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Crew gets OK for historic spacewalk

NATIONAL

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA agreed Tuesday to an unprecedented spacewalk by three astronauts to catch a slippery satellite that proved too much for one man to handle.

The third and final attempt by Endeavour's crew to capture the Intelsat-6 satellite is Wednesday.

"I have my toes, my fingers and my eyes crossed waiting for the mission tomorrow night," NASA Administrator Daniel S. Goldin told the crew in a telephone call piped up by Mission Control. "The one thing I ask you all to keep in mind is crew safety has got to be our first objective."

Endeavour's commander, Daniel Brandenstein, had argued that a third crewman was needed for the task.

To prove they could carry out the first three-man spacewalk, three of Endeavour's astronauts put on spacesuits earlier Tuesday and squeezed into the shuttle's airlock.

Oddly, a major concern had been whether three people could fit at once in the airlock, which is the barrier between the cabin and the vacuum of space. They did.

Brandenstein said he wanted to send out three men — the three who crowded into the airlock — rather than two men and Kathryn Thornton, the only woman aboard. They are Pierre Thuot and Richard Hieb, who went out Sunday and Monday to try to capture the satellite, and Thomas Akers.

Those four of Endeavour's seven astronauts have trained for months to walk in space and each has a spacesuit aboard.

"(The airlock) worked with the three biggest folks, so I think since we're going to be man-handling the satellite we'll go with Tom, Rick and Pierre," Brandenstein told Mission Control.

The airlock is only 7-by-5 feet, a tight fit even for two astronauts in bulky spacesuits. In weightlessness, with no up or down, they can fill all conceivable space.

Brandenstein had urged flight directors, apprehensive about sending three astronauts into open space, to pursue the idea "with great vigor." He said two could grab the satellite by hand and hold it steady while the third clamps a bar onto the bottom of the craft to anchor it.

Bush says he's going to Rio

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush will attend the U.N.-sponsored Earth Summit next month in Brazil prepared to sign a treaty that addresses global warming but does not commit the United States to specific pollution reductions.

Bush said Tuesday he is convinced that environmental problems, including global warming, can be confronted without sacrificing jobs and economic growth, and added, "I will be taking (that) message to Rio."

"Protecting the environment and encouraging economic growth in fact ... must go hand in hand," said Bush. He called today's environmental problems global and said "every nation must help in solving them."

The president's decision to attend the conference in Rio de Janeiro failed to blunt criticism from environmentalists and some members of Congress who have accused Bush of orchestrating a treaty that falls short of the steps necessary to stem global warming.

Sen. Al Gore, D-Tenn., accused Bush of "riding on symbols and not substance."

"The president, once again, has made an easy decision look tough and worked only to camouflage the weak, cynical approach of his administration to protecting the environment," said Gore, who will lead a delegation of U.S. lawmakers at the Earth Summit.

Earlier this week, Gore introduced legislation in the Senate that would require the United States to stabilize carbon dioxide emissions, which account for more than half of all greenhouse gases, at 1990 levels by the end of the decade.

Bush has refused to make such a commitment on grounds it would harm economic growth.

Bush's decision was also ridiculed by Republican presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan.

"Mr. Bush recently pledged a moratorium on new federal regulations. Now he's heading to

'Protecting the environment and encouraging economic growth in fact ... must go hand in hand.'

— President George Bush

Rio to a summit sponsored by the Sandals and Beads International for the purpose of imposing new stringent global regulations on American business," Buchanan said in a statement.

The U.N. conference June 3-14 will attract representatives from 160 countries and the heads of state from about 60 nations. Its aim is to deal with a range of global environmental issues from the so-called "greenhouse effect" to population growth and the Earth's sustainable development.

The president announced his decision to attend the 12-day conference during a meeting at the White House with U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt and Maurice Strong of Canada, the conference's chief organizer.

The trip had been a subject of debate within the White House for weeks as some aides feared Bush might be put in a position of having to oppose a treaty that would require specific greenhouse gas reductions. Other aides worried that not going would depict Bush as trying to scuttle the conference.

The decision was made easier over the weekend when European negotiators capitulated to U.S. pressures and agreed to a draft treaty that does not commit any country to specific pollution reductions, but only suggests general goals for curbing greenhouse gases. The Europeans also had wanted a commitment to stabilize carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

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