

Dispute over space tourist cools off

by Kathy Sawyer
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A heated U.S. - Russian confrontation over an American space tourist cooled slightly this week, with the end of a brief cosmonaut walkout on a scheduled training session in Houston. The core conflict remained, but NASA officials suggested a possible compromise.

Despite U.S. opposition, Russian space officials have insisted they will launch California millionaire Dennis Tito to the fledgling International Space Station on a Russian Soyuz spacecraft April 30, in exchange for his \$20 million payment. NASA maintains Tito could pose a safety hazard at an extremely busy time aboard a space complex still under construction.

The matter came to a head Monday, when NASA officials at Johnson Space Center in Houston barred Tito from a scheduled training session. Two Russian cosmonauts refused to continue without him, but Tuesday the Russian Space Agency directed them to go ahead with the training without Tito.

The way out of the faceoff may lie in the timing, NASA officials suggested at a briefing this week. Although Tito, 60, has trained for months in Russia, he still needs at least six to eight weeks of instruction in Houston to gain minimal competence in emergency procedures and other requirements, said Michael Hawes, NASA's chief space station official.

"Six to eight weeks of training in

Houston to go visit the space station is a fairly minor price to pay, overall," Hawes said.

If Tito could delay his flight until October, the next Soyuz launch, it would allow time for him to pass muster in Houston, while giving NASA and the Russians time to work out questions of legal liability and other issues, Hawes said.

Former astronaut Bill Readdy, who commanded a shuttle flight to Mir and is now a NASA space flight official, stressed the demands of space flight, noting a string of crises that required finely honed responses that come only with training.

NASA, along with space station partners from Europe, Japan and Canada, argue that the international agreements governing space station operations require consensus on anything like the Tito flight - a tenet the Russians are violating.

There was no immediate sign of softening. Yuri Semyonov, the head of the state-controlled RKK Energia corporation, which signed the contract with Tito, told the Associated Press in Moscow that it would be wrong for the company to go back on its word with Tito, who Semyonov said had paid part of the fee.

NASA officials refused to say exactly what they will do if Tito actually arrives at the space station on the April flight. "We hope it doesn't come to that," Hawes said.

The purpose of the April flight is to deliver a fresh Soyuz to serve as an emergency lifeboat. The Soyuz it replaces will return the "taxi" crew to Earth after a week.

Eatery's sign for 'Ghetto Burger' called tasteless

by Chris L. Jenkins
The Washington Post
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RICHMOND, Va. - Sitting on a ceramic plate next to a heap of fries, the Ghetto Burger looks innocuous enough-even appetizing. With seven ounces of hand-slabbed ground beef, grilled onions and peppers, lettuce and tomatoes, it has become a small restaurant's ticket to the big time.

"This is our signature meal," says the burger's inventor and biggest fan, Frank Pitchford, 39, an owner of Send-a-Chef Restaurant just outside Richmond. "We call it the Ghetto Burger because this is a family restaurant, and that's what we ate when I was growing up. All we want to do is celebrate where we come from. Simple and plain."

The \$3.50 item has been on the menu since the business opened several years ago as a catering service.

But some of Pitchford's neighbors in this middle-class community in eastern Henrico County find the burger - and a new large sign advertising it - insulting.

"This is not the way anybody should use the word ghetto," said Fran Xavier, who was at the restaurant recently. "I mean, I understand what he's trying to say, but isn't there a better way of saying it than using the word ghetto? It just isn't right."

The debate over Send-a-Chef's hot-ticket item in this largely black

neighborhood has impelled a local minister and the district supervisor, concerned that the sandwich's name reflects badly on their community and celebrates a condition that needs no celebration, to ask Pitchford to alter or take down his sign.

Constance Beecham, a former schoolteacher and a restaurant customer, said, "There are a lot of words that sometimes we use as black people that we really shouldn't throw around." Beecham, who moved from Chicago several months ago, pointed to what she called the "n-word," which she says many black people use but should never say in public. The word ghetto, as used by Send-a-Chef, is one of those words, she said.

But Pitchford isn't swayed. "You see, I'm not ashamed of saying that I once lived in the ghetto or grew up poor, so why should anybody else?" he said. "Anybody who is worried about using ghetto in this way has forgotten where they've come from."

Last year, Pitchford's original Richmond restaurant burned down. After he and co-owner Torrence Smith, 38, reopened in their new location, adjacent to a convenience store and an abandoned restaurant, they looked for a way to draw business.

So they applied for permission to erect the 5-by-9-foot sign in January.

"I certainly understand why this would be a sensitive issue for some

people," said John Mariles, director of planning for Henrico County, who added that he couldn't remember a sign causing such a stir. "But we don't regulate speech unless there are constitutional violations. It's not government's responsibility to regulate taste."

Nearby businesses have told local television stations that they are concerned that the word ghetto on the sign will damage their attempt to revitalize the area.

Last week, the sign brought intense scrutiny after an article in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. But that meant good business for Pitchford.

By noon Friday, the line of customers wrapped outside the door, past television cameras and photographers, and into the parking lot. One employee had to break bad news to the throng.

"I'm sorry, but there is a 45-minute wait on all burger orders. We're sorry for the inconvenience."

Nobody budged. Eleanor Cook, who had snagged a burger before the rush, offered an explanation through mouthfuls.

"Look at all this meat!" she said as she polished off her second-to-last bite. "They can call it what they want. It doesn't matter to me."



WASHINGTON POST PHOTO BY ANDREA BRUCE WOODALL.

Send-a-Chef co-owner Frank Pitchford estimated that 2,000 burgers were sold in one day after publicity about his sign in Henrico County in Virginia.

Vatican is 'dealing' with reports of sexual abuse of African nuns

by Paul Moses
Newsday
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Faced with reports that priests have sexually abused many African nuns, the Vatican said Tuesday it is working with bishops and leaders of religious orders to deal with the problem.

"The problem is known, and is restricted to a geographically limited area," the Vatican spokesman, Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said in a written statement.

He did not specify the area, but two explosive reports - in the weekly National Catholic Reporter Friday, then Monday in the Rome daily La Repubblica - said the problem was serious in Africa, where the Church has grown rapidly and recruited many new priests and sisters in recent years.

National Catholic Reporter quoted a series of reports written over the past seven years by senior members of women's religious orders and a priest who now holds a prominent post in the national bishops' conference in Washington. The newspaper posted the story and documents on its Web site at www.natcath.com/NCR-Online.

The reports said sisters, viewed as safe targets in AIDS-ravaged Africa, were being sexually harassed by priests and even raped. The documents indicated the problem has gotten attention at high levels in the Vatican.

The most extreme instances were cited in a 1995 memo written by Sister Maura O'Donohue, a physician and member of the Medical Missionary of Mary order, that recounted a meeting with Cardinal Eduardo Martinez, head of the Vatican's congregation for religious life.

Examples were also given of situations where priests were bringing sisters (and other young women) to Catholic health institutions for abortion," the memo said. "I gave one example of a priest who had brought a sister for an abortion. She died during the procedure and the priest officiated at the Requiem Mass. The response was of stunned silence."

In its statement, the Vatican said it was "dealing with the question in collaboration with the bishops" and with organizations of the superiors general of priests and sisters. It added that the "heroic fidelity of the great majority" of priests and sisters should not be forgotten.

In her memo, O'Donohue wrote that a prominent priest, the Rev. Robert Vitillo, had worked with her and joined in her concerns. Vitillo, then director of programs at Caritas International, a major charity, is currently executive director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development in Washington.

In a 1994 talk at Boston College on AIDS, Vitillo referred to the same

concerns, according to National Catholic Reporter. "I myself have heard the tragic stories of religious women who were forced to have sex with the local priest or with a spiritual counselor who insisted that this activity was 'good' for the both of them," Vitillo said. "Frequently, attempts to raise these issues with local and international church authorities have met with deaf ears."

A call to Vitillo was referred to a spokeswoman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Sister Mary Ann Walsh, who said Vitillo would have no comment.

In a 1998 report to a council of leaders of religious orders, Sister Marie McDonald wrote that "everyone here knows that this problem exists and that in spite of very many attempts to improve the situation, it seems to be getting worse, instead of better."

McDonald said that some student sisters from Africa, immature and ill-prepared for studies in Rome, wound up performing sexual favors for seminarians and priests in return for help with their school work.

In one report, she said she had found examples of misconduct in some countries outside Africa, including the United States, but no details were offered.

Political scientist detained in China

by Philip P. Pan
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BEIJING - A Chinese-born political scientist at American University who does research on women's issues and mainland-Taiwan relations has been detained in China for more than a month, her husband said Wednesday. The Foreign Ministry said she was suspected of "engaging in activities damaging state security."

Chinese officers detained Gao Zhan, 40, an unpaid faculty fellow at AU's School of International Service, as well as her husband and their 5-year-old son at the Beijing airport on Feb. 11 as they prepared to return to Washington, D.C.

Gao's husband, Xue Donghua, and her child, Andrew, were released 26 days later. Xue said they had been held in separate locations, and officers refused to let him, his wife or other relatives see Andrew the entire

time. Speaking by telephone from the Washington area, Xue said he was told he could see his son only if he first incriminated his wife. He refused because "she is absolutely innocent."

"My wife has been detained for almost 40 days now. . . . They wouldn't even let me see her before I left," said Xue, a D.C.-based manager for Electronic Data Systems. "I'm very worried because she has heart disease and other health problems."

Xue said he sought the U.S. Embassy's help immediately, but waited to speak to reporters because the Chinese officers warned him that doing so would make matters worse. He said he changed his mind because "waiting hasn't worked."

The New York-based group Human Rights in China urged President Bush to ask for Gao's release when he meets with Vice Premier Qian Qichen in Washington this week. The group said the detentions violated both Chi-

nese and international law. Gao and Xue are Chinese citizens who immigrated to the United States in 1989, but their son is a U.S. citizen. China failed to inform the American Embassy of the boy's detention as required by treaty, an embassy official said.

China's foreign ministry issued a statement saying that Gao was under investigation for activities harming national security and that the case would be handled according to the relevant Chinese criminal statutes.

"It's all nonsense," Xue said. "She's just an academic, a scholar. She's not doing anything against the Chinese government. We wouldn't do that."

Xue said he and his wife were planning to return to China for good and had been looking for jobs teaching in Chinese universities after spending the Chinese New Year with relatives.

"We wanted to go back and do something for the country," he said.

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