



Top Stories

Space Shuttle Discovery successfully launches after a month of delays

NASA has successfully launched



Space Shuttle Discovery after over a month of delays. Discovery lifted off at 7:43 p.m. (EDT) from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in

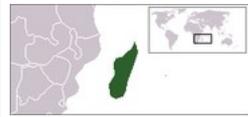
Florida in the United States after NASA declared the weather to be "100% go for launch".

Maldives to become the world's first carbon-neutral country

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Coup in Madagascar; opposition leader backs army

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Antananarivo today as the army of Madagascar forced armored vehicles into one of the country's many presidential palaces in an apparent military coup.

US Fed chairman Bernanke says recession could end this year

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said that the country's recession will "probably" end this year if the government is able to bolster the banking system.

Wikipedia Current Events

Mauricio Funes of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front wins El Salvador's presidential election.

•The Seattle Post-Intelligencer will publish its final edition in print on March 17.

•Former Antananarivo Mayor Andry Rajoelina demands that Madagascar's military arrest President Marc Ravalomanana, as Army soldiers seize a presidential palace in the capital.

•Josef Fritzl of Austria pleads guilty to charges of rape, incest, sequestration, and grievous bodily harm.

•Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif cancels the Pakistan Muslim League's proposed demonstration, following the impending reinstatement of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as Chief Justice.

Coup in Madagascar; opposition leader backs army

Gunfire, believed to be shots into the air by celebrating soldiers, was heard in Antananarivo today as the army of Madagascar forced armored vehicles into one of the country's many presidential palaces in an apparent military

coup. Madagascar President Marc Ravalomanana, whose I Love Madagascar party controls an overwhelming majority of seats in the National Assembly, was not in the palace and is said to be taking shelter in another palace six miles (10 km) from the site.

"The President of the Republic, the National Assembly and the Senate, and the government are removed from their duties," announced declaration signed by opposition leader Andry Rajoelina which also said new elections would be held within two years. Earlier in the day, Rajoelina, the former mayor of Antananarivo and head of the Tanora malaGasy Vonona movement, had called for President Ravalomanana to be arrested, rejecting the President's offer of a plebiscite on his rule. The occupation of the palace follows a long chain of events which includes Mr Rajoelina's January 31 declaration that he would "run all national affairs" of the country. Mr Rajoelina has been publicly supported in turn by the self-proclaimed chief of staff of the Army and it was unclear as of this writing whether he or the military were leading the coup, and Mr Rajoelina denied ordering the attack on the palace.

President Ravalomanana, in response, called for the people of the outskirts of the capital to "organise themselves to thwart all movements of mutinous troops towards the palace in order to protect the president and the palace" on his private radio

station.

The African Union, which has been urging both sides to come to the negotiating table during the several months of unrest which has led to the deaths of over one hundred Madagascans, condemned the attempted coup, urging the country to respect its constitution; that constitution bars Mr Rajoelina, who is 34, from the presidency for reasons of age.

Mr Rajoelina argues that under President Ravalomanana, freedoms in the country are being suppressed while large areas of land have been unfairly given over to foreign interests.

President Ravalomanana, meanwhile, has also accused Mr Rajoelina of being a puppet of former Madagascan president Didier Ratsiraka, whose refusal to leave power in 2001 after losing an election led to eight months of demonstrations.

The coup follows a number of legal rebuffs for Mr Rajoelina, who lost the mayorship after his January declaration of power and whose attempt to challenge the legitimacy of President Ravalomanana was rejected by the Madagascan Constitutional Court.

Search for survivors of Canadian helicopter crash ends, recovery mission focuses on victims

The search for the 16 missing people has been called off about 34 hours after the Sikorsky S92 helicopter crashed in the Atlantic Ocean on Friday. The helicopter is lying on its side at a depth of 178 metres approximately 30 miles (48 kilometres) off the Newfoundland shoreline, about 55 miles (88 kilometres) south-east of St. John's, Newfoundland and

Labrador

Of the original 18 people on board, Robert Decker is in critical condition in hospital and the body of Allison Maher had been recovered. Decker is the only survivor of the crash.

The remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) used to search the wreckage, have videotaped ten to thirteen of the missing within the helicopter. At first recovery crews were hoping to haul the main body of the helicopter and its fuselage up intact, but because of the helicopter's condition, the Transportation Safety Board will first retrieve the bodies from within the tangled metal.

Weather permitting, the recovery of the helicopter should be completed by the end of today.

US Fed chairman Bernanke says recession could end this year

In a rare television interview, the chairman of the United States Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, said that the country's recession will "probably" end this year if the government is able to bolster the banking system.

Speaking on the CBS network "60 Minutes", Bernanke said that recent efforts by the government probably avoided a depression similar to the one that occurred in the 1930s. He also said that he didn't expect any of the US's largest banks to fail. However, he stressed that the prospects of ending the economic downturn in 2009 probably relied on getting the financial markets working normally and making the banks to lend more freely again.

"We've seen some progress in the financial markets, absolutely. But

until we get that stabilized and working normally, we're not going to see recovery. But we do have a plan. We're working on it. And, I do think that we will get it stabilized, and we'll see the recession coming to an end probably this year," he said.

Bernanke noted that he expects the unemployment rate will continue rising above the current 25-year high of 8.1% even if the government is able to end the 15-month recession.

The chairman said that the largest possible danger now was the absence of "political will" to fix the economy.

Bernanke is the first incumbent Federal Reserve chairman to take a television interview for two decades. The chairman said that he decided to do so because it was an "extraordinary time" for the US, and it gave him an opportunity to speak directly to the public.

Maldives to become the world's first carbon-neutral country March 15

Mohamed Nasheed, the leader of the Maldives, has announced that the country will become carbon-neutral within a decade by completely switching to renewable energy sources.

"We aim to become carbon-neutral in a decade," he said.

"Climate change threatens us all. Countries need to pull together to de-carbonize the world economy. We know cutting greenhouse gas emissions is possible and the Maldives is willing to play its part," Nasheed said, adding that he hopes his plan will serve as a blueprint for other countries.

"We understand more than

perhaps anyone what would happen to us if we didn't do anything about it or if the rest of the world doesn't find the imagination to confront this problem," Nasheed told Newshour in a telephone interview from the Maldives' capital of Male.

"So basically, we don't want to sit around and blame others, but we want to do whatever we can, and hopefully, if we can become carbon-neutral, and when we come up with the plan, we hope that these plans also will serve as a blueprint for other nations to follow. We think we can do it, we feel that everyone should be engaged in it, and we don't think that this is an issue that should be taken lightly."

Nasheed's plan calls for half of a square kilometre (0.19 square miles) of solar panels and 155 wind turbines, each generating 1.5 megawatts. The electricity will power vehicles as well. Boats and automobiles with gasoline engines would be slowly replaced with electric versions.

The plan will cost an estimated US\$1.1 billion. The economy of the Maldives, reliant mainly on tourism and fishing, is worth \$800 million a year.**HAVE YOUR SAY**

What do you think of this plan? Are the Maldives doing the right thing?

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Environmentalist Mark Lynas said that the plan could pay for itself in a decade, due to savings on oil imports. "It's going to cost a lot of money but it will also save a lot of money from not having to import oil," Lynas said.

"The point of doing it is that it is something the Maldives can lead

the world in. No rich country has the excuse that it is too expensive and we can't do anything," Lynas said to the news agency Reuters.

"The Maldives could just give up. Its people could declare themselves climate change refugees and ask for sanctuary elsewhere. But the new government is taking a stand and asked us to give them a plan for a near zero-carbon economy," said Chris Goodall, the British climate change expert who led the development of the carbon-neutral plan. "We don't want to pretend that this plan is going to be easy to implement. There will be hiccups, and electricity supply will occasionally be disrupted. But we think that building a near-zero-carbon Maldives is a realistic challenge. Get it right and we will show the apathetic developed world that action is possible, and at reasonable cost."

The Maldives are located in the Indian ocean and are among the lowest-lying islands on the planet, with none of them rising more than six feet (1.8 metres) above sea level, making them particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels associated with global warming.

Space Shuttle Discovery successfully launches after a month of delays

NASA has successfully launched Space Shuttle Discovery after over a month of delays. Discovery lifted off at 7:43 p.m. (EDT) from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida in the United States after NASA declared the weather to be "100% go for launch".

"The clouds broke up and that's why we were go for launch," stated mission control on NASA TV. A crystal clear blue sky could be seen in Discovery's background

about 40 minutes before launch. NASA earlier had made jokes about a small black bat attached to the rear of the external fuel tank delaying launch, but NASA assured it would not be a problem for launch. NASA also said that there was a bat on STS-72 which managed to fly away just before the shuttle launched.

The current scheduled mission, STS-119, is set to fly the Integrated Truss Structure segment ("S" for starboard, the right side of the station, and "6" for its place at the very end of the starboard truss) and install the final set of power-generating solar arrays to the International Space Station. The arrays consist of two 115-foot-long arrays, for a total wing span of 240 feet, including the equipment that connects the two halves and allows them to twist as they track the sun. Altogether, the four sets of arrays can generate 84 to 120 kilowatts of electricity – enough to provide power for more than 40 average homes.

Commander Lee Archambault will lead Discovery's crew of seven, along with Pilot Tony Antonelli, and Mission Specialists Joseph Acaba, John Phillips, Steve Swanson, Richard Arnold, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Koichi Wakata.

Discovery's original proposed launch was for July of 2008. Later it was changed to December 4, 2008. The next change scheduled the liftoff date for February 12, 2009. It was then delayed until February 27, but was then delayed indefinitely on February 20 after NASA discovered an issue with the hydrogen control valves.

Today in History

45 BC – Caesar's civil war: Julius

Caesar scored his final military victory at the Battle of Munda, defeating the Optimate forces of Titus Labienus and Pompey the Younger.

624 – History of Islam: The Muslims of Medina defeated the Quraysh of Mecca in Badr, present-day Saudi Arabia, a victory that has been attributed to divine intervention or the genius of Muhammad.

1958 – Vanguard 1, the first solar-powered satellite, was launched. It is the oldest human-launched object still in Earth orbit today.

1969 – Golda Meir of the Labor Party became the first female Prime Minister of Israel.

2004 – Unrest in Kosovo broke out, resulting in more than 20 killed, 200 wounded, and the destruction of several Serb Orthodox churches and shrines.

March 17 is Saint Patrick's Day

Quote of the Day

Man dwells apart, though not alone,
 He walks among his peers unread;
 The best of thoughts which he hath known
 For lack of listeners are not said.
 ~ Jean Ingelow ~

Word of the Day

shamrock n

1. The trefoil leaf of any small clover, especially *Trifolium repens*, or of any clover-like plant.
2. Any of several small forms of clover with trefoil leaves, especially *Trifolium repens*.

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