

Van fire kills 6 inmates

DICKSON, Tenn. (AP) — A van carrying prisoners burst into flames along a highway Thursday, burning to death six handcuffed, shackled inmates locked in a wire cage.

The fire apparently was started by a broken drive shaft that pierced the fuel tank, investigators said.

The driver burned his arms trying to save the prisoners, all of whom were in handcuffs and individual shackles.

"The driver could not get close to the back of the vehicle to even open the door," Tennessee Highway Patrol Lt. Mike Dover said. "The prisoners were consumed in the fire."

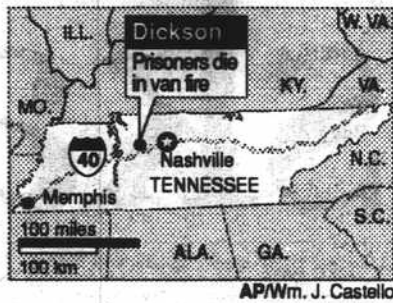
Dover said heat from the blaze burned so hot it welded the back door

shut. Another guard riding in the van was not hurt. The van was operated by Federal Extradition Agency, a Memphis company that transports inmates.

The prisoners had spent Wednesday-night in Memphis and were scheduled to spend Thursday night in Chattanooga on their way to a Florida prison, Dover said. The identities of the state prisoners were not immediately available.

The van had pulled over because of mechanical problems on Interstate 40, about 45 miles west of Nashville, before catching fire.

There was a fire extinguisher on



board, but the guards could not reach it because of the heat and fire, authorities said.

The van lay charred along the median after the blaze. Glass blown out by the heat littered the highway.

Baptist church closes day care, saying working mothers hurt kids

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — A Baptist church board says it shut down its day-care center to get mothers to stay at home because working mothers "neglect their children, damage their marriages and set a bad example."

Now 27 parents are without day care, and state officials are rushing to license another facility to replace the center at the First Baptist Church of Berryville — a small town in north-west Arkansas.

"This is not 'Happy Days' and we are not living in the 1950s," Katrena Alexander, 44, who runs a manufacturing company with her husband, said Thursday.

Alexander's daughter Keanna was enrolled at the church's day care for a year before it closed two weeks ago. The girl cried when she heard the news.

"I don't know of too many people

here who can survive on one person's salary, especially if that salary is minimum wage," she said. "This is just something that shouldn't have happened in this decade."

On Feb. 14, members of the First Baptist Church's Corner Stone Day Care board sent a letter to parents stating that the church would close the center in the spring and reduce its tuition until its closure.

In a letter that followed, the church said that while it was sensitive to the plight of single parents, it could not continue the center because its existence encouraged mothers to work outside the home.

The letter added that families could get by on one salary if luxuries such as "big TVs, a microwave, new clothes, eating out and nice vacations" were forfeited.

"God intended for the home to be the center of a mother's world," the church said. "In Titus 2:5, women are instructed to be 'discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good and obedient to their own husbands, ...'"

The day-care center closed March 14. The church's pastor, Clyde Gray, and the day care's board members could not be reached for comment; Gray's phone rang unanswered Thursday.

The closure infuriated parents.

"I don't think any of us are trying to copy a man's role, whatever that role may be," Alexander said. "I still don't know what those roles are. My husband does dishes just like I do."

The Arkansas Department of Human Services expedited a permit for the First Christian Church, also in Berryville, so it could accept the 27 children.

Convicted drug dealer gave cocaine money to Democrats in '95

NEW YORK (AP) — A convicted drug dealer wrote a \$20,000 check to the Democratic National Committee from an account filled with cash from cocaine sales, The New York Times reported, quoting congressional investigators.

Jorge Cabrera wrote the check in November 1995, the Times reported in today's editions, after a prominent Democratic fund-raiser met with him at a Cuban hotel to solicit a campaign contribution.

Three weeks after the DNC got the money, Cabrera attended a Christmas reception at the White House hosted by Hillary Rodham Clinton and had his photograph taken with the Clintons and Vice President Al Gore.

Congressional investigators told the Times that Vivian Mannerud, a businesswoman from Miami, had promised Cabrera an invitation to a Miami fund-raising dinner honoring Gore if he gave the money.

The revelations about the location of the solicitation of Cabrera's gift, plus the source of the money, emerged from congressional investigators' conducting interviews in Miami, the Times said.

Mannerud said she could not recall soliciting a contribution from Cabrera in Cuba, although she vaguely remembered meeting him there.

The Times said it is unclear whether Mannerud or other Democratic fund-raisers knew about Cabrera's criminal past. The donation was returned last October.

"Once we found out about Cabrera's past, we immediately returned the money, and we feel we have put this behind us," said DNC spokeswoman Amy Weiss Tobe.

Nation/World

Israelis refuse to stop building until terrorism stops

JERUSALEM (AP) — Armed with slingshots, Palestinian youths fired stones Thursday at Israeli soldiers guarding the tomb of a biblical patriarch, and both sides hardened their positions over the resumption of peace talks.

Palestinians said Israel must freeze building of Jewish settlements before talks can resume. Israel refused, insisting that Yasser Arafat halt a wave of terrorism. The statements indicated that neither side planned to show flexibility before a summit Monday between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Clinton.

Palestinians kept up daily protests that began when Israel began construction of a Jewish housing project in disputed east Jerusalem, where Palestinians want to establish their capital.

In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, youths fired stones at Israeli soldiers guarding Rachel's Tomb. Soldiers responded with tear gas and rubber bullets.

Israeli media suggested Clinton will seek a compromise from Netanyahu — a freeze on Jewish settlement activity in exchange for adopting Israel's proposal to speed up negotiations for a permanent peace agreement.

Chicago man charged in rape and assault of 9-year-old

CHICAGO (AP) — A 25-year-old ex-convict was charged Thursday in the rape and beating of the 9-year-old child known as Girl X, nearly three months after she was found unconscious in a filthy public housing stairwell.

Patrick Sykes allegedly raped, choked and poisoned Girl X for sexual gratification, said Chicago police spokesman Paul Jenkins.

It was "a crime of opportunity. He saw the victim walking alone and went after her," Jenkins said.

Sykes, who was in prison from 1991-93 for attempted criminal sexual assault, confessed to the brutal attack of Girl X and revealed details not known to the general public, Jenkins said.

He was charged with aggravated criminal sexual assault, aggravated kidnapping, predatory sexual assault, heinous battery, unlawful restraint and aggravated sexual assault of a minor, Jenkins said.

Sykes was visiting Girl X's building in the Cabrini-Green apartment complex when he saw her walking up a stairwell, police said.

He pulled the 64-pound girl into a vacant apartment and choked her into unconsciousness before sexually assaulting her, Jenkins said.

Sykes poured a gasoline-type substance down her throat and scrawled on her body with a marker for an "inane reason," Jenkins said.

Jenkins said police were led to Sykes by a tip phoned into police 10 days ago. He wouldn't reveal details about the caller, but said police had obtained physical evidence that supported Sykes' confession.

Children get shots to protect from contaminated strawberries

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Giggling and putting up a brave front, youngsters lined up in two states for shots Thursday to protect them against hepatitis from a contaminated, illegal shipment of frozen strawberries.

"Needles don't scare me. I've already taken a lot of shots," said 9-year-old Lucy Kadzhikyan, a fourth-grader at Ramona Elementary in Hollywood.

About 2,000 children in California and Georgia received shots Thursday, and officials in four others states worked to prevent the spread of the disease from tainted berries believed to have been served in school lunches.

One inner-city Los Angeles school served the suspect dessert cups on Monday after it was left off a list of schools warned last Friday. More than 700 kids and teachers at Mount Vernon Middle School will have to get shots next week.

So far, the only reported cases of hepatitis attributed to the frozen, sliced strawberries have been in Michigan, with 175 children and adults sickened. Children at schools in Iowa, Arizona and Tennessee may also have eaten the tainted fruit.

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The Lighter Side



MATT HANEY/DN

Pig on the lam eludes capture by fuzz

ANNISTON, Ala. — This town's public enemy No. 1 is a 100-pound porker that refuses to give itself up.

For three weeks the rogue pig has run amok, eluding capture and deftly taking the bait from the best-laid traps.

Capt. John Dryden nearly nabbed his nemesis Tuesday, scrambling after it up a steep ravine. But the pig squeaked through the dragnet.

"I was trying to detain him for questioning, but he failed to yield to my command to stop," Dryden said. "Hey, I yelled 'Suey' all I could."

Although the pig is laughed about by many, police say it is a public nuisance that could cause an accident if it darts out in traffic.

Police phones are ringing three times a day with tips of the pig's whereabouts and its latest capers. Members of the community have been taking the law into their own hands, organizing small posses.