



## U.S., China continue talks over spy plane

BY GEORGE GEDDA  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The standoff with China over a downed reconnaissance plane showed signs of easing Thursday. "We are working all diplomatic channels," President Bush declared.

Bush said he regrets "that a Chinese pilot is missing" and that his plane is lost. At the same time, he told a convention of newspaper editors China must allow the 24 U.S. crew members to come home.

"The Chinese have got to act, and I hope they do so quickly," Bush said.

Bush spoke amid a flurry of diplomatic activity over the crippled Navy spy plane which has been stranded on China's Hainan Island since it made an emergency landing Sunday after a collision with a Chinese fighter over the South China Sea.

The talks were centered on the captured

American crew, which administration officials insisted should be released both on legal and humanitarian grounds.

Still, a senior U.S. official said there was no assurance the crew would be released and predicted a second busy night of diplomacy.

"Our message to the Chinese is we should not let this incident destabilize relations. Our relationship with China is very important. But they need to realize that it's time for our people to be home," Bush said.

"I regret that a Chinese pilot is missing, and I regret one of their airplanes is lost. And our prayers go out to the pilot and his family. Our prayers are also with our own servicemen and women and they need to come home," Bush said.

The United States has declined to apologize for the mishap, despite Chinese demands.

In the meantime, a senior U.S. official said the Chinese had questioned the American crew.

American diplomats were told this when they met with the crew earlier in the week, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"In terms of what we're discussing, I think we continue to make the point that these people, the air crew, need to be released," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

When asked whether there were any circumstances under which he would offer an apology to the Chinese, and whether he was reconsidering his planned trip to China in October, Bush said: "I have no further comments on this subject."

"We're working all diplomatic channels to effect our priority," Bush added. "There are discussions going on, and we'll continue to do so."

Earlier, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said it was "important to resolve this matter quickly, satisfactorily."

"There is intensive diplomacy" under way, Boucher said.

The administration appeared more optimistic for a resolution of the crisis on Thursday than it had on Wednesday. Two high administration officials, who declined to be identified by name, said things looked brighter.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer characterized the U.S.-Chinese talks as negotiations. Powell, in a letter to Beijing, reiterated U.S. concern and regret over the death of the Chinese pilot.

At the same time, Fleischer suggested that Bush's support of free trade relations with China, an issue of enormous impact to the U.S. and Chinese economies, will depend on the outcome of the standoff. "It underscores what the president said two days ago, that this matter needs to be resolved in order to avoid any damage to U.S.-China relations," Fleischer said.

"The president is in favor [of normal trade relations with China] and the president is taking it one step at a time."

## WORLD BRIEFS

### ■ Senate GOP hopes to restore Bush's \$1.6 trillion tax cut

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Senate Republicans said they're intent on restoring President Bush's proposed \$1.6 trillion, 10-year tax cut to near its original size, now that the heart of his economic blueprint has suffered its first bruises. In the first real blow to Bush's fiscal plans, the Senate tentatively voted Wednesday to reduce the tax cut by \$450 billion and distribute that money evenly between education and debt reduction. The 53-47 vote came as senators continued debating a \$1.94 trillion GOP budget for 2002 that would pave the way for Bush's tax proposal. Minutes earlier, moderate Republican Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont said he expected to vote against the GOP budget "unless a miracle occurs." The twin setbacks ignited an intensive effort by the White House and GOP leaders to woo Jeffords back into the fold while pumping the tax cut's size back up. Top Republicans predicted they would do so — and push the budget through the Senate — by week's end.

### ■ Muslim rebels say they won't behead U.S. hostage

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (AP) — Muslim rebels backed off on a threat to behead a U.S. hostage Thursday as thousands of soldiers, bolstered by helicopters and cannons, descended on a southern Philippine island in search of the insurgents' hide-outs. Minutes before a self-imposed evening execution deadline, Abu Sabaya, the leader of the Abu Sayyaf guerrilla group, told Jeffrey Schilling's mother during a conversation on the local Radio Mindanao Network that he wouldn't behead the 25-year-old Oakland, Calif., native. Carol Schilling, a 51-year-old YMCA accountant in Oakland, had come to Manila to appeal for her son's life. The Abu Sayyaf group, which says it's fighting for a separate Muslim homeland, had promised to behead Schilling on Thursday to mark the 54th birthday of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

### ■ Israeli troops attack Palestinian security officials' convoy

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP (AP) — Israeli troops fired from close range early Thursday on a four-car convoy carrying top Palestinian security officials who had just returned from talks with Israel on how to reduce friction after six months of fighting. The army said its soldiers were fired on first. Mohammed Dahlan, one of the three security chiefs, said Israel tried to assassinate him and his colleagues with heavy machine gun fire. His silver Mercedes was struck by seven bullets, and a bag with personal belongings that had rested near his feet in the car was also hit. Three of his bodyguards were hurt, including one who was shot in the leg and two who suffered broken limbs when one of the four cars overturned.

## Scientists suspect colliding stars as source of heavy Earth metals

BY CHRIS FONTAINE  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — A team of scientists said Thursday that the origins of most of the gold, platinum and other heavy elements on Earth can be traced to the massive explosions of colliding neutron stars, hundreds of millions of years before the birth of the Solar System.

"This is an incredible result," exclaimed senior team member Stephan Rosswog after the scientists' data was released. "It's exciting to think that the gold in wedding rings was formed far away by colliding stars."

It has long been accepted that common elements, such as oxygen and carbon, are created when dying stars explode into supernovae, but researchers have been puzzled by data that suggests

these stellar explosions don't produce enough heavy elements to account for their abundance on Earth.

The scientists — from the University of Leicester, in England, and the University of Basel, in Switzerland — believe rare pairs of neutron stars hold the answer.

Neutron stars are the super-dense cores of large stars that survive supernovae. They contain about as much matter as our sun, but are only about the size of a large city. Sometimes two are found orbiting each other — leftovers of a binary star system. Four such pairs are known to exist in our galaxy.

The team used a supercomputer at the U.K. Astrophysical Fluids Facility in Leicester, to model what might happen if the intense gravity created by these pairs slowly forced them to spiral closer

and collide.

One such calculation takes the supercomputer several weeks to calculate, but represents just the final few milliseconds in the lives of the two stars. It shows that as the neutron stars get closer, immense forces tear them apart, releasing enough energy to outshine the entire universe for a few milliseconds, the team said.

Team member Melvin Davis of Leicester said the explosion most likely creates a black hole — a light-sucking tear in space — and ejects ash so hot that nuclear reactions take place as it races outward, smashing newly created protons into the nuclei of lighter elements to create heavy elements.

## Drug companies agree to help reduce prices of AIDS medications

BY ARTHUR MAX  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS — Meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the chief executives of six major drug companies agreed Thursday to speed up the reduction of prices in order to control the AIDS epidemic in poor countries.

The companies also agreed to consider using private aid agencies and charities to ensure the drugs reach the people who need them, a U.N. statement said. Until now, the distribution has only been available through governments.

The meeting was a signal that Annan is deepening his personal involvement in combating AIDS in poor countries, before an AIDS summit this summer in New York. The AIDS fight "has become my personal priority," Annan said.

Annan supported the patent protection, which yields the profits that would allow those companies to develop new medications.

At the same time, he urged them to further cut prices voluntarily in the developing world, where 90 percent of AIDS victims live.

Annan praised the companies for the price cuts they had already made, and said they had agreed "to continue and accelerate reducing prices substantially," especially in Africa.

But lowering the price is only half the story. The companies said governments must strengthen their health systems and networks for distributing drugs to those who need them, said Daniel Tarantola of the World Health Organization.

The meeting was attended by the director of the World Health Organization, and executives of Abbott Laboratories, Boehringer Ingelheim, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Glaxo Smith Kline, Hoffman-La Roche and Pfizer.

Merck and Co., another firm that has announced a 90 percent price cut for two of its AIDS drugs on the African

### AIDS epidemic

- More than 36 million people worldwide suffer from HIV or AIDS
- There were 5.3 million new cases last year alone
- An estimated 3 million people died of AIDS in 2000

market, was invited but didn't attend, said U.N. Deputy Spokesman Manoel de Almeida e Silva.

Scorched by public criticism, manufacturers began reducing their prices last year in several African countries. Four companies signed agreements with Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, under a program called Accelerated Access.

But even the lowest cost — more than \$600 for a one-year course of treatment — is more than twice the per capita income of some of the hardest-hit countries. The same treatment could cost up to \$15,000 in wealthy countries.

U.N. officials traveling with Annan, who arrived in Amsterdam late Wednesday, told reporters he had no commitments until a dinner Thursday evening with Dutch Queen Beatrix. His meeting Thursday with the drug executives was kept secret.

One idea discussed at the session was the voluntary licensing by the patent holders to local companies, said Tarantola, a senior adviser to Brundtland. But the companies rejected the proposal, saying their large capacities enabled them to produce the medicine at a lower cost than small local operations.

In his statement, Annan called for a mobilization of funds to finance "a dramatic leap forward" in preventing and treating the HIV virus that leads to AIDS.

## European Union won't stage protest against U.S. over global warming

BY RAF CASERT  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM — Despite outrage over U.S. rejection of the international agreement on global warming, the European Union said Thursday it doesn't have plans to retaliate against the Bush administration.

U. Environment Commissioner, Mapt Wallstrom, said it was too soon to discuss sanctions, after a two-day visit to Washington to discuss the policy reversal that abandoned the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 agreement by industrial countries to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

We should see now what we can do, did from there on we might have to think about exactly how to act," Wallstrom said.

Wallstrom held out hope that the United States could still contribute to the debate, and said any action would

have to wait until after an international meeting in July, in Bonn, Germany.

"We are still having these contacts. They are important partners in trade and other aspects as well," she said.

She said it remained unclear what "creative solutions" the Bush administration would be able to create, but left no doubt that the essence of the Kyoto agreement would be ripped out of any U.S. government position.

"Kyoto has become somewhat of a dirty word in the Bush administration," she told journalists. "I don't think the United States will change their mind. The kind of harsh statements made, make it very difficult to back off," she said.

President Bush was criticized by European officials for turning his back on the landmark global warming agreement.

Bush said the Kyoto makes mandatory cuts on carbon dioxide emissions, and short timetables were no

longer acceptable, highlighting the economic costs and the increased risks of higher unemployment.

Christie Whitman, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, said the Kyoto treaty was unfair to the United States, but pledged cooperation in seeking technologies and incentives to address climate change.

The 1997 Kyoto treaty calls for countries to agree to legally binding targets to curb heat-trapping greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, like oil, often in power plants that produce electricity.

No industrial country has yet ratified the Kyoto treaty. An effort last November to develop a plan for implementing the accord collapsed in a disagreement between the United States and Europe over trading pollution credits.

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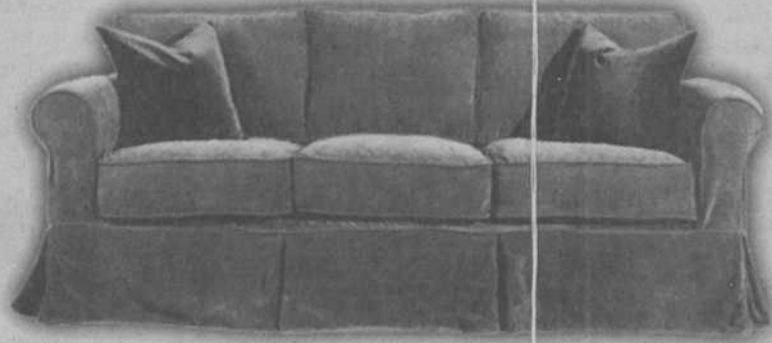
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