

South Africa takes lead on diplomacy ap news capsules

By Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

DURBAN, South Africa (AP) — South Africa once again took over efforts to break an impasse at the world conference against racism today, working to devise a compromise text on the Middle East that could be included in a final declaration for the U.N. meeting.

Disagreement over how to refer to the Israel-Palestinian conflict in conference documents threatened to derail efforts to come to a global agreement on how to fight racism. The European Union has rejected attempts by the Arab League to characterize Israeli practices in the Palestinian territories as racist.

The United States and Israel withdrew their delegations from the conference on Monday after attempts to reach a compromise failed.

Koen Vervaeke, spokesman for Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, said a special drafting committee, which included the Europeans and the Palestinians, finished work Wednesday night without reaching a compromise.

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli helicopters fired missiles at a car carrying activists in Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement today, and two passengers were killed, a Palestinian security official said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli army.

The missiles were fired at the car while it was driving in the West Bank town of Tulkarem. Five people were in the car, and three were lightly injured, said a senior Palestinian intelligence official in the city, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Palestinians say Israel has killed about 50 people in targeted attacks against militants it accused of bombing and shooting attacks against Israelis. Several of those killed have been bystanders.

NATIONAL

HONOLULU (AP) — A giant strap split as it was lifting a sunken Japanese fishing vessel, thwarting for the third time in two weeks the Navy's unprecedented efforts to recover the ship sunk by a U.S. submarine.

The 830-ton Ehime Maru had been lifted 24 feet off the ocean floor before the steel strap split Tuesday night, according to the Navy, which announced the setback Wednesday afternoon on its Web site.

Two weeks ago, the Navy abandoned an unsuccessful effort to drill beneath the ship in order to raise it. The first attempt using a strap raised the ship 23 feet before the strap broke Friday night, dropping the ship.

WEST GLACIER, Mont. (AP) — Crews battling a fire that has burned into Glacier National Park have new hope thanks to the arrival of one of the most effective firefighting tools: rain. Showers fell throughout much of the day Wednesday on the 64,000-acre blaze, breaking more than two weeks of hot, dry and windy weather that favored the fire.

The rain, which also brought cooler temperatures, was not enough to stop the fire but the moisture will slow it, said Larry Humphrey, incident commander for the fire.

The fire "might make some small runs, but it's not going to make any big runs," he said. "That's just my gut feel-

ing."

A relieved Bill Paxton watched the rain with other fire information officers from a fire camp near the park.

"God's smiling down on us," he said.

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prepared to invoke executive privilege for the first time, President Bush is moving toward a showdown with a GOP-led House panel over whether lawmakers are entitled to see documents about prosecutors' decision making.

Senior administration officials told The Associated Press that Bush has accepted the advice of White House counsel Alberto Gonzales and is ready to make an executive privilege claim to keep the House Government Reform Committee from seeing memos involving three Clinton-era criminal cases.

The committee planned to up the ante today by serving Attorney General John Ashcroft with a subpoena demanding access to the documents and expanding its request to cover even more cases.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government wasted \$1.1 million on a program that told public housing tenants which gemstones, types of incense and clothing colors would best improve their self-esteem, an internal audit found.

The Creative Wellness Program was funded through a federal anti-drugs and crime program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development starting in 1998. But in a report released Wednesday, the HUD inspector general found scant evidence the money had resulted in less substance abuse or violent crime in the public housing projects.

"This represents an excessive and ineffective use of public housing drug elimination funds with no measurable benefits," the report said.

The inspector general also said that HUD employee Gloria Cousar, then deputy assistant secretary for public and assisted housing delivery, likely misused her position by awarding the contract for the program to Michelle Lusson, with whom she had a long-standing relationship through their joint leadership of the Virginia-based Community Center for Holistic Healing and other capacities. The inspector general said Cousar did not make enough of an effort to look for alternative contractors.

WASHINGTON (AP) — A tiny change in a virus that causes flu can turn it from an unpleasant annoyance to a killer, a team of researchers has found.

A change in just one of the virus' 10 genes switched a form of flu in chickens to a strain deadly to humans four years ago in Hong Kong, they discovered.

Authorities were forced to kill more than a million chickens in that city to block spread of the flu, which killed six of the 18 humans that it infected.

"What this tells you is that the avian influenza virus can become the virus that causes the disease in humans at any moment," said Yoshihiro Kawaoka, one of the research team at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The findings are published in Friday's issue of the journal Science.

New district attorney says case to proceed

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The new district attorney in Oklahoma City is pressing ahead with state murder charges — and the death penalty — against bombing conspirator Terry Nichols despite Nichols' federal conviction and the high cost of prosecuting him.

District Attorney Wes Lane said Wednesday he would pursue 160 first-degree murder charges and other counts against Nichols, Timothy McVeigh's co-conspirator in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

"I simply do not know what might loom out there on the legal horizon which would place Terry Nichols' federal conviction in jeopardy," Lane said. "The interests of the people of the state of Oklahoma cannot be vindicated by the blind reliance upon the federal government or Terry Lynn Nichols."

Nichols, 46, was convicted in federal court of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter and is serving a life sentence for his role in the blast, which killed 168 people and injured more

than 500 others.

The state murder charges were filed in 1999 by Lane's predecessor, Bob Macy, who retired in June.

Since then, Lane has been re-evaluating the case. He said he questioned whether the office's limited resources should be devoted to a case already tried in federal court and determined he could prosecute Nichols with his existing budget.

Nichols' defense cost — already about \$1.6 million — are to be covered by a court fund financed primarily by fines and court costs, and no tax revenues will be necessary, he said.

In a letter to the Tulsa World, Nichols' attorney, Brian Hermanson, said Tuesday that Nichols was willing to end his appeals and accept his federal life sentence in order to avoid the state trial. Lane said a court order prevented him from commenting on the offer.

"This community has been deeply and sharply divided on the appropriate course of action to take in this case," Lane said.

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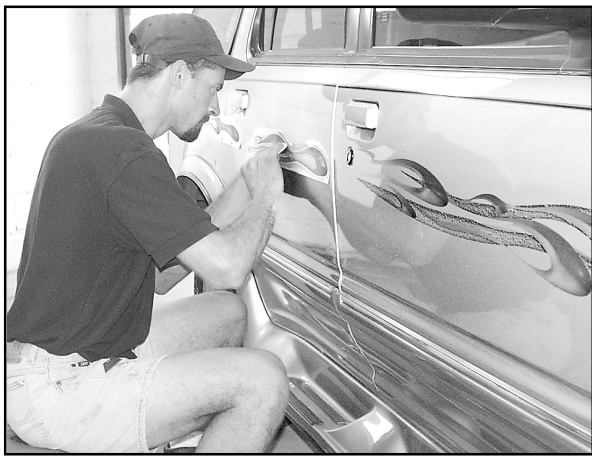


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