

NEWS DIGEST

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Trains collide in London

■ At least 26 passengers have died; search of wreckage continues today.

LONDON (AP) — Two London commuter trains smashed into each other during rush hour Tuesday, killing 26 passengers and injuring 160 on the same rail line as another fatal crash two years ago.

Ambulance and fire crews, police and rail workers swarmed around the overturned, mangled rail cars for hours, locating and freeing injured survivors in the wreckage near the Ladbroke Grove residential area in west London.

Many passengers sobbed as they described frantically crawling out broken windows after Britain's worst train accident in more than a decade.

"I was thinking, 'God, please don't let me die,'" Stuart Allen said. "You've got flames. You've got smoke. You've got a big bang. You've just got to think the worst."

Police said one badly damaged car could contain more bodies but called

off the search until daylight today.

The cause of the collision was not immediately known, but health and safety officials began an investigation.

Great Western, one of the train companies involved in Tuesday's disaster, had been fined \$2.47 million for "dereliction of duty" in connection with the crash in 1997 that killed seven people and injured 150 others.

"I felt an almighty bang," passenger David Taylor said of Tuesday's crash, which occurred at 8:11 a.m. "I looked up, and I could see the front of the coach was on fire. There were balls of flames coming down both sides."

Emergency crews said 18 people were seriously injured and 124 transported to area hospitals.

"The injuries are among the worst I have seen in my professional career," said Robin Touquet, an accident and emergency consultant at St. Mary's Hospital.

Others were haunted by the cries of those trapped in the wreckage.

"I could see people with blood pouring down their faces," said Joe Bannerman, who was working nearby.

“I could see people with blood pouring down their faces.”

JOE BANNERMAN
London worker

"Someone was running with their clothes on fire. I could see lots of people were burned badly on their faces and hands."

Authorities could not immediately determine the total number of passengers aboard the trains. Great Western said as many as 500 people might have been on board its train. Thames Trains' cars may have carried 150 passengers.

While safety officials were cautious about speculating the cause of the collision, many said it was possible that the investigation would study the 1997 Southall crash in its search for answers.

The immediate cause of the Southall accident was that the driver had bent down to pack a bag and went through two amber warning lights and

a red signal. But an inquiry said a contributing factor was that two automatic safety devices were not fully operative as the train traveled at speeds of up to 125 mph.

Great Western pleaded guilty to the charge that it exposed passengers to risks to their safety in that crash.

"To have two very serious fatal accidents is a great tragedy and obviously a great disappointment," said Victor Coleman, Britain's chief inspector of railways. "What we need to do is to learn the lesson and prevent this sort of thing from happening again."

Tuesday's accident was Britain's worst rail crash since December 1988, when three trains collided outside London's Clapham Junction, killing 35 people.

Stocks fluctuate after rate decision

■ Interest rates were left alone for now, but the central bank warns increase could be pending.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve left interest rates unchanged Tuesday, passing up a chance to boost rates a third time since June. But the central bank warned that further increases could still be needed to cool the booming economy and keep inflation under control.

The Fed's warning sent stock prices on a wild roller-coaster ride during the final two hours of trading, swinging from a gain of 106 points to a 124-point loss. The Dow then rebounded to finish down by 0.64 point at 10,400.59.

Interest rate jitters also pounded the bond market, where a sharp drop in demand pushed the yield on 30-year Treasury bonds up to 6.17 percent, the highest level since early August.

Stocks had posted a 128-point gain on Monday in hopes that the Fed

would not raise rates and would also keep its policy directive, meant to signal possible future moves, at neutral.

The Fed raised its target for the federal funds rate, for the first time June 30, then followed that action with another quarter-point raise on Aug. 24, pushing the funds rate to 5.25 percent.

Commercial banks matched those increases with similar quarter-point increases in their prime lending rate, the benchmark for millions of consumer and business loans. The prime rate now stands at 8.25 percent.

After the August increase, the Fed left its policy directive at neutral, saying it believed its two quarter-point rate hikes "should markedly diminish the risk of rising inflation going forward."

However, since that time, various economic statistics have shown that the economy has continued to grow strongly, powered by strong consumer spending and the lowest unemployment rate in almost three decades.

In its statement, the Fed said "the growth of demand has continued to outpace that of supply, evidenced by a decreasing pool of available workers.

Clinton says nuclear test ban fight still on

■ Senate's top Democrat says that the support isn't there to ratify the measure.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate's top Democrat on foreign affairs issues told President Clinton Tuesday the votes aren't there to ratify an international ban on nuclear testing.

The immediate White House reaction was that Clinton would continue to fight. "The vote's still scheduled for Tuesday, and the president is going to continue to make the case," National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., said that while all 45 Senate Democrats are prepared to support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty next Tuesday when a vote is scheduled, any Republican support that might have existed appears to be disappearing.

"Republicans have evaporated into the ether" on the treaty, he said. At least 22 Republican senators would have to join the 45 Democrats for the pact to be ratified.

Biden said his instinct was that Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., would withdraw the treaty from the Senate calendar.

Lott said he would consider that. "If they would indicate some willingness to let the next administration and the next Congress consider this and vote on it, we'd entertain that," Lott told reporters.

On Tuesday, the Senate is scheduled to vote on the treaty, a troubled Clinton administration initiative signed by 154 nations but ratified by only two of the seven acknowledged nuclear powers, Britain and France.

The Senate Armed Services Committee opened three days of hearings Tuesday on the treaty. The first session, a closed one, explored a central question: Can the United States maintain the integrity of its nuclear arsenal without occasional testing?

"If there were some feeling of weakness about that stockpile, it could induce a leader of another nation or some terrorist to challenge the United States," said the committee chairman, Sen. John Warner, R-Va.

Senate critics say the treaty, which would ban all nuclear testing and set up a seismic monitoring network to gauge compliance, is seriously flawed — and unverifiable because there are ways to muffle atomic blasts. They contend it would not prevent U.S. enemies or terrorist elements from developing nuclear weapons.

Russian forces advance

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — The distant echo of crashing artillery rounds signaled the approach of the Russian military Tuesday — now only 15 miles outside Chechnya's gloomy capital.

Russian forces have seized the northern third of Chechnya, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in Moscow.

Russian troops battled Chechen forces near Chervlyonnaya, on the Terek River 15 miles northeast of Grozny, the Chechen capital.

The Interfax news agency said the Russians had taken the bridge across the river, though the report could not be confirmed. The sound of the Russian artillery could be heard in Grozny.

Russia took military action after

Muslim militants based in Chechnya invaded neighboring Dagestan in August and September, seeking to create an Islamic state in southern Russia.

The mood in Grozny was bleak. Markets were open and food was displayed in the stalls, but business was poor. Gas, water and telephone services have been cut, and there is electricity for only a few hours a day.

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on Tuesday night declared martial law, Interfax reported.

Many Chechen civilians are critical of both the Russian government and their own leaders, saying there was no need for a new war. Most denounced the Chechen warlords who helped trigger the fighting by raiding Dagestan.

World and Nation Datelines

■ New York
Regulators question benefits of buyout

NEW YORK (AP) — MCI WorldCom Inc.'s bold \$115 billion plan to take over Sprint Corp. and unite the nation's second- and third-largest long-distance companies met immediate resistance from a top federal regulator who asked "How can this be good for consumers?"

MCI WorldCom and Sprint, however, insist their deal, the richest corporate buyout ever, would strengthen competition across the board.

WorldCom, as the combined company will be known, could offer customers local and long-distance service, as well as mobile phone, paging and Internet products, all for one, flat-rate monthly fee.

Regulators, however, point to WorldCom's control of 36 percent of the \$110 billion U.S. long-distance market, second only to AT&T Corp.'s 43 percent.

■ South Korea
Leak exposes 22 workers to radioactive water

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Radioactive water leaked inside a South Korean nuclear power plant during repair work, exposing 22 workers to small amounts of radiation, the government said Tuesday.

About 12 gallons of so-called "heavy water" was leaked during the accident Monday evening at a nuclear plant in Wolsung, 190 miles southeast of the capital Seoul, the Science and Technology Ministry said in a statement.

It said the radioactive water was contained inside the plant and did not escape into the environment.

The mishap followed neighboring Japan's worst nuclear accident, in which at least 49 people were exposed to radiation last week.

The town of Tokaimura was temporarily closed down amid heightened fears about the safety of Japan's nuclear plants.

■ New York
College tuition rise is smallest in four years

NEW YORK (AP) — College tuition and fees rose an average of less than 5 percent this year — the smallest increase in four years — thanks in part to the booming economy. But the increase was still more than twice the rate of inflation.

The average tuition at a four-year private college in 1999-2000 is \$15,380, a 4.6 percent increase over last year, according to a survey released Tuesday by The College Board.

That doesn't include the average room-and-board cost of \$5,959, up 3.6 percent from last year.

In-state tuition at public four-year schools averages \$3,356, a 3.4 percent increase, while out-of-state tuition is \$8,706, a rise of 3 percent.

Room and board at those schools average \$4,730, a 4.6 percent rise.

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Ask for the appropriate section editor at
(402) 472-2588
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