

British prime minister refuses to cut fuel tax

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — Prime Minister Tony Blair, joined by leaders in Belgium and Germany, on Wednesday defiantly rejected demands to lower fuel taxes, despite spiraling protests that have left gasoline pumps bone-dry and disrupted schools, businesses and transportation.

"Real damage is now being done to real people," Blair said on nationwide television, blaming protesters for fuel shortages that triggered school closings, delayed non-vital surgery in hospitals and even threatened deliveries by Britain's reliable Royal Mail.

Late Wednesday, the National Blood Authority went on alert, saying it feared its blood supplies soon could be affected. The gov-

ernment put military fuel tankers on standby in case they are needed to get deliveries through, and banks reassured customers they would still be able to get cash.

William Hague, leader of the opposition Conservative Party, urged that Parliament be called back from its summer recess to deal with the crisis, as Blair prepared for more urgent meetings today with top advisers.

Europeans — Britons especially — pay some of the highest gasoline prices in the world. British pump prices average \$4.31 a gallon, with taxes accounting for three-quarters of the cost.

Because of heavy levies, public anger has been largely aimed at the government rather than at the protesters who last week began tying up traffic and strangling fuel

supplies with refinery blockades and go-slow convoys.

As the flow of gas dried up, so did rush-hour traffic on normally busy London arteries. Undertakers said they might have to halt funerals if they can't find fuel for their hearses. School closures were expected to affect thousands of pupils today.

Some truckers brought their protest almost to the doorstep of Buckingham Palace. Scores of trucks were stopped by police on a central London street that passes near the palace gardens, as the drivers tried to mass their trucks close to the Parliament.

Blair insisted he would not be pressured into lowering fuel taxes, saying that would shatter his government's credibility.

"Whatever the protesters do ...

"Whatever the protesters do . . . it cannot be right to try to force a change in policy by these means."

Tony Blair
British prime minister

it cannot be right to try to force a change in policy by these means," he told a nationally televised news conference, his second in as many days. "We will not be intimidated. We will not give into violence, to blockades, to threats."

In Britain, the Petrol Retailers' Association reported that 9,000 filling stations were without fuel. On Wednesday, police escorted dozens of fuel tankers past protesters' barricades, but progress on restoring deliveries was uneven.

Some tanker drivers refused to

cross protest lines, and there were two reports of bricks thrown through windshields of tanker trucks.

"Our decision is we are fighting a battle, which is going well. If we leave now then everything we have done will be for nothing," said Mark Williams, a spokesman for the protesters.

Blair has been granted emergency powers to cope with the crisis, but has made it plain he expects the oil companies to take steps of their own to restore fuel supplies.

Bill pushes for tire safety

TREAD act aims to require companies to notify U.S. during overseas recalls.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A bill aimed at improving auto and tire safety was introduced in the House on Wednesday by lawmakers who hope that passions ignited by the Firestone tire case will drive it through Congress at breakneck speed.

The TREAD Act — for Transportation Reporting Enhancement, Accountability and Documentation — seeks to improve consumer protection and communication between auto and tire manufacturers and the federal government.

It will increase the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's authority to collect information about possibly defective products and expand its budget for investigations.

"Clearly, NHTSA and others were asleep at the wheel, and we are looking to move bipartisan legislation in the fast lane to correct it," said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., the bill's sponsor.

Bridgestone/Firestone Inc. recalled 6.5 million ATX, ATX II and Wilderness AT tires on Aug. 9.

Upton's bill requires auto and tire manufacturers to report any defects on American tires or automobiles sold in foreign countries. Ford Motor Co. recalled the tires on its vehicles in 16 foreign countries without telling U.S. officials.

"What this bill tries to do is to make sure that even if a company isn't going to do the right thing on their own, that the federal government has the tools to force them to do the right thing," said Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M. "And I think it's kind of sad that we've come to that point."



Joe Raedle/NewsMakers

GUNNING FOR POSITION: Garrison Scott, 14, and Dewey Bowman, 13, play Time Crisis II on Tuesday at the Family Fun Center in Albuquerque, N.M. The Federal Trade Commission released a report stating the movie, video game and music industries aggressively market to underage youths violent films and products that carry adult ratings.

Clinton calls for hate crime legislation

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Armed with more data showing hate crimes often go unreported, President Clinton on Wednesday appealed to Congress to pass hate crimes legislation.

"Only Congress can do what really should be done here," he said.

Only minutes later, the House agreed in a nonbinding vote to make the hate crime legislation part of a defense appropriations bill.

"Today, with this bill, we as a society say that we will do everything we can to protect people from these heinous acts, that we will not rest until Americans are free from all violence," said House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo.

Despite the 232-192 House vote, congressional sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott told President Clinton at the White House on Tuesday the hate crimes provision would not be made part of the defense bill.

According to one source, Lott told Clinton, "We'll talk about it somewhere else, Mr. President," possibly as part of another bill.

Clinton convened an event at the White House to release a new Justice Department report that shows information on hate crimes sometimes is not forwarded to the FBI. The report also shows victims of hate crimes tend not to report them, and sometimes police lack sufficient training to handle such cases.

He said a hate crime is "an even more dangerous kind of infection" than ordinary acts of violence.

"I don't think any of us believe we can ever root it out just by punishing people," Clinton said. "The most important thing is that we do have the tools we need to take a strong stand before these things spread even wider."

The president directed Attorney General Janet Reno to work with state and local authorities over the next three months on a plan to improve hate crimes reporting.

He was joined by the widow of Ricky Byrdson, a former Northwestern University basketball coach killed in a 1999 hate-motivated shooting rampage, and Laramie, Wyo., police investigator David O'Malley, who handled the 1998 slaying of gay college student Matthew Shepard.

The Senate voted 57-42 in favor of

the hate provisions in June, and Clinton urged House lawmakers to follow suit.

House Republicans argued state courts could handle hate crimes much better than the federal courts.

"All murders are hate crimes and I think what we're trying to do is legislate by headline," said Rep. Kenny Hulshof, R-Mo.

But Rep. David Bonior, D-Mich., said lawmakers know they can't legislate hateful thoughts "but we do understand that when hateful thoughts turn into hateful deeds, Congress must act."

Byrdson said the legislation must be passed to tell bigots that their hatred will not become commonplace.

"The tragedy my family and I experienced is becoming the American way," she said. "If we allow this evil to spread, I believe it will rock the foundation of this society."

Clinton's plan would add crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender or disability to the list of offenses covered under a 1968 federal law, and allow federal prosecutors to pursue a case if local authorities refuse to press charges.

The legislation also provides assistance to local law enforcement agencies in investigating hate crimes.

Weather

TODAY	TOMORROW
Partly sunny high 79, low 51	Partly cloudy high 78, low 50

Correction

Tickets to "As You Like it" at the Lincoln Community Playhouse are \$9 for all students with a student I.D. The price was incorrectly listed in Friday's issue of the Daily Nebraskan.

Daily Nebraskan

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Judge frees Wen Ho Lee

The scientist is released after pleading guilty to mishandling nuclear secrets.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Nine months after he was branded a threat to national security and put in solitary confinement, Wen Ho Lee was set free Wednesday with an apology from a judge who said the government's actions "embarrassed our entire nation."

Supporters cheered as a smiling Lee left the courthouse alongside his family.

He thanked them and said, "I'm very happy to go home with my wife and children today."

With a chuckle, he added: "The next few days, I'm going fishing."

Lee, 60, pleaded guilty to a single count of mishandling nuclear secrets as the government all but abandoned its case against the former Los Alamos scientist.

Under the terms of the plea bargain, he was sentenced to 278 days — essentially the time served since his arrest last December.

Lee had been charged with 59 counts of breaching national security and faced life in prison if convicted. Fifty-eight of those counts were dropped.

"I sincerely apologize to you,

Dr. Lee, for the unfair manner in which you were held in custody by the executive branch," U.S. District Judge James Parker said.

Parker said the Departments of Justice and Energy "have embarrassed our entire nation and each of us who is a citizen of it."

Lee, a Taiwanese-born naturalized U.S. citizen, read a statement in court in which he admitted using an unsecured computer to download a national-defense document onto a tape. He said he knew his possession of the tape outside of the top-secret area where he worked was unauthorized.

Lee agreed to cooperate with the government and tell them everything he knows about seven missing tapes.

The government said that the fate of the tapes was paramount and that Lee's willingness to explain what happened to them was the turning point in 2-month-old plea discussions. Lee has said the tapes were destroyed.

Federal prosecutor George Stamboulidis said Lee did not deserve a government apology. He called the downloaded information "a personal library" of nuclear defense secrets.

"Which Americans among us would want us to turn our backs on that?" he asked.

Japan storms keep many from homes

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO — Skies cleared Wednesday over cities swamped by Japan's heaviest rain on record, but streets were still flooded and fears of landslides kept hundreds of thousands of people away from their homes.

The torrential rains Tuesday in central Japan — bolstered by a typhoon creeping up from the south — killed seven people, stranded 50,000 bullet train passengers and forced Toyota and Mitsubishi to halt production.

Officials were scrambling to drain muddy water from flooded streets in the city of Nagoya, said Kenji Ogawa, an official with Aichi prefecture, which was hit hardest by the downpour.

On Wednesday, nearly 364,000 people were ordered to evacuate their homes, though it was unclear exactly how many sought refuge.

Ogawa said it was not yet known when those who evacuated would be allowed to return home because the threat of mudslides had not subsided.

Toyota Motor Corp., Japan's largest automaker, resumed operations Wednesday afternoon after shutting down factories nationwide the day before, the company said.

Mitsubishi Motor Corp., which halted production at its two factories in Nagoya, 165 miles west of Tokyo, had already gone back online.

Typhoon Saomai, packing winds of 77 mph, was off the coast of Okinawa and heading toward China late Wednesday, the Meteorological Agency said.

About 17,800 homes were without electricity on Okinawa at the height of the storm, but power has since been restored, said Shinsaku Toma, a spokesman for Okinawa Electric Power Co.

World/Nation
The Associated Press

Austria Right-wing Austrian leader ridicules European Union

VIENNA — Hailing the lifting of European Union diplomatic sanctions, Austria's right-wing firebrand Joerg Haider on Wednesday labeled the measures a "complete flop."

Haider, whose far right Freedom Party's inclusion in the government led to the sanctions, said the measures failed in their goal to force the party out of the ruling coalition.

Austria's 14 European Union partners lifted the seven-month sanctions against Austria on Tuesday after a panel said the measures stoked the nationalistic feeling they were meant to punish.

"They ended as a complete flop," Haider said in Klagenfurt, capital of Carinthia province, where he is governor. "Democracy cannot be unhinged by undemocratic means."

Haider also ridiculed a European Union statement stressing the need to remain vigilant about the Freedom Party.

Washington, D.C.

Norplant says latest implants may not be totally effective

WASHINGTON — The maker of Norplant said Wednesday that it cannot guarantee certain batches of the birth-control implants are effective, and announced it will reimburse women who have questionable implants for the cost of backup birth control.

Women who have received Norplant implants from batches that were shipped to doctors on or after Oct. 20 should use a non-hormone form of birth control as a backup, Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories said.

The Food and Drug Administration advised women Wednesday not to wait to be notified, but to call their doctors if they had Norplant inserted since Oct. 20 and specifically ask about backup birth control.

Women and doctors may call the company at 1-800-364-9809 for information or financial assistance.

Washington, D.C.

Army aligns National Guard to bolster corps

WASHINGTON — The Army for the first time will align National Guard divisions with active-duty Army corps, making it more likely that part-time soldiers will ship out if war erupts in Korea or the Persian Gulf, Army officials said Wednesday.

The change reflects Army leaders' search for ways to make better use of the National Guard at a time when the active-duty force is stretched thin by a variety of peacetime missions across the globe.

The new arrangement means members of the eight National Guard divisions are more likely to be called on not only for major wars but also as rotation units for peacekeeping operations in places like Bosnia and Kosovo.

Indonesia

Bomb explodes in garage under stock exchange

JAKARTA — A car bomb tore through a packed parking garage beneath Jakarta's stock exchange on Wednesday, killing at least 13 people, injuring 27 and shaking confidence in Indonesia's attempts to reform after decades of dictatorship.

The blast damaged or destroyed 400 vehicles in the garage filled with cars and drivers waiting for stockbrokers to finish work, said national police chief Gen. Rusdihardjo.

The 27 injured — many covered in black dust and breathing with difficulty, and others cut by flying glass — were brought into a nearby hospital.

Smoke filled the exchange's trading room and other offices, forcing the evacuation of about 1,000 workers.