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Channel tunnel fire causes travel chaos



Max Nash/AP
A convoy of trucks sitting idle Friday on the British side of the Channel tunnel.

Heavy damage;
operator suspends
traffic indefinitely

By James Kanter
and Caroline Brothers

PARIS: Thousands of travelers were stranded and delayed on both sides of the English Channel going into the weekend after a roaring blaze that reached temperatures as high as 1,000 degrees Celsius shut down the tunnel that links Britain with the Continent.

The closure threatened to disrupt services for several weeks and raised new questions about how such incidents could occur after previous fires in the tunnel, which is relied upon by truckers as well as tens of thousands of tourists and business people shuttling between London, Paris and Brussels each day.

Reports Thursday afternoon suggested that damage to the tunnel and disruption were not heavy. But by Friday morning, officials said it had taken firefighters most of the night to douse the flames, and a truck driver talking to French media suggested that he and others narrowly escaped.

"Because it's a tunnel, it works like an oven," said a Eurotunnel spokeswoman, Mady Chabrier, explaining how firefighters had to put out a blaze of such intense heat. "I guess the concrete has suffered and the iron inside of the tunnel, and we have to check now what the situation is."

Six people were taken to a hospital in Calais suffering from smoke inhalation. There were no reports of more serious injuries.

The link between Britain and France remained closed Friday, a day after the fire, which broke out on a France-bound freight shuttle train, and possibly from a truck. The fire was not extinguished until Friday, Chabrier said.

Eurotunnel's Web site said Friday night that traffic would be suspended on Saturday and Sunday as well.

French officials said the fire was likely to have been accidental, appearing to rule out terrorism. The exact cause is under investigation.

The link consists of two tunnels that ordinarily carry passenger trains and freight in opposite directions, and a

TUNNEL, Continued on Page 4



Court ruling clears Zuma's path to South African presidency

Supporters of Jacob Zuma, the African National Congress leader, celebrated in Pietermaritzburg after a judge set aside corruption charges against him. The ANC's dominance all but assures its candidate the presidency. The next election is in 2009. **Page 3**

Themba Hadebe/The Associated Press

Obama turns up the heat on McCain

Democrat toughens ads in bid to retake initiative from rival

By Adam Nagourney and Jeff Zeleny

DOVER, New Hampshire: Senator Barack Obama intensified his assault against Senator John McCain here Friday, drawing sharp links between his rival and President George W. Bush through a coordinated, partywide message as he confronts an invigorated Republican ticket and increasing nervousness in the Democratic ranks.

"The good news is that in 53 days, the name George W. Bush won't be on the ballot," Obama told supporters here at an afternoon campaign appearance. "But make no mistake, George W. Bush's policies will be on the ballot."

Obama amplified his criticism of McCain through new television advertisements that portrayed McCain as an out-of-touch politician with a long career in Washington.

The ads — among the most pointed attacks to be aired by Obama — depicted McCain as he looked when he was first

elected to Congress in 1982, an attempt to blunt the new argument from McCain that he is the candidate of change.

A spokesman for the Republican National Committee, Alex Conant, accused Obama of "trying to destroy" McCain and his running mate, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, with personal attacks.

"This is more evidence that Obama's politics of hope is just empty words," Conant said in a statement.

McCain's choice of Palin — and the resulting jolt of energy among Republican voters — appears to have caught Obama and his advisers by surprise and added to concern among some Democrats that the Obama campaign was not pushing back aggressively enough against Republican attacks in a critical phase of the race.

"Our ads have been pretty tough. I just have different philosophy; I'm going to respond with the truth," Obama told a voter Friday, responding to a question about whether Democrats would suffer the same fate they have in previous presidential campaigns. "I know there are a lot of Democrats and some independents and some Republicans who really want change and are getting really nervous because they have seen this movie before."

Some Democrats said Obama needed to move to seize control of the campaign and to block McCain from snatching away the message that he was the best hope to bring change to

CAMPAIGN, Continued on Page 4

■ In her first big interview, Sarah Palin says 'I'm ready.' **Page 5**

BUSINESS OF SPORTS

The moguls meet on the soccer fields of England

By Joe Nocera

The first of them to arrive was Malcolm Glazer, in 2003. That's when this whole business of Americans buying into English soccer began. Glazer is a billionaire from Palm Beach, Florida, who got into sports in 1995, at the age of 66, when he bought the Tampa Bay Buccaneers of the National Football League. In March 2003, it emerged that Glazer owned about 3 percent of Manchester United, the English Premier League's most successful team and one of the most storied sports franchises in the world; by the end of that November, he had upped his stake to nearly 15 percent.

By July 2005, Glazer owned the club outright, at a cost of \$1.5 billion, by far the most ever paid for a sports team. He paid largely with borrowed money.

To say that Glazer's hostile takeover — for that's what it was — troubled devoted Manchester United fans is an understatement. Even before he completed his purchase, he was hanged in effigy. During games in the team's fabled stadium, Old Trafford, fans chanted, "Die, Glazer, die." The press pilloried him. "A lot of it was just anti-American feelings that many Brits have but don't openly discuss," said Christopher Harris, who runs the blog EPLTalk.com.

As Harris notes, not long after Glazer began accumulating his stake, a Russian oligarch named Roman Abramovich — said to be among the richest people in the world — bought another top Premier League franchise, Chelsea. There was nary a peep from its fans. On Sept. 1, an investment firm controlled by the ruling family of Abu Dhabi bought another Premier League club, Manchester City, which the former prime minister of Thailand had bought in June 2007. Again, not a peep.

What especially bothered the Manchester United fans and the English soccer press was the fear that Glazer would "Americanize" the business of running the team. A Web site called LoveUnitedHateGlazer.com protested his "excessive merchandising, TV deals" and

NOCERA, Continued on Page 24

■ Joe Nocera finds reasons for pause in the Google-Yahoo deal. **Page 16**

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Chile's precocious teens cast aside sexual taboos



Tomas Munita for The New York Times
Dancers at an afternoon party in Santiago. The youth-led sexual revolution is happening in a once conservative country that only legalized divorce in 2004.

Internet spawns a steamy party culture

By Alexei Barrionuevo

SANTIAGO: It is just after 5 p.m. in what was once one of Latin America's most sexually conservative countries, and the youth of Chile are bumping and grinding to a reggaeton beat. At the Bar Urbano disco, boys and girls aged 14 to 18 are stripping off their shirts.

The place is a tangle of lips and tongues and hands. About 800 teenagers sway and bounce to lyrics imploring them to "Ponceal Ponceal": to make out with as many people as they can.

And make out they do — with stranger after stranger, vying for the honor of being known as the "ponceo," the one who pairs up the most.

Chile, long considered to have among the most traditional social mores in South America, is crashing headlong against that reputation

with its precocious teenagers. Chile's youth are living in a period of sexual exploration that, academics and government officials say, is like nothing the country has witnessed before.

"Chile's youth are clearly having sex earlier and testing the borderlines with their sexual conduct," said Dr. Ramiro Molina, director of the University of Chile's Center for Adolescent Reproductive Medicine and Development.

The sexual awakening is happening through a booming industry for 18-and-under parties and an explosion of Internet connectivity, especially through Web sites like Foto-log.com, where young people trade suggestive photos of one another and organize weekend parties, some of which have drawn more than 4,000 teenagers. The online networks have emboldened teenagers to express

CHILE, Continued on Page 4

Tennis betting inquiry clears Russian player

The Russian tennis star Nikolay Davydenko was cleared by the governing association of men's tennis on Friday after a yearlong investigation into suspicious betting patterns on a match he lost to a low-ranked opponent. The ATP said it had found no evidence of wrongdoing by Davydenko or his opponent, Martin Vassallo Argüello of Argentina, in the match in Poland last year. "The investigation is now concluded," the association said. **Page 24**

Lehman employees facing loss of their jobs

Lehman employees who watched the value of their stock evaporate over the last few days now have a new worry: the possibility of unemployment. Even as pink slips for previously announced terminations were handed out, remaining staff members realized a sale of the firm was likely. **Page 16**

Alitalia on the brink

Negotiations between airline unions, government officials and a group of Italian investors were near collapse Friday. The impasse jeopardized a €1 billion plan to rescue the money-losing carrier. **Page 16**

U.K. travel industry wilts

Britain's already struggling travel industry suffered a pair of new setbacks on Friday when one of the country's largest tour operators collapsed and British Airways offered thousands of its managers incentives to quit. **Page 18**

Deutsche Bank wins stake

Deutsche Bank was successful in its bid for nearly 30 percent of Postbank, despite a last-minute offer from Banco Santander. The transaction marks a further unwinding of what was once a mammoth German monopoly. **Page 18**

■ Moves toward NATO membership for Georgia would be intolerable to Russia, Medvedev insists. **Page 3**

■ Morton Sobell, a central figure in Rosenberg espionage case, admits spying for the Soviet Union. **Page 2**

CURRENCIES New York

Friday, 2 p.m.	Previous	
€1=	\$1.4178	\$1.3924
£1=	\$1.7889	\$1.7493
\$1=	¥107.515	¥106.600
¥1=	SF1.1324	SF1.1404

Full currency rates | **Page 19**

OIL New York, Friday, 2 p.m.

Light sweet crude	\$101.27	▲ \$0.24
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STOCK INDEXES Friday

The Dow 2 p.m.	11,391.13	▼ 0.37%
FTSE 100 close	5,416.70	▲ 1.85%
Nikkei 225 close	12,214.76	▲ 0.93%

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