

12 killed as trains collide in US

SILVER SPRING, Feb 17: An Amtrak passenger train bound for Chicago and a local commuter train crashed head-on just north of the US capital during a snow storm on Friday. At least 12 people died on the commuter train and a score were injured, reports AP.

A loud roar, apparently an electrical explosion, followed the collision of the two Amtrak locomotives and several other cars jumped the tracks. One Amtrak locomotive and several passenger cars from the commuter train were engulfed in flames. The locomotive's front was demolished, its side torn with a gaping hole, its engineer's cab heavily damaged.

"When the firefighters first arrived at the scene, there were people banging on the windows and trying to get out," said Lt. Denise Fox, spokeswoman for the Montgomery County fire department.

The dead were trapped in a car of the commuter train, victims of multiple trauma and fire, she said.

"There may be more, but for sure there are 12 dead", Fox said. Local hospital reported treating 21 people for injuries.

Mike Hall, a Montgomery County spokesman, said their bodies were left in the wreck as investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board conducted a preliminary investigation.

Brian Hall, a volunteer firefighter who helped evacuate the Amtrak train, described a chaotic scene when he and his colleague clambered inside a passenger car.

"There were about 30 people in that particular car, who looked like they were in a total state of disarray. Hall said, "We grabbed two or three of the more seriously injured ones and loaded them into ambulances."

"Some were yelling, just frantically yelling, because of the tremendous shock ... Others were just sitting there like they didn't know what had happened!"

After dark, with the fire just extinguished, a helicopter crisscrossed the scene scanning the wreckage with a beacon light.

About half an hour after leaving Washington's Union Station bound for Chicago, Amtrak's Capitol Limited train carrying 175 passengers plus crew crashed into the Maryland Rail Commuter train at 5:45 pm (2230 GMT).



City's markets witnessed an excessive rush of Eid shoppers yesterday.

— Star photo

The Midnight File

Arms cache from China seized in Taiwan

TAIPEI, Feb 17: Police have seized 30 grenades and 50 handguns and rifles in what they said was the largest seizure of arms smuggled from China. Four Taiwanese men were arrested Friday at seas off Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, after the weapons were seized from their fishing boats, police said today, reports AP.

Hawala case: Advani's plea rejected

NEW DELHI, Feb 17: An Indian court today rejected the plea of a key suspect in an 18 million dollar bribery scandal who said charges against him were politically motivated, reports Reuter.

President of the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) Lal Krishna Advani had urged the court on Wednesday to either dismiss charges against him or speed up the trial so that he could prove his innocence before a general election.

said in his plea to the court.

Three ministers of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's cabinet were forced to resign last month after federal police charged them with involvement in the bribes-for-favours "hawala", or black money, affair.

The scandal has its improbable roots in the arrest of two suspected Kashmiri guerrillas in March, 1991.

Rohingya

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clearance from the Myanmar authorities, an official said.

On the other hand, the number of new born babies at six Rohingyas refugee camps is increasing rapidly as 8 to 12 babies are born everyday, official sources say.

Different NGOs working here, however, say that around 15 babies are born everyday. Nearly 2,000 women in these camps are now carrying.

In the last four years, some 26,042 babies were born in these camps, officials say.

The NGOs say figure exceeded 30,000, some 6,990 refugees died during this period.

The Rohingyas males tend to be interested in having more than one wife and several children. They are reluctant to adopt family planning methods and avoid family planning workers," an official said.

World Cup

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lowly United Arab Emirates at the Pakistani frontier city of Peshawar.

England came up with a poor show on Wednesday last to concede defeat to the unfancied Kiwis and will hope to do better against the UAE, who were thrashed by South Africa on Saturday.

Bangladesh Television will telecast live the 1st Jia-Kenya match as will the sports channel of Star TV.

Delayed coverage of the England-UAE game will follow the live telecast on Star TV.

Soccer fans go on rampage in Egypt

CAIRO, Feb 17: Police fired tear gas at hundreds of angry soccer fans who went on a rampage and smashed cars in the coastal city of Port Said after a referee's calls against the hometown team, reports AP.

Two spectators and two police were injured in the riot, which exploded at the end of a match late Friday between Port Said's el-Maary team and el-Zamalek from Cairo.

Fans were angered when el-Zamalek tied the match 2-2 as a result of the penalty calls. The crowds surged onto the field and then poured into the streets. They smashed a van belonging to Egyptian Television, a police car, an ambulance and five private cars.

Referee Gamal el-Ghandour and the el-Zamalek players were escorted off the field under police guard.

BCL activist stabbed

From Our Correspondent

KHULNA, Feb 17: A Chhatra League activist, Prakash Shah, was stabbed allegedly by some activists of BNP backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal in front of the Khulna General Hospital here today.

He was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition.

Saha, 28, was the former assistant general secretary of the students union of Sundarban Government College.

Conservative MP threatens to desert Major

LONDON, Feb 17: A Conservative lawmaker threatened today to desert the governing party and further erode its thin majority in the House of Commons, reports AP.

If Peter Thurnham does resign from the party, Prime Minister John Major would be left with a majority of just two votes over the combined opposition in the House of Commons.

Thurnham, first elected a member of Parliament in 1983, said he was increasingly concerned about falling values and standards of public service in the Conservative Party. But he said he wanted to meet Major before making a decision on leaving the party.

He had already decided not to stand for re-election from Bolton Northeast, where he won by just 185 votes out of 48,000 cast in 1992.

Balkan leaders start summit to review Dayton accord

ROME, Feb 17: Western mediators and the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia began an emergency summit today to review the Dayton peace agreement, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic took their places around a circular negotiating table with US peace envoy Richard Holbrooke and other Western mediators.

"There are bumps in the road we've encountered. We hope to smooth them out," Holbrooke told CNN television before the start of the summit. "General Joutwan and Admiral Smith will give a no-holds-barred, straight from the shoulder statement of what's going on — the good, the bad, the ugly."

Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli of Italy, which is hosting the summit as current holder of the European Union presidency, opened the meeting with an address to the participants.

General George Joutwan, NATO's supreme commander, and NATO Bosnian commander Admiral Leighton Smith sat

around the conference table together with officials of the big power contact group and the international community's high representative in Bosnia, Carl Bildt.

US officials said the agenda during the two-day summit would be far-ranging and would include the breakdown in ties between Bosnian Serbs and NATO, the exchange of prisoners and the growing fractures in Bosnia's Muslim-

100m people

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ate new obligations.

The United States has repeatedly said that world conferences are too expensive and produce little. Habitat will be the last major international conference sponsored by the United Nations this century.

"An unworkable city in social terms is an unworkable economy in many developing countries," said Wally McDow, the head of the conference. "Everyone has an interest in making these cities work."

Each week some 1 million people are added in the world's already overcrowded cities, the UN says.

Al-Faran leader killed in blast

SRINAGAR (India), Feb 17: A guerrilla group, accused by India of involvement in the kidnapping of four Western hostages, said today its fled commander was killed in an accidental mine blast on Friday, reports Reuter.

Kashmir's Harkat-ul-Ansar group denies any role in the seizure of the Western hostages in July last year.

Javid Ahmad, also known as Sikender, "died while experimenting with a land-mine in a house in Aashpora village in southern district of Kashmir," a Harkat statement said.

Police said four militants, apparently including Javid Ahmad, were killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) he was handling went off in a private house.

Police did not identify those killed in the blast but one senior official said: "Four militants were blown into pieces when an IED exploded in a house in Anantnag district."

Indian officials say the group has links with the little-known Al Faran militants holding two Britons, a German and an American tourist.

Indian officials say the southern Kashmir region where Ahmad was killed is a stronghold of Al Faran and Harkat-ul-Ansar groups.



Eid Greetings

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