



THE BATTALION

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FBI sting operation uncovers bribe scandal at NASA

The Associated Press

SPACE CENTER, Houston — About a half-dozen NASA employees and up to 24 workers from outside the agency were implicated by a federal sting operation, a government official said Thursday.

The FBI's sting, dubbed Operation Lightning Strike, netted evidence that NASA employees and contractors took kickbacks and bribes and sold inside information, according to reports by two Houston television stations and NBC News. The report cited anonymous sources.

Johnson Space Center spokesman Harold S. Stall said officials were told about the investigation by the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration's inspector general on Wednesday.

"We are cooperating fully," Stall said. Both the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office in Houston refused to comment on the sting.

The government official told The Associated Press that the investigation implicated six or seven NASA employees, 12 to 24 non-NASA employees, and a couple of corporations. The official spoke on condition of anonymity.

Discussions were being held with some of the targets to resolve the matter through pleas, the official said.

The investigation was active until news organizations publicized the probe this week, the source told the AP.

An FBI agent posing as a wealthy businessman peddled a fake medical device — one that supposedly would cure kidney stones without surgery — to people within NASA, the broadcasters reported.

The agent told NASA workers he wanted the space agency's endorsement and the device flown aboard the shuttle to increase its worth, KHOU reported.

He then paid a contractor in the Life Sciences Projects Division and a NASA technical manager to say the machine was real even though they knew it was not, according to the report.

The investigation caught at least two major aerospace companies offering bribes and kickbacks for inside information on the project, KHOU said, adding

that an unidentified astronaut also was implicated.

The investigation's results were turned over to the U.S. attorney's office in Houston and the contractor and technical manager involved have agreed to cooperate with prosecutors.

NASA and Johnson Space Center in particular have come under heavy scrutiny this year for cost overruns and contract abuse. In one instance, the sprawling Houston complex was blamed for \$1 billion in overruns for space station contracts it oversees.

"Unfortunately, NASA's dismal record ... may have opened the door for these kinds of improprieties," said Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., chairman of the House

Government Operations Committee.

Conyers' committee in October heard testimony from NASA Inspector General Bill Colvin that the agency is plagued with abuse, including contractor overcharges and contracts that are awarded non-competitively.

He added that NASA had more than 400 criminal fraud investigations already under way.

Rep. Ralph Hall, D-Texas, chairman of the Science, Space and Technology Committee's panel on space, said he would ask for hearings on the matter when Congress reconvenes in January.

But he urged the Justice Department to make the investigation public so a pall is not unnecessarily cast over all of NASA.

Registration woes

Computer shut-down causes 8,000 freshmen to wait on matriculation

By Jacqueline Mason

THE BATTALION

Freshman attempting to register for spring semester classes at Texas A&M on Thursday ran into a big surprise.

The Student Information Management System, Texas A&M's computerized registration system, had a problem with its hardware drive on Wednesday night, closing the entire system down through Thursday evening.

Larry Malota, SIMS project leader, said up to 8,000 freshman trying to register for classes may have been affected by the failure.

Thursday was freshman make-up day for preregistration.

"This is the first time we have been down for an extended period of time," he said.

He expected the system to be functioning again by Thursday evening.

Texas A&M was considering allowing freshman to register throughout Thursday night until 6 a.m. Friday.

Beginning Friday, registration will be open for all students.

Student Senate to forward food services bill to Gage

By Jennifer Smith

THE BATTALION

A bill passed by the Student Senate Wednesday supporting the University's decision to conduct an independent management review of the Department of Food Services will be forwarded to A&M Interim President E. Dean Gage.

Student Body President Brian Walker said the University will have to decide who is qualified to conduct the review.

"But, I'm sure there will be some student input," Walker said.

The review might be conducted by a private firm that will review past and present management policies, purchasing practices and employee relation policies to make recommendations for improvements.

The call for a review into Food Services comes after months of speculation into the reasons behind the reassignment of three of the department's top-ranking administrators.

Lloyd Smith, former Food Services director, George Nedbalek, former Food Services business manager, and Col. James Moore former assistant director of Food Services, have all been reassigned to other positions within the University.

But, Dr. Richard Floyd, interim director of Food Services, said Col. James Moore was still the assistant director of Food Services and had only changed of-

fices and would be assigned new duties despite Moore's claim he had been demoted because of his opposition to Robert Smith's former plans to have a private food company manage the Sbis Underground Food Court.

Walker said the review will not look into personnel matters and will instead center on management matters.

"From what I understand, the process of looking into personnel matters is an internal process," Walker said.

Walker said the review will look into the past of Food Services as well as the future.

"It will be a diagnostic review," Walker said.

Sen. Owen Ross said looking into the past dealings of Food Services will help the organization.

"If they're going to conduct a review, I don't see how you can avoid looking into the past," Ross said.

Ross said many employees of Food Services have told him they are happier with the new management of Food Services.

"But I think looking into the past would only be a benefit because the same mistakes won't be made in the future," Ross said.

Walker said the results of the review will benefit students at A&M.

"A management review with the intended outcome of giving more quality to the students can only be a benefit," Walker said.

RADIO MASH: MAKING A SMILE HAPPEN

KORA and Texas National Guard sponsor toy drive for needy children



Amy Browning/The Battalion

Pam Ivey (left) and Jason Hightower (right) broadcast live for KORA near Post Oak

Mall Thursday afternoon. The station is conducting a toy drive for underprivileged

children in the Bryan/College Station community that will continue through Monday.

By James Bernsen

THE BATTALION

Local needy children go without many of the things that other children receive, but this Christmas they won't go without toys.

Radio MASH (Making A Smile Happen) is sponsored by KORA and collects toys to distribute to children in need for the holiday season during a 100-hour drive that began Thursday morning.

Benny Springer, vice president and general manager of KORA/KTAM, said the program is in its 10th year and has been very successful.

"Our purpose is to get enough toys so that no child in the area goes without at least one toy under the tree," he said.

The program is also accepting donations and will conduct a "silent auction" of several items, including two baseballs autographed by Nolan Ryan.

Jason Hightower, promotions director of KORA, said that last year the program collected 35,000 toys and \$4,000 in cash. The

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- Benny Springer, vice president and general manager of KORA/KTAM

cash is used to buy toys.

Donations are distributed to families on lists compiled by local churches and charities.

Various groups also volunteer to help sort toys in boxes for boys and girls of various ages.

Elizabeth Sanders, a volunteer from a local Star Trek fan club, said the experience is great.

"We're letting kids who otherwise wouldn't have a Christmas have at least one

toy," she said. "It's just good to see people giving their money and their time and such."

Sanders said she volunteered because it cost nothing and she "gets a lot in return."

"Seeing those people getting those toys was great," she said. "That was my Christmas."

Springer said that when he sees the children's smiles, he knows it's worth it.

"One lady we helped two years ago was down on her luck, and her husband couldn't work," Springer said. "She came back last year and left \$200 worth of toys. She told us 'It's my turn to give.'"

The program is co-sponsored by the Texas National Guard, HHC 4th Battalion 112 Armored Brigade, which contributes time and equipment to display, including tents, heavy machinery and a Humvee jeep. In addition, a WWII/Korean war style jeep and ambulance were loaned by the Confederate Air Force.

The drive is being held at the corner of Harvey Road and the East Bypass, near Post Oak Mall.

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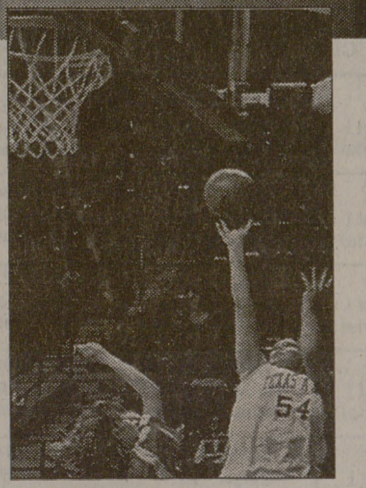
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MIDEAST PEACE

Top PLO leaders boycott meeting on negotiations

The Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia — Two senior PLO officials boycotted an emergency meeting Wednesday on stalled negotiations with Israel, underlining the growing discontent with Yasser Arafat among the movement's highest ranks.

The boycott by Mahmoud Abbas and Yasser Abed Rabbo, two of Arafat's closest aides, helped deny the PLO chief a quorum for the meetings of the group's Executive Committee, Palestine Liberation Organization sources said.

Arafat had scheduled the meetings after coming under fire for his leadership style and handling of negotiations with Israel, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Much of the criticism of Arafat focuses on his visits to nearly a dozen European nations in the last month seeking financial assistance as talks with Israel were foundering, and violence in the occupied territories rose.

Under the Israel-PLO accord, Israel is supposed to begin withdrawing from the Gaza Strip and Jericho on Dec. 13.

Morales announces plans to run for second AG term

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Dan Morales, touting his efforts to remove federal courts from control of state departments, said Thursday he will run for a second four-year term as Texas attorney general.

The 37-year-old Democrat, a native of San Antonio, cited resolution of the 20-year legal battle that kept Texas prisons under federal control as a top success of his first term.

"Texans do not believe that the courts should be running our state institutions," he said. "I am proud that we have taken back control of our prisons from the federal court and returned the keys to Texas leaders. For the first time in more than two decades, the Texas prison system is no longer under federal court supervision and control."

Morales, a former Bexar County prosecutor and three-term state

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