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Fire takes Russian TV tower

Firefighters have difficulty in calming flames

MOSCOW (AP) — Fire engulfed the Ostankino television tower, the world's second-tallest freestanding structure, trapping four people in an elevator and knocking out most TV channels in the Russian capital Sunday.

Firefighters have had trouble fighting the fire, which started about 1,520 feet above ground, due to the difficulty of hauling equipment, including chemical fire extinguishers, up so many flights of stairs. The tower's spire is narrow at that point and the cramped quarters hampered movement.

Dozens of tired, smoke-stained firefighters in heavy rubber coats sat on the grass around the tower in northern Moscow late Sunday. Scores of fire engines and ambulances were parked at the bottom of the tower, which was lit by at least three searchlights, as officials tried to figure out a way to fight the blaze.

Yellow flames licked from the glassed-in platform as darkness fell

on the city. Thousands of people thronged to the base of the tower, gathering in a carnival atmosphere, drinking beer, laughing and a few dancing to transistor radios before they were pushed back by police.

Rescuers battled to locate the stuck elevator where three firefight-

ers and a female elevator operator were trapped about 860 feet above ground, said Nikolai Sarychev, a department spokesman at the scene.

The 1,771-foot futuristic tower, shaped like a giant needle, is a popular tourist attraction. It has an observation deck and restaurant about a third of the way up. The fire started well above that level, and officials said all visitors were evacuated.

Sarychev said no one so far has been killed or injured in the blaze. The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but initial reports said it apparently was started by a short-circuit in equipment belonging to a paging company.

The fire began at about 3:30 p.m. By midnight, flames and smoke billowed out of much of the tower, which looms over a large park, and a plume of smoke towered over the city.

A huge helicopter capable of dropping water from a giant bucket was brought to the scene but not immediately deployed.



Excavation site shows new syphilis theory

LONDON (AP) — Recent excavations at a medieval friary in Northern England add weight to the theory that syphilis did not come to Europe from the New World.

Skeletons excavated at Hull, dated to between 1300 and 1450, had clear signs of syphilis, said Anthea Boylston, a paleopathologist and leader of an archaeological team from University of Bradford in north England that conducted the dig. Several other skeletons also showed signs of the disease, she said.

"The disease, which takes some 20 years before it begins to leave its mark on the bone, was quite advanced at the time of death."

— David Evans
excavation director

Scientists long have argued about whether syphilis was brought to the Americas by European explorers, transmitted the other way around, or arose independently in each region. Skeletons studied earlier in Europe have suggested that the disease was present before Christopher Columbus returned from his first voyage.

Europeans seemed to become aware of the disease after 1500, but some researchers believe that syphilis may have been confused with leprosy in earlier times.

Syphilis starts out as sores, develops into a rash, fever and fatigue, and years after initial infection, may develop into severe complications of the heart and brain.

"This discovery changes our views about the history of syphilis," Boylston said. "There had been a couple of skeletons around the country with signs of syphilis that could have predated Columbus, but the interesting thing about this burial site is there are cases of the disease in many individuals, not just one or two," she said.

"That makes us think that syphilis was present in medieval England."

David Evans, who directed excavations at the Augustinian friary, dated the skeletons somewhat later — between 1450 and 1475 — based on stratification.

Four skeletons showed signs of the disease, Evans said in an article in the June edition of *British Archaeology*.

"The disease, which takes some 20 years before it begins to leave its mark on the bone, was quite advanced at the time of death," Evans wrote. "These victims had contracted syphilis long before the return of Columbus and his ships from the New World — traditionally regarded as the time when 'the Great Pox' was introduced into Europe."

Donald J. Ortner, curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., said Monday that the discoveries at Hull help to clarify some issues regarding the biological origin of the disease.

"I think a very plausible case can be made for it being syphilis," said Ortner, who said it also was possible it may have been yaws or bejel, related diseases that are not spread by sexual contact.

2 million attend youth day

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope John Paul II basked Sunday in the success of the church's latest World Youth Day, lauding the "joyous and peaceful" young pilgrims who took part.

The six-day gathering peaked Aug. 19-20. An estimated 2 million pilgrims camped overnight outside Rome to pray and celebrate Mass with John Paul — one of Europe's biggest youth assemblies ever.

"Their great numbers made a vivid impression on all," John Paul said Sunday, speaking to faithful gathered in the courtyard of his summer retreat at Castel Gandolfo outside Rome.

"Joyous, peaceful young people, ready to smile and say hello, respectful of the city and of its culture," the pope said. For the pilgrims, he said, the event was "only the first step in the path that must be followed."

The young people far outnumbered the vacation-time population of Rome.

The city managed the throng with few reported problems. The gravest was a subway escalator that bucked under the weight of young pilgrims, throwing and injuring several.

John Paul started the World Youth Day tradition in 1984. The largest gathering was in the Philippines in 1995, when 4 million young people attended.

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