

Honecker steps down as E. German leader

BERLIN -- Hard-line East German leader Erich Honecker, who oversaw the building of the Berlin Wall, stepped down Wednesday and was replaced by a younger Communist Party loyalist amid growing unrest and calls for democratic reform.

Two other ruling Politburo members also lost their jobs in a shake-up during a meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee, but changes from Honecker's course were unlikely.

Communist Party leaders have made clear they will resist pro-democracy movements like those under way in Warsaw Pact allies Poland and Hungary, which on Wednesday approved constitutional amendments creating a democratic political system.

Tens of thousands of East Germans have fled the country in recent months, turning their backs on the rigid authoritarian system, and thousands of citizens have staged massive demonstrations in recent weeks.

Honecker's replacement, 52-year-old Egon Krenz, has a reputation as a hard-liner opposed to the growing pro-democracy movement. The state-run news agency ADN said Krenz will take over as Communist Party chief, head of state and head of the military, replacing his mentor in all three roles.

The 77-year-old Honecker, who was reported ill following a gall bladder operation in August, said he was resigning for health reasons.

"My health no longer allows me to bring the energy to bear that the fate of our party and people requires today and in the future," he said in a statement carried by

ADN.

Krenz, the youngest member of the Politburo, is known as a tough backer of the country's orthodox communist structure. He had been in charge of internal security issues and government-run youth organizations while being groomed as Honecker's successor.

"I told the Central Committee that I realize this is a difficult task that I have taken over," Krenz told East German television after his appointment. "In this very complicated time there is much work before us."

During a recent visit to China, Krenz led an East German delegation that expressed support for the way Chinese leaders handled pro-democracy protests in June. The protests were crushed when Chinese soldiers moved in with tanks and guns, and hundreds of people were killed.

However, Communist Party sources have said it was Krenz's decision to ask East German police to stop attacking pro-democracy demonstrators earlier this month in East Berlin and Dresden.

The demonstrations were the largest in the nation's 40-year history.

In West Germany, the mass-circulation newspaper Bild reported that Krenz is considering loosening up on travel restrictions for East Germans.

In Hungary, amendments formally ending one-party domination, regulating free elections by next summer and creating the office of state president won overwhelming approval at the nationally televised session of Parliament.

Rescuers search for survivors of devastating California quake

SAN FRANCISCO -- Rescuers searched with dogs and sensitive microphones Wednesday for any survivors of the killer Bay Quake, as thousands of Californians picked their way through glass-strewn streets in search of a semblance of normal life.

Across San Francisco Bay in Oakland, hopes faded for finding anyone alive within the tons of steel and concrete left when Tuesday's earthquake brought one level of Interstate 880 down atop another.

Approximately 250 people were feared entombed in that twisted wreckage, and at least 21 others were dead elsewhere in the quake area. Some 1,400 people were injured, said state emergency services spokesman Tom Mullins.

"To the best of our knowledge now, there are not any people still alive on this freeway," Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson said of the collapsed roadway.

The figure of 250 dead was based on estimates of the number of cars trapped in the rubble, and that assumed only one person per car.

Searchers had been hindered by darkness and the condition of the wrecked freeway, which Acting Oakland City Manager Craig Kocian described as "a house of cards" that could collapse further unless rescuers work carefully.

The 1 1/4 miles of the Nimitz Freeway that collapsed was one of the oldest in the area, built in the 1950s, and apparently was not included in a program to make spans earthquake-proof, said state Transportation Department spokesman Kyle Nelson.

In just 15 seconds, the earthquake destroyed or damaged hundreds of buildings along 100 miles of the San Andreas Fault, collapsed a section of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and two spans near Santa

Cruz, cracked roads, and severed gas and power lines, sparking fires.

The temblor, the nation's second-deadliest, surpassed only by the San Francisco quake of 1906, measured 6.9 on the Richter scale and was felt 350 miles away.

Even as residents and officials tried to evaluate the damage, President George Bush signed a disaster declaration making federal funds available for recovery, and said "we will take every step and make every effort" to help.

Bush directed an initial \$273 million to relief efforts and said he would inspect the area. The White House said the money will come from unallocated funds in a \$1.1 billion appropriation for Hurricane Hugo relief, and the president's trip probably would be Friday or Saturday.

Vice President Dan Quayle and Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner toured the area Wednesday by helicopter.

The federal government normally pays at least 75 percent of the cost of rebuilding bridges and public facilities that are destroyed, and provides low-cost loans. The disaster declaration covered seven counties.

Lt. Gov. Leo McCarthy said damage was "the better part of \$1 billion." Other estimates were in the billions in San Francisco alone.

Gov. George Deukmejian headed home from a trade mission to West Germany.

In San Francisco's Marina District, where a fire fueled by gas destroyed a block of 12 apartment buildings, about 500 people packed a cafeteria at Marina Middle School for breakfast after spending the night on cots and mats.

Deputy Fire Chief Mike K. Farrell said he strongly suspected people were trapped in collapsed buildings. "We're going to bring in dogs to see

if people are trapped in there. I saw three- and four-story buildings that are now one-story buildings."

Los Angeles donated sonic equipment to help detect any sounds of people trapped alive in rubble, said Scott Shafer, a spokesman for Mayor Art Agnos. Ten people are known dead in the city, according to the coroner's office.

The death toll elsewhere included five people in Santa Clara County, five people in Santa Cruz County, and one in San Mateo County.

State Sen. Milton Marks of San Francisco estimated damage in the Marina area alone at \$1 billion. Shafer said damage throughout the city would run into the billions. Most of the damaged buildings were Victorian-era.

Agnos estimated 40 buildings as either damaged or unusable, and said, "The city is well-organized and responding effectively to the crisis."

Agnos described the city's emergency services' performances as "sensational," and asked city workers not at work to volunteer for the Red Cross. He urged residents to conserve electricity and tourists to stay away.

San Francisco District Attorney Arlo Smith said about 50 people were arrested downtown Tuesday night on felony charges of looting and burglary. He had few details of the looting incidents.

The transportation system was crippled by the closing of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, and Agnos urged commuters to stay home Wednesday.

Tourist ferries that helped Tuesday by giving commuters free rides to Oakland charged the normal \$4 on Wednesday. The Oakland and San Francisco International airports reopened and BART, the rapid transit system, was open.

EPA tests show widespread concentrations of radon gas

WASHINGTON -- Tests in eight states by the Environmental Protection Agency show surprisingly widespread concentrations of cancer-causing radon gas, including almost three of every four homes tested in Iowa, the agency said Wednesday.

The latest results prompted EPA Administrator William K. Reilly to repeat his agency's call for every homeowner to test for radon.

Radon is colorless, odorless and radioactive gas produced by the de-

cah of uranium in all soil and rocks. Seeping from the ground and concentrating in houses, radon has been blamed for up to 20,000 of the nation's more than 130,000 annual lung cancer deaths.

"Radon is one of the most serious environmental health problems today. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer (after smoking) in this country," Reilly told a news conference.

Reilly said radon tests have been

conducted in 37,000 homes in 25 states during the past two years and about one-fourth showed unhealthy radon.

The latest tests in the eight states and three regions of the Indian Health Service covered 11,268 homes. Overall, about 27 percent of the 9,876 non-Indian homes checked in the latest round showed radon above EPA's recommended threshold. Not enough information was given to calculate a similar percentage for all 11,268

homes, but the result would not change much.

Reilly estimated that as many as 10 million homes nationwide could have year-around average radon exceeding 4 picocuries per liter of air, which is roughly equivalent to smoking a half a pack of cigarettes a day and the concentration that EPA says should trigger corrective action by the homeowner.

In an effort to boost radon testing, the Advertising Council announced it

is launching a national public service campaign to urge homeowners to test.

The latest tests covered Iowa, Georgia, Maine, New Mexico, Ohio, West Virginia, Vermont and Alaska as well as three Indian Health Service regions: Aberdeen, covering parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska; Bemidji, parts of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin; and Albuquerque, parts of Colorado and New Mexico.

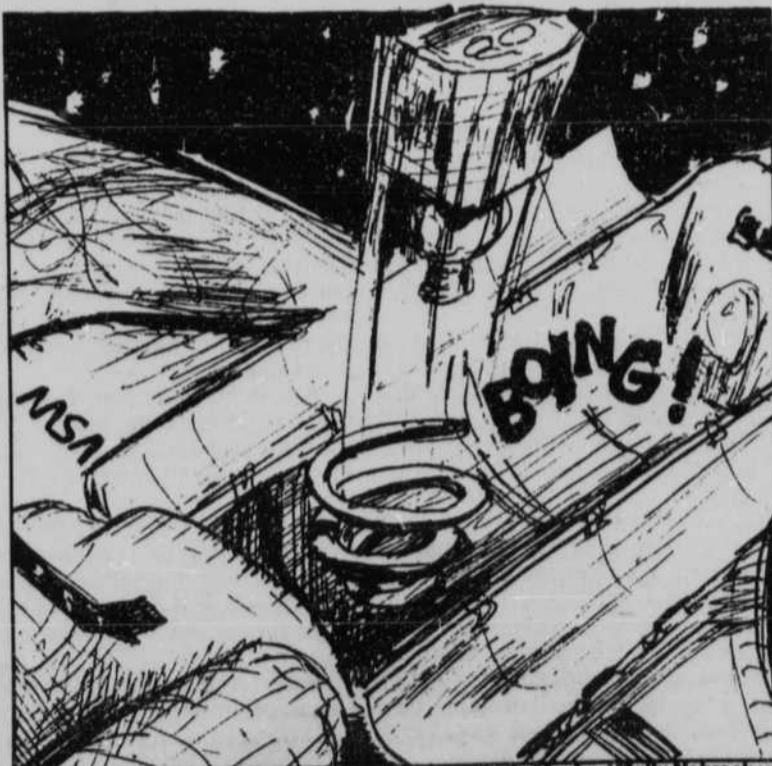
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Atlantis astronauts launch Galileo on 6-year trip



CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. -- Space shuttle Atlantis soared into orbit Wednesday and its astronauts started the Galileo probe on a six-year journey to Jupiter for the closest look yet at the colossus of the solar system.

Earlier, concerns about Galileo's nuclear power supply were left behind as Atlantis lifted off flawlessly on its mission to carry the \$1.5 billion space probe into orbit on the first leg of its trip.

After Atlantis had made five trips around the world, Galileo was ejected from the cargo bay by springs, on schedule over the Gulf Coast. The shuttle moved away to put distance between itself and the space probe's rocket.

The "burn" was to be an hour later -- first for 2 1/2 minutes, then for a minute, 45 seconds -- giving the 6,700-pound Galileo the initial push toward Venus, its first planetary port-of-call.

The five astronauts spent their first hours in space giving a final electronic checkout to Galileo, a probe so sophisticated that one

NASA official dubbed it "the Rolls-Royce of spacecraft."

"Everything looks real good," said astronaut Shannon Lucid, a one-flight veteran from Bethany, Okla., who had charge of the probe deployment.

The crew members reported a few problems with their own ship as it orbited 184 miles above the Earth. One was with a cooling system that might cause them to have to return slightly earlier than planned in what a flight director called "a worst-case scenario."

"You looked marvelous going up," Mission Control told Atlantis Commander Don Williams as the winged spacecraft reached orbit after two launch postponements.

"I feel a lot better," said Williams.

Galileo, named after the 17th century discoverer of Jupiter's moons, will use the laws of physics to get to Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system, in 1995. Flying by Venus will cause it to gain momentum and so will two subsequent close encounters with Earth.