

Barak's short trip yields results

■ Israeli-Palestinian negotiations may involve more U.S. mediation.

JERUSALEM (AP) — In a concession to the Palestinians, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak accepted President Clinton's proposal to increase U.S. involvement ahead of a May deadline for a peace treaty outline, a senior Israeli official said Wednesday.

Barak's agreement was elicited during a quick visit to Washington at Clinton's behest, said the official in Barak's delegation, who spoke on condition of anonymity aboard Israel Air Force One.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat complained this week that the most recent round of U.S.-sponsored talks has not come up with anything concrete. Arafat is demanding Israel agree to a Palestinian state on the

West Bank and in Gaza with part of Jerusalem as its capital. He has accused Barak of taking an "extremist" position.

The sides are still deadlocked over final borders, the future of Jerusalem and the status of refugees.

A failure to meet a Sept. 13 deadline for a full-fledged peace agreement could precipitate a complete breakdown in negotiations and a return to violence. Clinton summoned Barak to Washington to ensure that the process he has nurtured for seven years does not collapse just before he leaves office. The Israeli official said Clinton's interest in the topic stretched what was supposed to be a two-hour meeting into more than four hours.

The Israeli official said U.S. observers would begin sitting in on the Israeli-Palestinian sessions regularly at Bolling Air Force Base near Washington. He said Clinton felt that their presence at the meetings would

facilitate the after-hours informal mediation that the Americans had been conducting until now.

If the May deadline for a treaty outline approaches and there is still no significant progress, the Americans would adopt a much more involved role and begin to put their own proposals on the table, the official said.

The three leaders — Clinton, Arafat and Barak — would wrap up loose ends at a Washington summit, the Israeli official said. He didn't say when that would take place, but Barak is due to attend an American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee meeting on May 20 in Washington.

The official said a successful treaty outline would "make it a lot easier for us to be more generous with territory" in the last interim troop withdrawal in the West Bank, slated for June.

Arafat has complained that Barak has made niggling offers of

territory. The chief Palestinian negotiator, Yasser Abed Rabbo, has described Israel's proposal as isolated "islands in an Israeli ocean" lacking the contiguity Arafat needs for statehood in what are now the Palestinian-controlled territories.

The Israeli official said Israel saw a small number of areas near Jerusalem as remaining under joint Palestinian-Israeli control in a final settlement — the first time Israel has raised such a proposal.

The Palestinians want all areas now under joint control to come under their full rule after a final agreement.

It is the refugee issue, however, on which the two sides are furthest apart. The Palestinians want Israel to at least acknowledge the right of return of Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in what is now Israel in the 1948 Mideast war.

Founders: Sale won't melt social role

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Ben & Jerry's Homemade, the ice-cream maker founded by two former hippies, is being sold for \$326 million to Unilever, the world's largest ice-cream maker. At the same time, the multinational giant is buying diet staple Slim-Fast.

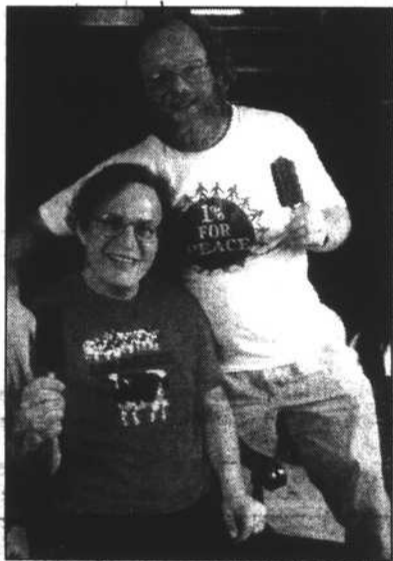
The Ben & Jerry's deal, announced Wednesday, would bring the maker of ice cream flavors like Chunky Monkey and Cherry Garcia under the same corporate umbrella as Good Humor, Popsicles and Breyers ice cream.

On the opposite end of the weight scale, Unilever said it will pay \$2.3 billion for Slim-Fast Foods Co., a privately owned Florida company that makes nutritional supplements and food for dieters.

Ben & Jerry's has played up its iconoclastic image as a small Vermont company bucking the worldwide standard of maximizing profits.

It has long bragged of giving 7.5 percent of its pre-tax profits to charitable enterprises and has purchasing policies that favor family farms and sustainable agriculture.

Its annual meeting has coincided



News-makers File Photo
Jerry Greenfield, left, and Ben Cohen, the founders of Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc.

with a summer pop festival in Vermont, where the bottom line has been played on bass guitar.

There were already signs that the company's rebellious nature might

"We hope that, as part of Unilever, Ben & Jerry's will continue to expand its role in society."

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield

Founders of Ben & Jerry's
Homemade Inc.

have become chilled.

Michael Garrett, the owner of four Ben & Jerry's franchises in southwestern Connecticut and New York, said in January that he and other franchisees were joining forces to stop the company's sale "to corporate interests."

Wednesday, Garrett applauded the sale, saying it "might allow us to increase what we do best, which is to be involved in our community and to be socially conscious."

The Ben & Jerry's deal with Unilever follows an effort by a group led by co-founder Ben Cohen to take the company private.

The agreement calls for Ben & Jerry's to operate separately from Unilever's current U.S. business.

There will be an independent board of directors and the company will remain in Vermont.

"While we and others certainly would have pursued our mission as an independent enterprise, we hope that, as part of Unilever, Ben & Jerry's will continue to expand its role in society," co-founders Cohen and Jerry Greenfield said in a statement released Wednesday morning.

Ben & Jerry's CEO Perry Odak said Wednesday, the company will operate as an independent subsidiary, with only one Unilever member on its board.

He said Ben & Jerry's would continue manufacturing exclusively in Vermont.

Reno meets with Elian's Miami family

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno took an extraordinary step to resolve the Elian Gonzalez case Wednesday, flying to Miami and personally urging his relatives to end the wrenching 4½-month custody struggle.

Reno left after a 2½-hour meeting with the boy's great-uncle, Lazaro Gonzalez, and cousin, Marisleydis Gonzalez, at the Miami Beach home of Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin, the nun who was host of a meeting between Elian and his grandmothers.

There was no immediate word whether a handover agreement was reached.

"She wants to do anything possible to resolve this," Justice Department spokesman Myron Marlin said before the meeting. "She realizes it's a tall order but believes she may be the one who can do it."

Elian and his relatives had left their Little Havana neighborhood for Sister O'Laughlin's home earlier in the day.

One option Reno planned to propose was for Elian and some of his relatives to come to Washington, to

arrange a meeting with the boy's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, and the transfer of custody, said a government official, who requested anonymity.

This official said the attorney general's negotiation strategy was flexible, and she did not intend to insist upon any single plan.

Armando Gutierrez, a spokesman for the Miami relatives, called her trip "a good sign."

The visit at least temporarily postponed a letter the government had planned to send the Miami relatives Wednesday telling them where and when to relinquish custody of Elian.

"The timing of the letter is now in Reno's hands," Marlin said.

It was learned that the latest draft of the letter called for the transfer to occur at 9 a.m. today at Opa-locka airport outside Miami. The transfer could also be moved back to Friday.

Reno also planned to meet with community leaders in her hometown, where she served as state's attorney for 15 years and where Cuban exiles now wield signs denouncing her and depicting her with horns.



■ South Carolina

Senate takes steps toward removing Confederate flag

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina lawmakers on Wednesday took the first step to removing the Confederate flag from atop the Statehouse dome, exactly 139 years after the first shots of the Civil War were fired.

South Carolina is the only state that flies the Confederate flag above its Statehouse, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is leading a tourism boycott of the state until the flag is removed.

"I think it's a great day because a lot of people are sacrificing their special interests in favor of what is best for the people of South Carolina. Ladies and gentlemen, we've been fighting this battle a long time," Democratic Sen. McKinley Washington said of the Senate's initial 36-7 vote to take the flag down.

All opponents were Republicans.

■ Florida

Wildfire stalls, fire crews wait to see what will happen

NAPLES, Fla. (AP) — A wildfire that had destroyed three homes and charred 13,000 acres of brush and grass stalled Wednesday between Naples and Big Cypress Swamp. Fire crews initially feared "very aggressive fire behavior" but by mid-afternoon said the fire had not advanced at all during the day.

Wind was expected to pick up later but was forecast to push flames back into areas that already had burned.

"We're just kind of sitting on pins and needles waiting to see what's going to happen," said Robert Heed, manager of Kountree Kampinn RV Resort, which sits about 2½ miles from the edge of the burned area.

■ Belgrade

Building explosion blamed on opposing Socialist party

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — An explosion rattled a branch office of President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling party, a news agency reported Wednesday.

No one was injured, but the blast shattered windows in the building and throughout the Belgrade neighborhood.

Local Socialist official Branislav Ivkovic linked the blast late Tuesday to the opposition, which has scheduled a massive rally Friday to protest Milosevic's rule and demand new elections.

Milosevic's Socialists openly revile the opposition, accusing key leaders of being traitors for maintaining ties to the West despite NATO's 78-day air war against Yugoslavia to end repression in the southern province of Kosovo.

■ Peru

Fujimori shy of majority vote, runoff expected

LIMA, Peru (AP) — President Alberto Fujimori fell just shy of the majority needed to avoid a runoff for an unprecedented third term, election officials said Wednesday, setting the stage for a showdown with international economist Alejandro Toledo.

Officials said that after counting 97.68 percent of Sunday's ballots, Fujimori had 49.84 percent compared to 40.31 percent for Toledo.

Jose Portillo, head of the office in charge of the count, said the most Fujimori could expect to win at this point was 49.89 percent of the vote.

A runoff election will be scheduled for late May or early June.

WEATHER TODAY

Sunny
high 78, low 55

TOMORROW

Sunny
high 82, low 55

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