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Photo by Jill Kaml

Firefighters battle a blaze that destroyed eight units late Thursday afternoon at the Tahoe Apartments at 3535 Plainsman Lane in Bryan. Bryan Deputy Fire Chief Jim Bland said six firefighters were treated for smoke inhalation and heat exhaustion from the fire but all six were released Thursday night. Bland said the fire marshal's office is

investigating the blaze but that as of this morning the fire's cause has not been determined and no damage estimate has been made. Apartment manager Sandy Dennison said the fire apparently began in an apartment where repairmen were welding a leaking pipe under a bathroom sink.

Reagan to seek increased tests for 'Star Wars'

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan, trying to clear a way for his "Star Wars" program, is preparing to ask Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev to agree to expanded testing of anti-missile technology in space, administration officials said Thursday.

At the same time, Reagan has tentatively decided to assure Gorbachev that the United States would not deploy the proposed shield against nuclear attack for five to seven years, said the officials, who demanded anonymity.

The Soviet leader, who has condemned the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative as a potential expansion of the superpower arms race, proposed in a letter to Reagan on June 23 that deployment be delayed for 15 to 20 years.

In exchange, officials said, Gorbachev offered to negotiate cutbacks of more than 50 percent in U.S. and Soviet long-range bombers, submarines and nuclear missiles.

The president, after consulting with his advisers, decided to reject the overture and to counter with the five- to seven-year pledge. He also will urge Gorbachev to accelerate the pace of Geneva negotiations and be willing to accept cutbacks of less than 50 percent as a first step to the larger reductions both leader seek.

Three U.S. envoys sent to consult with allied governments in Western Europe and Asia were due back

shortly. The officials stressed their reports would be weighed before a final decision was made.

The proposal for expanded testing is designed to go beyond the laboratory in determining if mobile sensors and chemical lasers capable of tracking and destroying attacking missiles could be effective in a space-based defense system.

This would require a major concession from Gorbachev, who has condemned Reagan's space initiative while conceding that at least some of the U.S. research can neither be detected nor stopped.

Reagan's "new approach" on testing is designed to advance an active and ambitious program while stopping short of deploying the exotic technology, an official said.

A U.S. pledge to put off deployment for five to seven years amounts to a guarantee the United States would observe the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty at least that long. Either side now can withdraw from the agreement with six months' notice.

The practical effect of Reagan's proposal was not clear because Air Force Lt. Gen. James A. Abrahamson, director of the Strategic Defense Initiative, said it would take at least a decade to deploy a space-based system. Abrahamson told CBS News that deployment could begin only after the mid-1990s.

Texas government faces estimated \$3.5 billion deficit

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas state government plunged further into the financial hole Thursday, as Comptroller Bob Bullock estimated it now faces a deficit of \$3.52 billion.

"Although there might be a slim chance of improving economic conditions, there is a much greater possibility that our economic downturn will worsen beyond what we currently expect, driving the shortfall even higher," Bullock said.

As the bad news piled up, key legislative leaders appeared no closer to agreement on a solution to the crisis.

House Speaker Gib Lewis, D-Fort Worth, again voiced opposition to a tax increase.

"The House will continue to examine alternative spending cuts and is not interested in any new tax proposals," Lewis said.

"I believe the majority of Texans feel we are taking the right approach and will not tolerate an increase in their existing tax burden given the depressed nature of our present economy," Lewis said.

Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, meanwhile, told state senators, business leaders and reporters that a combination of spending cuts and tax hikes is the "responsible" answer.

By imposing spending cuts, rolling back the 3 percent pay raise previously given state employees,

Hobby mapped out about \$650 million in possible cuts.

"There are \$650 million in reductions we can make here," Hobby said. "We will continue to look at all the options. But much beyond that point and we trifle with the future of this state."

"It is my hope that the Legislature will meet this crisis with a combination of spending reductions and revenue increases," he said.

Gov. Mark White has called a special session of the Legislature for Aug. 6 to try to cope with the mushrooming deficit.

White said that in light of Bullock's latest deficit estimate, "It is ob-

vious that we must continue to slash state spending." He did not suggest where such cuts should be made.

White also issued an executive order tightening his previously ordered state hiring freeze.

Hobby insisted that the state will suffer unless the upcoming special session addresses the full deficit.

Hobby will tour several Texas cities next week, seeking support for the combination cut-and-tax plan. He said he isn't worried about public reaction three months from the general election, where he faces Republican David Davidson.

The 1985 Legislature passed a

budget totaling \$37.16 billion for the 1986-87 fiscal year.

But Bullock said the worldwide oil price tumble, soaring Texas unemployment and other economic woes mean the state likely will take in only \$33.63 billion by Aug. 31, 1987, the end of the budget period.

"Rising unemployment and the accelerating decline of our state economy have once again forced a reduction in the (revenue) estimate," Bullock said.

"Given the continuing instability in world oil markets and the fast-changing nature of our economic situation, I must emphasize that any

revenue estimate is a moving target," he added.

The biggest losers were the oil production, natural gas and sales taxes.

Sales tax collections are projected to fall \$1.35 billion short of the original estimate, Bullock said. The oil production levy will fall \$428 million short and the natural gas tax will bring in \$632 million less than expected.

According to the comptroller's analysis, virtually all indicators are negative. That includes personal income, creation of new jobs, the unemployment rate, oil prices and retail sales.

Marble dispute slows work

Alumni center hits snag

By Michael Shriro
Reporter

An aesthetic dispute over marble columns on the uncompleted \$7 million Association of Former Students Center may delay completion of the building, the project director for the building's architect says.

Howard Anderson Kurc says the dispute between architect CRS Sirtine and contractor H.B. Zachry Co. centers around the graining of marble slabs that will cover the structural columns of the building.

The building's design calls for the grain of the marble on the

columns to match the horizontal grain of other marble on the building. But when Zachry began installing the column marble, it was found to have been cut with a vertical grain.

Kurc says it was the responsibility of Zachry's marble subcontractor, Lucia, to make sure the grain matched.

Skip Stevens, building district manager for Zachry, says aesthetic decisions, such as marble grain, are made at the construction site because it's hard to visualize details.

Bob Boyce, consulting architect for the former students as-

sociation, says these disputes are normal.

"There are myriad aesthetic and design considerations in a building of this refinement that architects evaluate," he says.

Kurc says the contractors could use the marble without matching it, could cut the marble slabs and reorient them so the grain runs horizontally or order new marble from Italy.

Whatever the final decision, Boyce says the association will not have to pay for fixing the problem.

Whitworth found guilty of spying for Soviets

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Retired Navy radioman Jerry Whitworth was found guilty Thursday of espionage for supplying communications secrets to convicted spy John Walker, who later sold them to the Soviet Union.

The secrets given to the Soviets by the four-member Walker spy ring severely damaged the Navy's internal communications network and will take years and millions of dollars to repair, government officials have said.

The seven espionage convictions each carry a potential sentence of life in prison. The jury said it was unable to reach a verdict on an eighth espionage charge that he took a contingency plan covering activities in the Middle East.

He also was convicted of four counts of income tax evasion on the \$332,000 Walker paid him for the secrets. Those charges are punishable by 17 years in prison.

An Aug. 28 hearing was set for sentencing, although U.S. District Court Judge John Vukasin said he was prepared to impose sentence immediately because virtually every aspect of Whitworth's life was documented during the trial and he felt well-acquainted with "his career, his personality, his beliefs."

The jury received the case July 11 and announced the verdicts on its ninth day of deliberations.

After the verdict, defense attorney James Larson refused to say whether he would appeal.

Peres says 2-day summit moved Mideast closer to peace

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Thursday his two-day summit with King Hassan II of Morocco moved the Middle East a step closer to peace despite disagreement on key issues.

He called the meeting a "first rate" achievement because it brought contacts between Israelis and Arabs into the open, and predicted that it would encourage future dialogue.

The Moroccan monarch, in contrast, made no optimistic comments during a nationally televised speech to his people Wednesday night. He said no progress was made toward peace, adding: "We did not meet to negotiate or to find a solution, but to explore the possibilities."

Hassan, a pro-Western moderate, is only the second Arab head of state to meet publicly with an Israeli prime minister. President Anwar Sadat of Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in March 1979 and was assassinated in October 1981.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz sent Peres a telegram praising the prime minister for "unwavering determination to pursue the search for peace." He added: "Today, you and King Hassan made history."

State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said: "The United States believes that this was a valuable and historic effort. No one ever suggested that making peace in the Middle East would be easy, nor did the United States expect any dramatic breakthrough at this session or that all problems could be resolved in two days of meetings."

'Poorly planned test' caused meltdown

MOSCOW (AP) — The experiment that caused the Chernobyl nuclear disaster was a poorly planned attempt to test whether a turbine generator could keep operating after a reactor shutdown, a Soviet official said Thursday.

In a statement Saturday, the Communist Party's ruling Politburo said the accident at the Ukrainian power plant occurred while improperly supervised experiments were being conducted and blamed gross negligence for the disaster.

The comments at a news conference Thursday by Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov were the first explanation of why workers were experimenting on the Chernobyl plant's No. 4 reactor in the early hours of April 26.

Press reports have said it was shut down for maintenance.

An explosion and fire in the reactor spewed a huge cloud of radiation

that spread over Europe and gradually worked its way around the world.

Gerasimov said he could not give details of the experiment, but a description would be included in a report covering "hundreds of pages" to be presented by September to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a U.N. organization with headquarters in Vienna.

He said the report also would be made available in Moscow.

An English translation of Gerasimov's remarks provided by the ministry quoted him as saying: "When you shut the station, the generator is still working. . . . The experiment (was) . . . if there is an accident, could the generator provide energy for the station for 40 to 45 minutes?"

When The Associated Press telephoned with another query about

the accident, however, Gerasimov insisted he had said 40 to 45 seconds.

He told the AP the turbine generators that produce electricity at Chernobyl apparently continue to function for a few seconds after a reactor stops working.

Gerasimov said the purpose of the experiment was to test how long the electricity-generating turbine could keep going after a reactor shutdown before a backup power supply at the plant went into operation automatically.

Asked whether poor preparation of the experiment caused the accident at Chernobyl, he said "Yes."

"The point is not that the experiment was conducted," he said at the news conference. "The point is that it was conducted without the nec-

essary precautions."

He said the experiment was "purely technical" and denied what he called suggestions in the Western media that it had a military purpose.

A spokesman for the U.N. agency in Vienna said he would have no comment on possible causes of the accident until an official Soviet report was received.

Phemi Speis, head of the U.S. team reviewing the Chernobyl accident, said in Washington that, noting Gerasimov's statement about the lack of necessary precautions, "It is possible that, because they were running at low power, the plant's emergency core cooling system was not hooked up."

Speis said the emergency core cooling system serves as a backup for circulating water through the reac-

tor's core if and when there is a break in the steam cycle.

Gerasimov denied what he said were reports in the United States that Deputy Premier Boris Shcherbina had been dismissed as head of the commission investigating the accident.

On July 3, Tass identified another deputy premier, Vladimir Gusev, as head of the commission.

The ministry spokesman said Gusev heads an operational body under the commission that is working at Chernobyl to clean up after the disaster.

Official reports say the accident has claimed 28 lives, stricken 203 people with radiation sickness, caused evacuation of 100,000 area residents and contaminated about 400 square miles of land.