

NASA, private firm join to develop commercial space research project

WEBSTER (AP) — A Houston firm signed contracts Thursday that will make it responsible for half of an estimated \$85 million NASA-related project to get the United States in the commercial spaceflight business by as early as next year.

Space Industries, Inc., signed three contracts with the University of Tennessee Center for Aerospace Research as part of the NASA-sponsored COMET Commercial Experiment Transporter program, known as COMET.

"The COMET program represents a very significant step by the United States to establish not only a foothold but a leadership position in what is becoming an international market in microgravity research," David Langstaff, executive vice president of Space Industries, said.

"The idea here isn't to service our governmental needs, but to service commercial needs," Joe Pawlick, COMET program manager, said. "And that's the real key to the COMET program."

Project officials hope to launch a spacecraft, powered by a rocket supplied by another Houston firm, in

September 1992, and keep a space capsule in orbit about 300 miles high for 30 days before returning it to Earth.

Inside the capsule, modeled after the Mercury and Gemini spacecraft used in the early days of the nation's manned space program, would be scientific experiments designed to take advantage of the lack of gravity in space.

"If we were to look at its most mature point, much like you fly your air mail package on UPS today, you will be able to fly your commercial package, perform your experiments and have the data or finished product returned to earth on a totally commercial basis," Pawlick said.

COMET will be directed by a group of seven centers for the Commercial Development of Space, led by the Center for Advanced Space Propulsion at the University of Tennessee in Tullahoma.

According to its contracts, Space Industries will design and manufacture the capsule and integrate the experiments with the vehicle. It also will operate the system while in orbit, including the establishment of a

tracking station.

The contracts are for three flights with an option for two more. The initial three flights should be complete by 1995, officials said.

"From there, it depends on the extent of how the market has developed," Langstaff said. "We now have in place the capability to do this on a frequent basis as the market requires."

"The state of space research is still very young. This could have a dramatic impact."

He estimated once the system became established, it could cost customers between \$20 million and \$25 million to fly. While neither he nor Pawlick could say how that compared with the cost of putting an experiment aboard the space shuttle, Langstaff said the price "is quite competitive with the numbers we hear in Europe and elsewhere."

"We just provide the wheels," Space Services division chief Donald "Deke" Slayton, one of the original Mercury astronauts, said. "The other guys provide the important stuff."

Texas hero loses place on name of bridge

HOUSTON (AP) — Col. Sidney Sherman shouted "Remember the Alamo!" at the Battle of San Jacinto. Texans always have, but the Houston City Council forgot Sherman when they unwittingly changed the name of the Ship Channel bridge that honors him.

State Sen. Gene Green, D-Houston, Mayor Kathy Whitmire and the City Council were trying to decide what to do about the span they unanimously agreed Wednesday to name after Councilman Judson W. Robinson Jr., who died in November.

The officials say they were unaware of the bridge, which takes Interstate Loop 610 over the waterway, was called anything but the common Ship Channel bridge.

Maps clearly mark it as the Sidney Sherman Bridge, there's a sign on the bridge and the city secretary's office recorded that the City Council named it after the war hero and industrialist in October 1974.

The change outraged Sherman's great-grandson, William T. Kendall.

Old West ghost town goes up for sale

VAN HORN (AP) — A ghost town with Old West roots dating back to 1882 is up for sale along a lonely stretch of Highway 90 between Van Horn and Marfa.

Ten abandoned buildings stubbornly stand in Lobo — named for the wolves that still roam the area — framed on each side by distant mountains.

Though the buildings date back only to the 1950s, they are the offspring of a tiny railroad stop that was built about 15 miles south of Van Horn in the late 1800s.

And for \$60,000 they can be yours — a four-room motel, gas station/diner, bunkhouse, several small family homes and a shower house, which stands next to a water tower. Behind the hotel, there's a big kidney-shaped pool where a couple of man-sized tumbleweeds frolic in the breezy deep end.

Like many dried-up rural towns, Lobo owes its beginnings to the railroad industry — early lines of the Southern Pacific, in this case.

The first railroad chugged across Lobo's tracks in 1882, when steam, not diesel, kept the machines rolling. Railroad workers and their families lived in the few buildings by the tracks.

But Lobo remained just a watering stop for trains when Virgie Smith took a job there in 1945.

"I worked there for the railroad there during World War II — in 1945 and '46. I think I was one of the first ladies to work for the railroad," says Smith, 65, who now lives in Tornillo. "All the men had gone to war, so we got their jobs."

"I wouldn't say we really called it a town. Back then, there were only two railroad houses, plus the ranch house across from the tracks. The foreman and his wife and the water pumper and his wife lived there."

Smith lived in the depot and worked with two sisters who made a home of the boxcar beside the tracks.

"We had no electricity or running water or anything. There was an old cowboy taking care of the ranch house across the way and we'd go over there to take a bath."

Van Horn provided what little excitement there was nearby.

"Usually you'd just sit around and talk to each other. You could go to Van Horn and go to the picture show," she says.

"My dad — he didn't especially like the conditions there — he got me a job at the bank in Fabens," she says. "My dad thought the railroad people were rough, but I thought they were just people."

Dogs

Continued from page 1

because January's above-average rainfall has swollen the river, hampering search efforts, Miller says.

"The river has been rampaging," he says. "It's three quarters of the way up its banks and that's dangerous conditions to work around."

Miller says since the river has been so high, the possibility of a drowning victim washing downstream has increased. Law enforcement agencies down river have been alerted.

Miller says because the Brazos River is cold, the body of a drowning victim could lie on the bottom for weeks before it surfaced.

The sheriff's department plans to drag the river today near the Hwy. 21 bridge, close to the site where Sharpe's van was found.

Western influences plague young Africans Many convert to Islamic fundamentalism

KADUNA, Nigeria (AP) — Young Africans disillusioned by corruption, poverty and decadence they blame on the West are flocking to Islamic fundamentalism.

Islam is the fastest-growing religion on the continent and fundamentalists say they hope to make it "the voice of Africa."

"Until we destroy the Western institutions and all their negative influences that plague our culture, we will continue to suffer their side-effects — corruption, social decadence, famine," said Muhammed Tawfiq Ladan, national secretary of the Muslim Students' Society.

The recession that followed Nigeria's oil boom of the 1970s was hardest on people like Ladan, the well-educated young of the middle class who often are a nation's future leaders.

A general economic decline also is encouraging Islamic fundamentalism elsewhere in Africa.

Justice Bashir Sambo, chief judge of the Islamic law courts in Kaduna state, northern Nigeria, said the rigid demands of fundamentalism put its followers on a "collision course with authorities."

Fundamentalists oppose not only their secular governments, but orthodox Muslim leaders, whom they see as corrupted by colonial influences, and traditional African customs, which they say pollute Islam.

Sambo said modern communications and education have spurred the growth of fundamentalist sects, bringing them into conflict with governments from Nigeria in the west to Zanzibar in the southeast and Egypt in the north, and beyond the Red Sea in the Middle East.

Nigerian fundamentalists look to Sheik Abubakar Gumi, who preaches daily in mosques and

at his home in Kaduna.

His words are broadcast on a weekly radio show and disciples from Ghana, Cameroon and Benin have said they will return home to seek converts. On weekends, his followers spread the message in the countryside.

Sometimes the message is delivered violently. Militant students have attacked campus bars where alcohol is sold.

Violence saddens Gumi because "Islam is a religion of peace," he said in an interview. "The Koran says no one must be forced to convert."

Gumi and his adherents speak idealistically of a world where tribalism, regionalism, corruption and crime would disappear before the march of "the Islamic brotherhood."

Many thousands have adopted that vision, and millions more are joining orthodox Islamic sects. At least half the 100 million people of Nigeria, black Africa's most populous and powerful nation, are believed to be Muslims.

Islam stagnated in West Africa after colonization by the Christian nations of Europe, but reference works say it has grown by about 50 percent in the past decade to 149 million adherents south of the Sahara. There are more Muslims in West Africa than Arabs in the world or Muslims in the Middle East.

Foreign powers vie to influence them. Saudi Arabia and its rivals, Iran and Libya, donate money to build mosques and finance pilgrimages to Mecca. Gumi said he had visited the holy sites in Saudi Arabia every year since 1956, and that the Saudis send preachers to help him.

He said he wants "not only an Islamic Nigeria, but an Islamic world."

"If we are all Muslims," Gumi said, "then a

woman could walk from here to Lagos and nobody would molest her. All the robbers are Christians or pagans."

Statistics show more crimes are committed in the Christian-dominated south, home of Lagos, the capital, than in the north, where most people are Muslims.

Dr. Bashir Ikara, a moderate-minded Islamic scholar, said: "Many say if we cannot have an Islamic state, then let us separate, form another state."

"Nigeria is an example of the degree to which people are committed to these revolutionary ideas ... in which they find inspiration in the Iranian revolution."

Ladan, the student leader, said Iran "gives us confidence in what we, too, can achieve."

He is a doctoral candidate and lecturer in law at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, a centuries-old northern town where adobe Arab homes sit in the shadows of multistory brick buildings.

Christianity and Islam collided 150 years ago in Zaria and a broad swath of central and eastern Africa, and peace has yet to be achieved.

Fragile truces in northern Nigeria collapse periodically. Mosques and churches are burned and thousands of people have been killed.

Neither side is satisfied with the compromises. Islamic and Western-style civil courts both operate, but governments have denied criminal courts based on Sharia, or Islamic law, which characteristically order the hands of habitual thieves amputated and adulterers stoned to death.

"We cannot have Sharia criminal law, but Western-style laws based on Christianity are imposed on us," Sambo said.

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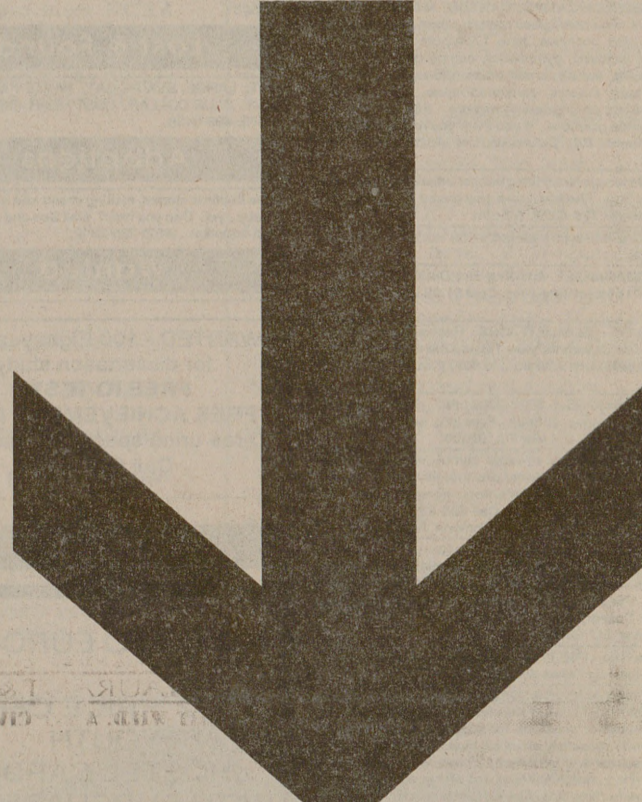
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