



Top Stories

Al-Jazeera airs new video of Ayman al-Zawahri

Video release by an Arabic-language news site confirms the survival of a top al-Qaeda member from an air strike where he was allegedly the target.

Aboriginal Sovereignty Day Declared

Representatives of Australian Aboriginal Sovereign Nations at a gathering in Canberra, have declared that the 26th of January would be known as Aboriginal Sovereignty Day.

Featured story

Congressional staff actions prompt Wikipedia investigation

Edits by Massachusetts congressman Marty Meehan's staff on his Wikipedia article spurred a Lowell Sun story and a subsequent Wikipedia investigation of all Internet addresses assigned to the Congress of the United States.

Wikipedia Current Events

- China and Russia agree to refer Iran to the United Nations Security Council for its nuclear program in March of 2006.
- In the United Kingdom, the High Court has ordered 10 Internet service providers to hand over the details of 150 UK customers accused of illegally sharing software.

Fatah assaults European Union office

In a reaction to the ongoing controversy over the September publication of cartoons by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, gunmen from the the Fatah assaulted a European Union (EU) office in the Gaza Strip on Monday, prompting Denmark to warn citizens to avoid travel to Saudi Arabia.

The Danish newspaper issued an apology to Arab countries later Monday through Petra, a Jordanian news agency, for publishing the series of 12 cartoon depictions of the prophet Mohammad that characterized him as a sort of terrorist.

The EU office was assaulted in an ordeal that lasted approximately 30 minutes. No-one was reported injured and no shots were fired. The gunmen, a group of approximately 15 masked men armed with anti-tank launchers, automatic weapons, and hand grenades, burst into the office of the international observers and then withdrew several minutes later, remaining outside to keep the offices closed.

The gunmen demanded apologies from both Denmark and from Norway, where the cartoons were republished this month, threatening that citizens of those countries would be prevented from entering the Gaza Strip.

First Iraqi case of Avian Flu reported

The first case of Avian Flu in Iraq was announced today by the country's Health Minister, Abdel Mutalib Mohammed. The preliminary result was reportedly from a United States military laboratory in Cairo; the World Health Organisation are expected to seek confirmation of this from a UK laboratory.

The victim was Shangen Abdul Qader, a fifteen year old girl from the northern Kurdish village of Raniya. Her suspected H5N1 infection killed her on January 17. The death of the girl's uncle is also believed to be under investigation due to him having symptoms that may indicate flu.

The area of Iraq where the suspected deaths occurred borders Turkey where there have been twelve confirmed cases of which four resulted in death. Turkey's last reported victim, Fatma Ozcan, was also aged fifteen.

Accident in Jacksonville, Florida, releases low-radioactive gas

WTLV news channel in Florida reports an explosion that released radioactive materials at Unison Industries, located at 7575 Baymeadows Way. One person was injured, according to the report.

Unison spokesperson Wayne Moles said "We believe one cylinder of gas may have exploded". The cylinder was filled with krypton gas according to AP. Firefighters say at

least forty people became exposed to the low-level radiation. All are undergoing decontamination measures.

Unison manufactures aviation equipment and military applications like ignition generators for Tomahawk cruise missiles.

SAG Awards handed out

ABC remained a Screen Actors Guild (SAG) award winning powerhouse, with *LOST* and *Desperate Housewives* winning Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in their respective categories. Keifer Sutherland (24) and Sandra Oh (*Grey's Anatomy*) won for the performances in Drama Series, and Sean Hayes (*Will and Grace*) and Felicity Huffman (*Desperate Housewives*) were honoured for their Comedy Series performances. Paul Newman won Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Movie or Miniseries, for his portrayal of Max Roby in HBO's *Empire Falls*, while S. Epatha Merkerson role of Rachel "Nanny" Crosby in *Lackawanna Blues* took the Female Actor.

The SAG selects a random portion of their professional members each year, to vote on each award category. The 12th annual awards ceremony for the 2005 season was hosted on Sunday.

William Shatner, who was nominated that night for his role in *Boston Legal*, introduced a "cinematic salute" to SAG members who perform in television advertisements. Shatner himself is a frequent commercial actor, known for appearing in Priceline.com commercials.

After a filmed tribute, actress

Jamie Lee Curtis presented Shirley Temple Black with the Screen Actors Guild Awards 42nd Annual Life Achievement Award.

THEATRICAL MOTION PICTURES

Outstanding Performance by a

Male Actor in a Leading Role:

Philip Seymour Hoffman as

Truman Capote / *CAPOTE*

(UA/Sony Pictures Classics)

Outstanding Performance by a

Female Actor in a Leading Role:

Reese Witherspoon as June

Carter/ *WALK THE LINE* (20th

Century Fox)

Outstanding Performance by a

Male Actor in a Supporting Role:

Paul Giamatti (Joe Gould) /

CINDERELLA MAN (Universal

Pictures)

Outstanding Performance by a

Female Actor in a Supporting Role:

Rachel Weisz as Tessa Quayle /

THE CONSTANT GARDENER (Focus

Features)

Outstanding Performance by a

Cast in a Motion Picture: *CRASH*

(Lionsgate)

Teacher confesses to having sex with student

A South Australian teacher has confessed to having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old student.

24-year-old Bridget Mary Nolan pleaded guilty to three charges of unlawful sexual intercourse with her male student. Facing a maximum of seven years imprisonment for each charge, Nolan pleaded with the Adelaide District Court to show leniency, claiming that she had been vulnerable, lonely and depressed because her boyfriend had left her for another woman.

Nolan, a music teacher, told the court she invited the boy to her house to discuss a kiss which had occurred between the pair on a

school camp. The pair then had sex on three occasions, allegedly at the boy's instigation. Nolan claims she engaged in the relationship out of fear that the boy would retaliate and report her, causing her to lose her job.

Nolan's lawyer, Joana Fuller, told the court that Nolan was a secondary victim. "There's more than one victim (here), in what is clearly a sorry tale. These offences occurred not, as is often the case, as a result of a deliberate, premeditated exploitation of a student-teacher relationship. (Nolan) was lonely, she was depressed, she was heartbroken. She was utterly vulnerable at the time these offences were committed," Fuller said.

The boy's mother told the court the relationship had deeply affected her son. She said that his grades had dropped and that he has lost friends and been subjected to torment, harassment and humiliation by other students. "I will never forgive you for causing my beautiful son so much hurt and humiliation," she told Nolan.

The prosecutor urged the court not to suspend Nolan's sentence, saying that she had repeatedly abused her position of trust.

Judge Gordon Barrett adjourned the case for sentencing in March.

Congressional staff actions prompt Wikipedia investigation

Edits by Massachusetts congressman Marty Meehan's staff on his Wikipedia article spurred a Lowell Sun story and a subsequent Wikipedia investigation of all Internet addresses assigned to the Congress of the United States.

While edits from the Capitol are

not generally news, the biographical article for Mr. Meehan was carefully edited, removing negative comments while expanding with content from the congressman's political flyer. The IP address which made these edits has an extensive editing history on Wikipedia, and has been repeatedly blocked in past months for article vandalism and violation of Wikipedia policies (Wikipedia's log of 143.231.249.141 being blocked from editing).

Wikipedia administrators, alerted to the Marty Meehan article edits, realized that many edits to politically-sensitive articles had been made from IP addresses assigned to the US Capitol building, and have begun an investigation into all edits from such addresses.

Editing history

Editing from U.S. House computers

At the center of the investigation are edits by the IP address 143.231.249.141 which is the proxy through which most of the U.S. House Internet traffic passes. Jon Brandt, spokesman for the Committee on House Administration confirmed House ownership of the IP [1]. An aide for Rep. Meehan made two edits to the article on Meehan's biography. The first was on July 18, 2005 and replaced the article with his official biography, which was biased towards Meehan. A later edit on December 27, 2005 removed text referring to Mr. Meehan's pledge to only run four terms, or 8 years.

Marty Meehan

The text that was removed said "He also ran on a platform of term limits. However, after serving four terms as US Congressman, the number of terms he pledged that

he and no other congressman should serve out, he has since gone back on his word and now is adamantly [sic] against the idea of term limits for Congressmen."

The text was replaced with: "His fiscally responsible voting record since then has earned him praise from citizen watchdog groups."

Congressman Meehan has served 7 terms as Representative of his home state of Massachusetts.

Most of the edits from Capitol Hill IPs have not been harmful edits. In fact it would be fair to say the vast majority of edits were neutral, correcting factual, spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. A sampling of both positive and harmful edits to politically-related articles are included here.

The communications director for Rep. Joe Wilson took a different approach to editing Rep. Wilson's article. She contacted Wikipedia founder Jimbo Wales, who advised that she supply a biography on the Wikipedia article's discussion page, rather than edit the article directly, for other Wikipedia editors to check and to incorporate into the article itself. After she added the official bio to Wilson's discussion page, Wikipedia editors used it and several other sources to expand the article substantially.

Further investigation

Following the reports of the edits from the House IP address, a so-called checkuser (a check of confidential information to determine the accounts used by staffers coming from that ip) was performed to determine what users logged-in with an account edited from the House IP address, and the edits made by all of those users were checked as well. They

all showed little bias and no vandalism.

Editing from Senate computers

Unlike the U.S. House, computers from the U.S. Senate are assigned individual IP addresses. To identify possible vandals, the edit history for all senators was checked, and a list of 25 addresses was extracted. While some had good faith edits, others showed unacceptable behaviour.

The Entire 156.33.X.X netblock is for Senate use only

OrgName: U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms

NetRange: 156.33.0.0 - 156.33.255.255

Senator pages edited

The following is a partial list of U.S. Senator biographies on the English-language Wikipedia edited by Senate employees. Senator Conrad Burns' page was edited to remove negative comments as positive comments were added. Senator Norm Coleman's page was also edited to remove negative comments while positive comments were added. Senator Robert Byrd's page was vandalized. Senator Tom Harkin's criticism section was deleted, a major section on Israel & military removed

and later vandalized by a different IP

Senator Joe Biden's page had a major edit removing significant criticism

Sen Tom Coburn's page was vandalized more than once

Edits categorized by IP

While the identity of these IPs are not known, a small sample of edits

from Capitol IPs shows both helpful and harmful edits.

156.33.148.107

This IP has had extensive edits at Wikipedia, including:

Improving William Swain Lee article from a stub to a full-fledged article.

Expanded Michael Davidson article.

156.33.150.38

Removing negative elements from Corrine Brown bio -

156.33.43.214

Vandalized George W. Bush -

Vandalized Robert Byrd -

A complete list of all the Senatorial IPs that contributed to political articles can be found here.

Wikimedia Foundation and Wikipedia response

The attention of Wikipedia administrators was drawn to the pattern of edits to Wikipedia articles by Congressional staffers at 18:47 on January 29. In response, Wikipedia administrators began a systematic examination of all edits to articles made from IP addresses that have been assigned for use by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Administrators found several places where edits from U.S. Senate IP addresses had been to articles on Senators.

Following online discussions using IRC, Wikipedia administrator FireFox blocked the U.S. House of Representatives' Wikipedia editing privileges for one week while the issue is discussed. The block was lifted shortly thereafter by a disagreeing admin. [19]

While the Wikimedia Foundation has not yet issued a statement regarding this, Jimmy Wales was quoted by the AP discouraging the removal of facts. "You don't delete

it," Wales said. "If they wanted to put in their side of things, that would seem ethically relevant, rather than just omitting it."

Steve Kubby, co-author of California Proposition 215, grows dangerously ill in US custody

Steve Kubby has been extradited from Canada, and is in custody in Placer County, California Jail, pending a hearing on 31 January. He is a medical cannabis patient who relies on the drug to regulate the symptoms of malignant pheochromocytoma, a cancer of the adrenal gland which can cause the level of adrenaline in his system to fluctuate out of control. If left unregulated, this can result in sudden, fatal heart attack, stroke, pneumonia, and a variety of other conditions.[1]

Kubby was arrested on arrival at San Francisco International Airport on behalf of the Placer County Sheriff's Department, having exhausted his extradition appeals in Canada. [2] He was taken to San Mateo County Jail, pending transport to Placer County Jail. While at San Mateo County Jail, he was reportedly denied access to medication and sufficient bedding. On arrival at Placer County Jail, his blood pressure was dangerously high, and so was given Marinol, a THC synthetic.

Communication with Kubby is highly restricted. According to his wife, Michele, Kubby has been placed in solitary confinement, denied access several times to sufficient bedding to keep him warm, and denied access to the cannabis which, according to several experts on his universally fatal condition, has been solely responsible for keeping him alive for decades.[3] The Marinol he is being given partially mitigates his

symptoms, but does not completely control them. He now grows dangerously ill. [4]

Kubby was a co-author of California's Compassionate Use Act of 1996, also known as Proposition 215. He fled to Canada in 2001 to escape the possibility of incarceration for an extended period without access to cannabis, a possibility which, in both his and expert medical opinion, would certainly prove fatal. [5] As he shivers in a cold cell in the Sierra foothills, his fears are now being realized.

Two people charged over burning bodies in drums

A man and a woman have been charged with the murders of two people whose bodies were found burning in oil drums in the the Tomerong State Forest, about 210 kilometers south of Sydney on Sunday.

The bodies were found by New South Wales Rural Fire Service officers who were called to extinguish a small bushfire. The firefighters notified the local Nowra police who established several crime scenes in the area. The crime scenes are believed to include an area surrounding a burnt out vehicle believed to belong to the victims, a house where the murders are thought to have occurred, and areas in the State Forest.

27-year-old Stacey Lea-Caton voluntarily attended Nowra Police Station and told officers he had witnessed a man and woman being tied up in a house in Nowra and he feared they were about to be murdered by another man and woman.

Police then attended a property in Calymea Street, Nowra, where 36-

year-old Kim Leanne Snibson agreed to accompany them to the station for questioning.

Lea-Caton and Snibson have both been charged with two counts of murder and faced Nowra Local Court today.

Magistrate Doug Dick issued a suppression order on the identities of the victims, but refused Snibson's request for a suppression order on her identity to protect her children who attend a local school, saying the court processes must be transparent.

Lea-Caton appeared briefly in the court dock but Snibson refused and remained in the cells.

They did not apply for bail and both were remanded into custody to appear in court on April 10

Tarja Halonen wins the 2006 presidential election in Finland

Helsinki, Finland - The second round of presidential elections in Finland have concluded, with incumbent Tarja Halonen of left wing parties gaining 51,8% of the vote (with 100% of all votes tallied), and former finance minister, Sauli Niinistö of the national coalition party gaining 48,2%. Pre-election studies indicated a close match with both candidates gaining approximately 50% support in polls. Halonen got 53,9% of the advance votes, while Niinistö got 46,1%. Both candidates got close to 50% of election-day votes (January 29). The total turnout in the end was 77,2%, or 3,148,780 voters. These results are to be confirmed by Wednesday. In Comparison, Halonen won the second round against Esko Aho in the year 2000, with approximately the same percentage. Total turnout then was 80,2%.

Halonen failed to win an outright majority in the first round, resulting in a second round against Niinistö, the runner-up in the first round.

A major talking-point in the elections was the possibility of Finland becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Halonen upholds the current Finnish policy of non-alignment and a reliable, independent defensive force, but does not outrule the possibility of Finland becoming a member sometime in the future. Co-operation with NATO will continue and be expanded on, despite the fact that the majority of Finns oppose outright membership.

Halonen will be inaugurated on March 1 for her second term, becoming the 19th president of Finland.

Today in History

1606 - Guy Fawkes was executed for his involvement in the Gunpowder Plot against the English Parliament and King James I.

1747 - The first clinic specializing in the treatment of venereal diseases was opened.

1876 - The United States ordered all Native Americans to move into reservations.

1946 - In Yugoslavia, a new constitution established the six constituent republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

1961 - Aboard Mercury-Redstone 2, Ham the Chimp became the first higher primate to travel in outer space.

January 31 is Independence Day in Nauru (1968); 1st Muharram

1427 AH, Muslim New Year

Quote of the Day

"Everyone does magic all the time in different ways. 'Life' plus 'significance' = magic." ~ Grant Morrison

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
+1-202-742-5918
(outside the U.S.)

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543 Howard Street, 5th Floor
San Francisco, California, 94105, USA

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