims are known for."

Suicide, rare and considered shameful in Egypt, is strictly forbidden in Islam.

Government officials: Tact key in flight investigation

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Egyptian sensitivities on world display, the State Department urged investigators Thursday to exercise "a maximum degree of cooperation and tact" in drawing conclusions about the culprit in the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990.

Egypt is experiencing a "great trauma," the State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said.

In Istanbul, Turkey, where President Clinton and European leaders are holding summit talks, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters it was premature to suggest anything other than a "technical failure" caused the crash that killed 217 people, including 106 Americans.

By stressing they have found no mechanical or weather-related cause and disclosing the presence and words of a relief co-pilot in the cockpit, U.S. investigators had pointed to the possibility that the co-pilot intentionally crashed the plane and resisted his captain's urgent plea to help him take the plane out of its dive.

Contributing to that conclusion was a recording of the relief pilot saying, "I made my decision now; I put my faith in God's hands" just before the Boeing 767 began its plunge into the Atlantic.

"You can't jump to conclusions from someone quoting the Koran and say that this was more than an acci-

dent," Moussa said in Istanbul. "The investigation has to continue."

Egypt's ambassador to the United States also questioned whether the quotation attributed to relief co-pilot Capt. Gameel el-Batouty was on the tape.

Interviewed on NBC's "Today," Ambassador Nabil Fahmy said: "I've listened to the tape myself, but I will refrain from commenting on the contents."

Asked whether the statement "sounds like a statement of suicide," Fahmy replied: "No, it does not, if it was said." He declined to say whether the tape raises doubt about a suicide scenario.

Rubin, at the daily State Department news briefing Thursday, said, "we're concerned by statements coming out of the investigation."

He said the State Department was using its diplomatic expertise to ensure proper coordination between the United States and Egypt.

Rubin also agreed the administration was trying to avoid negative effects on U.S. relations with Egypt.

"Obviously," he said. "But what we've been trying to do, and we think successfully, is ensuring that a close friend, Egypt, which has obviously gone through a great trauma when its national airline crashed ... that the investigation is done with the maximum degree of cooperation and tact."

Kentucky leads U.S. in adult smoking rate

ATLANTA (AP) — Kentucky, with its tradition of tobacco farming and low taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products, once again leads the nation in the rate of adult smoking while heavily Mormon Utah still has the lowest rate.

The CDC has blamed Kentucky's high smoking rates on a lack of tobacco controls. The state has the nation's lowest tobacco excise tax at 3 cents a pack and has the nation's most tobacco-dependent farm economy.

"There is a misconception in my state that if you help smokers quit, you are hurting the state's farmers," said Todd Warnick, head of Kentucky Tobacco Control, who was in Atlanta for a conference of state anti-tobacco officials sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"But U.S. demand for tobacco is about 5 percent of the entire world demand, and if every smoker in Kentucky quit, it wouldn't make a dent."

Kentucky had a rate of 30.8 percent of adults who smoke cigarettes, according to the CDC's 1998 adult state-by-state smoking report released Thursday, the same day as the Great American Smokeout.

The statistics were based on a national telephone survey of people over 18. Smokers were defined as those who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lives and currently smoke every day or some days.

Kentucky was followed by Nevada at 30.4 percent, West Virginia at 27.9 percent, Michigan at 27.4 percent and South Dakota at 27.3 percent. South Dakota made the biggest increase among states, jumping from 24.3 per-

"If every smoker in Kentucky quit, it wouldn't make a dent."

TODD WARNICK
head of Kentucky Tobacco Control

cent last year.

Georgia, the nation's third-largest tobacco producer, reported a rate of 23.7 percent, up from 22.4 percent last year.

Utah had the lowest rate at 14.2 percent, kept down by the Mormon church's stand against tobacco.

After Utah, the lowest states were Minnesota at 18.0 percent, California at 19.2 percent, New Jersey at 19.2 percent and Hawaii at 19.5 percent.

Minnesota had the largest drop, from 21.8 to 18. Dr. Michael Eriksen, director of the CDC's Office of Smoking & Health, attributed that to the state's high-profile suit against tobacco manufacturers.

The CDC included cigar rates for the first time in the report, saying 5.2 percent of adults had smoked at least one cigar in the past month, with 39 percent having tried at least one cigar ever.

More than 5 percent of Americans are regular cigar smokers, and federal health officials blame the increasing popularity in part on stogie-chomping celebrities.

FCC proposes video description for blind

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal regulators proposed Thursday that television broadcasters and program distributors in the biggest markets offer narrated programming for the blind.

The action was the first step in the Federal Communication Commission's effort to bring video description services, which describe the scene and action not captured in dialogue, to television programming.

Under the FCC proposal, commercial television broadcasters affiliated with NBC, ABC, Fox and CBS in the top 25 markets would have to provide four hours per week of described prime time and/or children's programming.

Large video distributors also would have to carry described programming to broadcasters affiliated with the top four networks and those

that reach a certain number of households.

The FCC said this would be a stepping stone for more widespread use of the service and also asked for comment on eventually applying video description rules to cable operators, satellite providers and others. The commission expects that between 8 million and 12 million people could benefit from the service.

"We cannot afford to let the issue of disabilities be simply an afterthought," said Bill Kennard, the FCC chairman. He hopes that the proposal will be approved in the next six months. Broadcasters then would have 18 months to implement the rules.

Regulators said they want to act now so they can set the stage to incorporate descriptive services as television transitions from analog to digital.

Boog's



Be a Biker or Be a Babe.

- vinyl & leather
- platforms & kneeboots
- rude T-shirts
- jewelry & accessories
- flares & minishirts
- fishnets & body jewelry
- Always A Sale Rack

122 S 52nd • 483-2263

Win a \$10,000 Shopping Spree
<http://WinStuffHere.com>