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Missile offer draws praise from Europe

LONDON (AP) — Western Europeans on Sunday welcomed the surprise Soviet offer of a separate deal to eliminate medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe, saying it was the long-awaited breakthrough to an agreement.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of West Germany said it

and Belgian Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans said his reaction was to "rejoice."

The governments of Britain, France, the Netherlands and Italy were among those which refrained from any quick assessment, saying they wanted time to study the Soviet offer.

U.S. Gen. Bernard Rogers, the departing commander-in-chief of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, warned against abolishing medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe without making progress on other East-West disarmament issues — a warning echoed elsewhere.

In a major policy switch, Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev announced Saturday that the Soviets were dropping their insistence that an agreement on medium-range missiles be linked to a deal limiting testing of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, known as "Star Wars."

Soviet and U.S. arms control negotiators in Geneva scheduled a special session today to discuss Gorbachev's appeal that an accord on medium-range missiles be reached "without delay."

Sens. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., and Richard Lugar, R-Ind., and U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard N. Perle, all in Geneva to observe the arms talks, welcomed the offer.

Genscher said the Soviet leadership recognized that the issue of medium-range missiles could not be linked to East-West disputes over President Reagan's Star Wars program.

"By separating medium-range missiles from other disarmament issues, Gorbachev has removed the main obstacle to an agreement on reducing and destroying all Soviet and American medium-range missiles," he said.

"It is reasonable to hope that a breakthrough on the question of medium-range missiles will have a positive effect on negotiations over other (disarmament) issues," Genscher said.

Carrington said he had asserted repeatedly that it was "artificial and unreasonable" for Gorbachev to insist on a link between Star Wars and medium-range missiles. "The apparent recognition of this marks a substantial step forward," he said.

Since NATO's decision in December 1979 to deploy 572 medium-range U.S. cruise and Pershing 2 nuclear missiles in five European nations, the Atlantic alliance repeatedly has said it would be willing to dismantle the rockets if the Soviets agreed to destroy their intermediate SS-20 missiles.

At the end of 1986, NATO said 208 Cruise missiles and 108 Pershing 2s had been deployed. NATO claims the Soviets have 441 SS-20s in place.



We're Number One!

Opening ceremonies for the Student Y Youth Fun Day were close to the high noise level of an A&M basketball finals game, as the local

children who participated in the Saturday event prepared to face a day of assorted games and competitions. See related items, page 5.

Photo by Doug La Rue

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removed "the main obstacle" to an accord. NATO Secretary-General Lord Carrington called the offer "a substantial step forward."

The Danish Foreign Ministry said it was "a good and positive signal"

TDC begins new program to reduce crowding

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — About 187 Texas convicts were released to halfway houses Sunday through legislation approved by the governor in an effort to ease overcrowding within the prison system, a prison spokesman said.

Gov. Bill Clements on Friday authorized the use of a new state law that awards up to 60 days of good-conduct time to selected prisoners, allowing them to be moved to supervised halfway houses.

The action followed a Texas Department of Corrections announcement that the prison population at midnight Thursday was 139 inmates over a 95-percent state-mandated capacity ceiling.

The count totaled 38,529 inmates, or 95.34 percent of capacity, prison spokesman Charles Brown said.

The 187 inmates released under the new legislation will go to halfway houses throughout the state, Brown said. Another 55 inmates were released on parole Sunday, he said.

The inmates released Sunday and Friday will allow the prison system, the nation's second-largest next to California, to open its doors to new prisoners Tuesday.

The prison system closed for the fifth time this year Wednesday after the population exceeded 95 percent.

In signing the action releasing the inmates, Clements insisted it was not an early-release program and said the prisoners actually were serving longer sentences than if they had been paroled.

Laxalt: Reagan not ready to renounce deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Sen. Paul Laxalt said Sunday he doubts President Reagan is ready to renounce the U.S. arms-sale initiative with Iran, despite the Tower Commission's condemnation of that policy and Reagan's subsequent replacement of White House Chief of Staff Donald T. Regan.

Laxalt of Nevada, one of Reagan's closest long-time political confidants, said that in his address

to the nation later this week, Reagan should admit "this was a flawed policy . . . a trip that shouldn't have been taken. . . . I'd like to have him do that, but I don't think he's there in his own mind yet."

Reagan acknowledged in his Jan. 27 State of the Union address that "serious mistakes were made," but he has never conceded that the ad-

ministration was seeking to trade arms for hostages.

Senate Republican leader Bob Dole of Kansas joined Laxalt in publicly urging Reagan to take full responsibility for the Iran-Contra affair when the president makes his nationally broadcast speech, probably on Wednesday or Thursday.

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Governor's task force suggests ways to help economy in Texas

By Frank Smith
Senior Staff Writer

It boasts a diverse membership of distinguished Texas business people. Its mission is to identify actions that can be taken to "remove obstacles or provide new stimulus for job creation in the state." Its prospects for success depend largely on the willingness of Gov. Bill Clements and the Legislature to follow

through on and implement its proposals.

"It" is the Governor's Task Force on Business Development and Job Creation, a blue-ribbon panel appointed by Clements in December. The group responded with a list of 35 recommendations, which it submitted to the governor on Jan. 23.

James R. Adams, co-chairman of the task force and president of

Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.'s Texas Division, commented on the group's work in an address to the Brazos Valley Economic Outlook Conference on Feb. 12.

He explained the committee's prompt response to its assignment.

"Does that mean we didn't know what we were doing so we just put something together?" he asked. "No, what it means is that most good ideas aren't necessarily brand new. The problem is that sometimes we study things to death. . . .

"We also were very aware that the Legislature was going to be in session and we didn't want to miss that opportunity to have some things down for it to consider."

The 72-member panel includes several people closely associated with Texas A&M. Among them are H.R. "Bum" Bright, former chairman of the A&M System Board of Regents; Jarvis Miller, former A&M president; Clayton Williams Jr., Midland

oilman and head of Claydesta Communications; and H.B. Zachry, president of H.B. Zachry Co. in San Antonio.

Task force recommendations call for, among other things:

- The governor and Legislature, through public policy statements and resolutions, to clearly signal to the world that Texas is committed to education.

- Active solicitation of federal research dollars and representation on federal boards by the governor.

- The recruitment of federal research laboratories by the governor.
- Deregulation of intrastate trucking, with the exception of the transport of hazardous materials.

- The development of a Small Business Development Center program.

The centers are intended to provide counseling for small-business

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State debates making prisons private

TDC examines cures for crowding

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series on the issues surrounding privately-operated prisons in Texas.

By Amy Couvillon
Staff Writer

Although a bill allowing some Texas prison operations to be turned over to private firms is being considered in the Texas House of Representatives, political scientists and prison officials are unsure as to whether privatization could be a long-term solution to Texas prison woes.

"We're open to any alternatives because of the situation that we are in," Department of Corrections spokesman Charles Brown said. "We have crowding problems. We also have a financial problem. If private industry could come in and (run prison operations), and we see that there are not going to be any liability problems, then of course we are open to that."

"(Privatization) is a viable option, but we would have to look at it to see if it would be more feasible."

The bill, which passed 23-2 in the Texas Senate Feb. 19, would authorize privately-operated prisons for "minimum- or "medium-

risk" inmates on the condition that any contract granted would save the state at least 10 percent of the cost of a similar government-operated facility.

Dr. Gary Halter, former College Station mayor and associate professor of political science at Texas A&M, said although government contracting to private corporations is not new, it does not automatically mean money savings for the state.

"You can't make the assumption that anything the government does, business can do more efficiently," Halter said. "It isn't true."

Sometimes private industry can run government operations more cheaply, Halter said, not because it is necessarily more efficient than the government, but because of different tax requirements, or because private corporations don't have to meet the same employment requirements to which the government is bound. Civil service requirements, various benefits and workers' compensation make up much of government costs, he explained, but private industry has other options, such as the use of temporary workers.

"The private sector may not be bound by the same kinds of con-

straints," he said, "and they can save on labor costs."

The legislation now is being considered in the House Corrections Committee. To become law, the bill must pass in the House, be approved by both chambers and be signed by Gov. Bill Clements.

Texas prisons have seen a revolving door of openings and closings in the last month because of overcrowding. After the prisons closed again Wednesday, parole restrictions were being eased to allow earlier release of non-violent inmates.

On Thursday, the state Board of Pardons and Paroles recommended extra good time for 185 inmates, and on Friday, Clements moved to ease the crisis by authorizing use of a new state law to speed up parole eligibility. The actions followed a TDC announcement Thursday that the prison population was 139 prisoners over the 95-percent capacity ceiling.

"There's no room at the inn," TDC spokesman Brown told the Associated Press.

The new law allows extra good time for non-violent, non-assaultive inmates who are serving sentences of less than 10 years and who officials believe do not pose a threat to the public.

If court-mandated improvements are not made by April 1, the state could be slapped with fines of up to \$800,500 a day.

Dr. Ben Crouch, an A&M associate professor of sociology who is familiar with the Texas prison system, said the TDC is in a bind and is looking at private prisons as one of many solutions.

"There aren't but two or three options," Crouch said. "One is to quit sending them. One is to let some go. And one is to build more room. . . . Right now the state is trying to let some go. And it's trying to build more facilities."

Halter listed other government operations that have been successfully turned over to private firms, such as trash collection, road construction and tax assessment. But privatization can bring problems, he said.

"Any time a government contracts out for services, there's a potential for losing control," Halter said.

If unforeseen problems develop, such as rising costs, a private firm owner only has to live up to the contract — he doesn't have to be responsive to the people, he said. A government tends

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