



Top Stories

Cypriot plane with 121 on board crashes in Greece, no passengers survive



A Helios B737 carrying 115 passengers and 6 crew has crashed

into a mountain at about 0920 UTC near Grammatikos on the island of Euboea, 40 kilometres north of Athens, killing everyone on board.

Mother's plea to the president gains widespread attention



A mother's determined plea to the president for him to explain why he sent her son to die has stirred emotions and national attention.

Featured story

Israeli greenhouses to be preserved after Gaza pullout



A last minute deal reached Saturday dictates that about 1,000 Israeli settler greenhouses located in the Gaza strip will not be dismantled after Monday's pullout.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Cindy Sheehan, a grieving mother of a fallen soldier in Iraq, demands answers from the U.S. president George W. Bush, as to "What noble cause" her son died for, and gains national attention.
- Kurmanbek Bakiyev has been sworn in as Kyrgyzstan's new president after winning nearly 90 percent of the vote last month in an election to find a successor to President Askar Akayev, who was ousted during protests in March.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Thirty bodies are found in a mass grave south of Baghdad after the interrogation of Iraqi insurgents captured in a raid yesterday.
- Time magazine cites United States military intelligence documents that Iranian-backed Iraqi insurgent network, led by Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani, had introduced bomb design based on Iranian-backed Lebanese militia Hizbollah plans in last eight months.
- U.S. forces in Iraq raid a warehouse in Mosul. They uncover a suspected chemical weapons factory.
- Helios Airways Flight 522 en route from Larnaca, Cyprus via Athens, Greece to Prague, Czech Republic crashes near Athens, with at least 121 onboard. Observations from Greek fighter aircraft and text messages from the aircraft indicate a decompression problem.
- Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda has been charged with sedition after a radio debate speculating on the death of Sudan's vice-president John Garang.
- Liberian football hero George Weah has been given the go-ahead to contest the country's presidency. Liberia's election commission dismissed a complaint that his French citizenship barred him from standing.

Mother's plea to the president gains widespread attention



Cindy Sheehan, the grieving mother of a fallen soldier in Iraq, has gained national attention for her efforts to demand the

President of the United States to speak with her personally. "What I want to ask is, 'What noble cause did my son die for?' And if he says that it was to get rid of Saddam or liberate the Iraqi people, I'm not going to buy it." Sheehan told Salon.com reporters. Prompted by the president asserting that Americans in Iraq have died for a 'noble cause', Sheehan has been camping near Bush's Texas ranch for the past week to demand a private conversation with the President. "I don't want comfort," she told Cox Newspapers, "I want the truth."

Mr. Bush said he was aware of the pleas of the grieving mothers, "But whether it be here or in Washington or anywhere else, there's somebody who has got something to say to the President, that's part of the job. And I think it's important for me to be thoughtful and sensitive to those who have got something to say. But I think it's also important for me to go on with my life, to keep a balanced life."

Cindy has been joined in Crawford by hundreds of mothers of fallen soldiers, who are camping out with her and joining her in asking "for the truth" about why their sons had to die. Rallies of support are also taking place and being scheduled across the nation, and contributions from citizens across the world are flowing into the "Peace House", a nearby cottage providing shelter and support for the mothers.

Casey's grandparents and other members of her extended family issued a statement emailed to the Drudge Report website, which states their disagreement with the actions and statements that Sheehan has made and accuses her of using her son's death to promote a personal agenda: *The Sheehan Family lost our beloved Casey in the Iraq War and we have been silently, respectfully grieving. We do not agree with the political motivations and publicity tactics of Cindy Sheehan. She now appears to be promoting her own personal agenda and notoriety at the the expense of her son's good name and reputation. The rest of the Sheehan Family supports the troops, our*

country, and our President, silently, with prayer and respect.

*Sincerely,
Casey Sheehan's grandparents, aunts,
uncles and numerous cousins.*

Sheehan has responded by saying that political views within her extended family have always been diverse, but she is happy that her husband and children share her views and are supporting her efforts. She says her husband Pat, couldn't bear having Casey's things at home and put most of them in storage. "We grieved in totally different ways. He wanted to grieve by distracting himself. I wanted to immerse myself." Sheehan says that she wants to know what "noble cause" her son died for.

Sheehan and her husband were part of a group that met with the President following her son's death last year; a meeting that President Bush began with what she thought was an insultingly insensitive greeting; "Who we'll gonna honor today." Sheehan says she had mixed feelings about Bush's demeanor at the meeting, but she kept quiet. When more information came out about the planning for the war, however, she started to feel utterly betrayed. "I want the kind of meeting that holds him accountable for the words he's actually said.", Sheehan told TIME magazine reporters.

Controversial cancer test gains support

Some cancer specialists have stepped up calls for smokers and ex-smokers to undergo advanced screening for lung cancer. They reacted to the recent deaths of Peter Jennings and Barbara Bel Geddes and the disclosure that Dana Reeve has lung cancer by urging people to have their lungs screened with special helical CT chest scans.

Because health insurance plans do not cover such screening, anxious patients who can afford it are paying about \$300 for the test out of pocket. The American Cancer Society discourages using the advanced CT scan technique for screening because doctors do not yet know how to interpret findings of small lesions. A helical scan can show lumps as small as 2 millimetres in diameter, but doctors do not know what to make of such lesions. The tumors may not actually be cancerous, and even small cancers may spontaneously remit or may

grow so slowly that surgery, radiation or chemotherapy would do far more harm than good. Preliminary results of a large ongoing study, expected within a year, may provide tentative guidelines on when to perform a biopsy and when CT screening would be worthwhile.

Smoking one pack of cigarettes daily for 20 years or more brings a 50 percent chance of dying from lung cancer. For any smoker, 10 years of abstinence cuts the risk in half. Women are more vulnerable than men even if they don't smoke. Environmental pollutants work with smoking to increase risk. People with affected parents or siblings are 2–3 times more likely to fall ill with lung cancer. A malignant tumor can grow silently for years. In the United States by the time it is recognized a lung cancer has spread in 3 out of 4 patients. Routine chest X-ray screening does not improve survival rate. Although patients treated after their lung cancer has shown up in a highly sensitive helical (also called "spiral") CT scan are much more likely to survive, this may only be because small cancers grow very slowly or would cause no trouble even without treatment.

On the other hand, some cancer experts already strongly support performing the screening. They point out that prompt treatment of lung cancer clearly improves prognosis and that an equivocal scan can be repeated after some months to see if a lesion has enlarged. Furthermore, a decision not to wait for conclusive science but to undergo a helical scan would be supported by consideration of a patient's age, family history, history of smoking and other risk factors. Annual scanning has been recommended for people over age 50 who have smoked 1 pack daily for 30 years or 2 packs for 15 and who also have a known lung condition.

David Lange, former New Zealand prime minister, dies at 63

New Zealanders woke up Sunday to learn of the death of one of its most notable citizens. David Lange was Prime Minister for just five years in the mid-1980s, but his administration left an indelible mark on the nation economically and socially, and also reoriented its foreign policy.

Lange, 63, died of renal failure at 10 p.m.

on August 13, a day after his family decided to discontinue artificial life support. He had fought a long battle with multiple ailments. In 2002, he was diagnosed with amyloidosis, a rare and incurable blood disorder. Lange defied his doctors' initial predictions that he had only four months to live, and following a round of chemotherapy, appeared to rally for a time, but in mid-2005 his condition took a sudden turn for the worse. He entered hospital in Auckland in mid July, 2005, to undergo nightly peritoneal dialysis and battled end-stage kidney failure. On August 2, he had his lower-right leg amputated without a general anaesthetic, as a result of diabetes complications.

His declining health resulted in the publication of his memoir *My Life* being brought forward to August 8. He lived to see this happen and gave his last interview on TV3 to John Campbell the same day.

Lange was first elected to the New Zealand Parliament in a byelection in 1977. As a lawyer, he had built up a personal rapport with his Mangere constituency by representing poor clients free of charge. In less than three years, he was elected Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, and, after an initial failed bid for the leadership in 1980, was chosen to replace Bill Rowling as the party leader in 1983. He went on to lead the party to a landslide victory in the general election held on 14 July, 1984, ousting the longtime Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon.

Despite his nominal socialism, he initiated sweeping reforms to deregulate the economy and boost private enterprise, and his was regarded as a government of the left only in name. In foreign policy, however, Lange remained somewhat further to the left: he banned nuclear-armed and powered warships from entering New Zealand's ports, straining a once-close relationship with the United States. In 1985 he took part in a widely-televised Oxford Union debate [1], arguing for the proposition that "nuclear weapons are morally indefensible", in opposition to U.S. televangelist Jerry Falwell.

Lange won the 1987 election by an even greater margin than in 1984, but internal divisions within the Labour Party were weakening his position. Many rank and file members of the party felt that the

government's economic reforms were a betrayal of Labour's socialist ideology. Attempting to appease the left, Lange fired his right-wing Finance Minister, Roger Douglas, late in 1988. When the party caucus, which under Labour Party rules chooses the cabinet, insisted on his reinstatement to the cabinet in mid-1989, Lange resigned on 8 August, 1989.

Lange was widely regarded as a larger-than-life figure, who was never far from controversy. Once regarded as a fervent Methodist, Lange weathered a storm in 1990 after his decision to leave his first wife, Naomi, and move in with Margaret Pope, whom he later married. In 1996, Lange and Pope had a daughter, Edith; Lange, whose health was already in decline, said that his fondest hope was to see Edith grow up. Responding to questions about whether he was afraid of being "an old dad," he replied, "No ... but I'm afraid of being a dead dad." He said in another interview the same year, on announcing his final retirement from politics, that he hoped to spend more time with his family, to concentrate on lecturing and writing, "and to grow old." This last wish did not materialize.

Lange was remembered for his intelligence, his wit, and his loud booming voice. Supporters and opponents alike spoke warmly of Lange. Whether they agreed with his policies or not, they described him as a deeply compassionate man who would be sadly missed.

Cypriot plane with 121 on board crashes in Greece



File photo of the crashed Helios Airways Boeing 737 © airliners.gr/Elliott Kefalas

A Helios airliner (Boeing 737, flight HCY 522) with 115 passengers and 6 crew onboard has crashed into a mountain at

09:04 UTC (12:04 p.m. EEST) near Grammatiko, 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Athens, while approaching the capital's airport. All on board perished. The plane was travelling from Larnaca, in the southeast of Cyprus (Greek:Κυπρος, Κύπρος) and scheduled to arrive in Prague after a stop in Athens.

In-flight events

Immediately after take-off, the pilots reported a problem with the air conditioning system of the aircraft. As the plane approached Athens, all communication abruptly ceased, and the plane never issued a mayday distress signal. A passenger sent a text message that read: "The pilot has turned blue [in the face]. [F]arewell we're freezing." Two Greek F-16 military aircraft were assigned to observe the plane. The pilots of the F-16s noted that one airliner pilot appeared to be unconscious and the other was not in the cockpit.

During a second sighting, two persons had been seen in the cockpit trying to gain control of the aircraft, but the F-16 pilots could not clarify if these persons were members of the crew.

The F-16s accompanied the airliner until it crashed.

Possible malfunctions and causes

The Greek F-16 pilot's saw at least one of the aircraft's pilots may have become unconscious before the crash, causing control of the plane to be lost. The emergency oxygen masks were also reported to have dropped.

It is speculated that the air-supply system of the aircraft may have failed, causing a sudden decompression of air within the cockpit. This malfunction can cause a steep drop in air temperature. The New York Times described an incident in 2004 where a Helios flight made an emergency landing after failure of the ventilation system and 3 passengers were hospitalized. A similar decompression occurred onboard Payne Stewart's Learjet in 1999, which crashed with no survivors.

Greek media reports that the crashed plane had several problems with its oxygen supply or pressurization system and that the airline ignored those malfunctions. The crashed plane had suffered a cabin pressure loss

during a flight from Warsaw to Larnaca on December 20, 2004, with three passengers needing medical treatment afterwards.

An airline spokesman insisted that the plane was airworthy when it took off.

Passengers

A precise passenger list is currently being compiled by officials in Cyprus. Of the 115 passengers, 48 were children, many of whom were returning from a holiday. Czech Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek has said that there were probably no Czech citizens on the flight. Four 'foreigners' (non-Greeks) are amongst the passenger list according to CNA. Helios Airlines was unable to supply a complete passenger list, having only first initials and surnames available for investigators.

Details on the passengers continue to develop and emerge throughout the day.

Post-crash events

After the crash, a fire started around the airliner. It was extinguished by firefighters after 2 hours. The fire burned most of the bodies that are now being collected by special firefighter units and transferred to the city of Shisto, near Athens. Meanwhile, the two F-16 pilots were transferred to Ministry of Defense to give their report.

The flight data recorder has been recovered, however search for the cockpit voice recorder will resume again at dawn.

Reactions from Helios Airways

Helios has informed the relatives of the victims; however, the company has been met with criticism for failing to release the passenger list quickly.

Helios Airways released a statement on their website today, stating, "Our thoughts are with the families of those on board at this difficult time."

An emergency telephone number has been setup in Nicosia, Cyprus. It can be contacted at 70003737, 22 – 446146.

Official reactions

The Cypriot government has declared three days of national mourning and ordered flags to be lowered on half-mast.

Timeline

09:00 (06:00 UTC) Scheduled departure time.
 09:07 (06:07 UTC) Airplane takes off from Larnaka airport.
 10:30 (07:30 UTC) Flight fails to establish contact with the Eleftherios Venizelos Airport
 10:37 (07:37 UTC) Last contact with Larnaka airport reporting problem.
 10:45 (07:45 UTC) Scheduled arrival time in Athens.
 10:55 (07:55 UTC) The Hellenic Armed Forces Joint Chief of Staff, Admiral Panagiotis Chinofotis orders military planes to establish visual contact with the aircraft.
 11:05 (08:05 UTC) Two F-16 fighter planes take off from Néa Anghialos Air Base, Greece.
 11:18 (08:18 UTC) Fighter pilots note co-pilot slumped over the aircraft's instrument panel.
 12:04 (09:04 UTC) Aircraft crashes near Grammatiko, having run out of fuel.
 13:10 (11:10 UTC) Scheduled arrival time in Prague.

Cyprus and Greece are UTC+3, Czech Republic is UTC+2.

About Helios Airways

Helios Airways is a subsidiary of Libra Holidays Group of Limassol, Cyprus and is registered in Cyprus. Founded in 1999 as Cyprus' first private airline, Helios' fleet (other than the downed plane) consists of 3 Boeing 737 jets and an Airbus A319. Helios offers flights between Cyprus and London, Athens, Sofia, Warsaw, Dublin and Strasbourg.

Paula Abdul cleared of sex scandal after 'American Idol' inquiry

Executives of the U.S. Fox network said Friday that singer Paula Abdul was cleared of any wrongdoing in regard to charges that she had an improper relationship with former American Idol contestant Corey Clark. The network cleared her to return to the show for its fifth season.

American Idol has topped network television ratings as the most-watched program in the U.S. for the past three years. Abdul is one of the three judges of the talent/variety program, where she is popularly referred to as the "nice one" by contestants.

Fox reportedly hired a former federal prosecutor to lead an investigation into whether Abdul compromised the integrity of its flagship series. After an investigation of more than three months, interviewing 43 people and looking over documents supplied by both Abdul and Clark, the investigation showed no proof that Abdul had a sexual relationship with Clark.

Clark was booted from the second season of Idol after it was discovered he hid a previous domestic violence arrest record from producers. Two years later, he told reporters that he had been involved in a secret romantic relationship with Abdul, which would have been a violation of the show's rules and Abdul's employment contract.

"I'm grateful this ordeal is over, and I'm so looking forward to getting back to the job I love," Abdul said in an Associated Press interview after the decision was announced to keep her on the show.

TSA cuts US airport security screening personnel

U.S. airline passengers may need to brace for longer lines at security screening checkpoints as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced plans to reduce the number of security screeners in US airports. The cutbacks come despite an increased TSA budget for 2006 over 2005 and an overall increase in airport traffic.

The Portland, Oregon and Medford, Oregon airports were among the hardest-hit by cutbacks, with Portland seeing a 30% decline in security screeners.

Travellers are advised to check with the TSA or the airport to plan for delays at check-in.

Kurmanbek Bakiev sworn in as president of Kyrgyzstan

Kurmanbek Bakiev has been sworn in as the president of Kyrgyzstan after winning the elections one month ago with an 89% majority.

Following the exile of the previous president, Askar Akayev, Bakiev was appointed acting president until elections were held.

Mr Bakiev's main competitor in the elections was Felix Kulov. They agreed upon a power-sharing pact, meaning that Mr Kulov would become Prime Minister if Mr Bakiev became president.

Bakiev took his oath of office after a military parade, in front of dignitaries in Bishkek's central square.

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Today in History

- 1385 - Castilians were defeated by Portuguese at the Battle of Aljubarrota.
- 1842 - Seminole Indians were forced from Florida to Oklahoma, ending the Second Seminole War.
- 1941 - Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter.
- 1980 - Lech Wałęsa and colleagues at Gdańsk Shipyard began strike actions, which subsequently led to the founding of the Solidarity movement in Poland.
- 2003 - Widescale power blackout occurred in the northeast United States and in central Canada.
- August 15 is Independence Day for Pakistan (1947)

Quote of the Day

"There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect." ~ G. K. Chesterton

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