



Top Stories

NATO and Iran talk for first time in 30 years

Last week, NATO and Iran had contact for the first time in thirty years, NATO officials stated Thursday. The visit to Brussels by the Iranian diplomat was the first "since the regime of the Shah" collapsed by the Ayatollah Khomeini led Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Irish economy sees biggest contraction in decades

The economy of Ireland shrank by 7.5% in the last quarter of 2008 compared to the same period a year previously, according to official statistics. The decline is the worst in decades. For the entire period of 2008, the economy contracted by 2.3%, the first loss since 1983.

Dam in Indonesia bursts, dozens killed

On Friday, a dam burst in a southwestern suburb of Jakarta, Indonesia, killing at least 52 people and displacing a further 1,490. Officials warn that the death toll will likely increase.

Four-storey building collapses in Lagos, Nigeria; two dead

A residential four-storey building collapsed in Lagos, Nigeria on Tuesday. At least two people have died, and another fourteen people have been rescued from the debris.

Wikipedia Current Events

Millions of people worldwide recognize Earth Hour by deactivating unnecessary lighting.

- Demonstrators in London, England, demand that the G20 combat poverty, climate change, and unemployment.
- Police and fans of Northern Ireland and Poland battle after a 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying match in Belfast.
- Space Shuttle Discovery lands at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, United States.
- Well Armed wins the Dubai World Cup in the United Arab Emirates.
- Taliban militants destroy 12 NATO trucks in Peshawar, Pakistan.
- The Red River rises above 40 feet, causing emergency evacuations in Fargo, North Dakota, United States.
- The Dunfermline Building Society in Scotland will be sold.

Manitoba residents receive evacuation flood alerts

Evacuation alerts were issued to 850 Manitoba residents as they prepare for the worst flooding from the Red River.

Dominion City declared a state of emergency on Monday regarding rising water levels. The area is already experiencing overland flooding. Southern Manitoba is under a winter storm warning which will worsen the situation

with further precipitation. Besides working on dikes and sandbagging efforts, communities are breaking up ice jams and frozen culverts.

Ice jams have already caused the evacuation of 40 homes north of Winnipeg, and dozens of homes were flooded. A state of emergency was declared Wednesday for the rural municipalities (RM) of St. Andrews, St. Clements, East St. Paul, West St. Paul, Blanshard, St. Laurent and Franklin. Roads are being wiped out and basements flooded due to the overland flooding caused by frozen culverts and ice jams. The Red River Floodway was constructed to divert flowing waters from the river basin around the city and communities, however ice jams have caused the waters to flow over the river banks.

"The road is eventually going to get washed over so we want to get the elderly out for that reason," said Curtis Smith of the Manitoba Association of Native Fire Fighters. 95 have already been evacuated to Winnipeg from Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation.

"All the plans are in the offing. It all depends on the elevation of the water, how fast it's going to approach. You need to do a phased evacuation so it's elderly and people with special needs first." said Don Brennan acting executive director of Manitoba's Emergency Measures Organization.

Paul Guyader, Manitoba's emergency measures coordinator

reported that residents are setting sandbags into place as fast as they can be made, however the height of flooding won't come for yet another week in southern Manitoba. Towns throughout the area are surrounded by ring dikes.

During the week of April 5 to 10 is when the Red River is expected to crest around Emerson, Manitoba. Emerson is located on the east banks of the Red River near the Canada – United States border.

The river should reach its maximum during the week of April 12 to 17 in the region around Winnipeg.

"We don't want to be in a scramble this time, because one of the problems that we had last time [in 1997] was making sure that everyone understood who was in charge," said Chief Terry Nelson of the Roseau River First Nation. "Last time, the people, we weren't too much involved in what the authorities were doing."

The United States National Weather Service recorded levels at 11.6 metres (38 feet) on Thursday, and the predictions are that it should reach 12.5 metres (41 feet) by the weekend. Mayor Dennis Walaker of Fargo, North Dakota has put into place contingency plans. The Red River's recorded highest cresting at Fargo was in 1897 when it reach 12.2 metres (40 feet). The Flood of the Century in 1997 crested at 16.5 metres (54 feet) at Grand Forks, North Dakota. Manitoba officials feel that this year flooding should not be as bad as the 1997 flood.

"Mother Nature will decide when she's going to crack this baby loose", said Steve Strang, mayor of the RM of St. Clements, Manitoba.

Somali pirates seize two European tankers, Seychelles yacht

Pirates in Somalia have seized two European tankers within twenty-four hours. In the same time frame three other vessels escaped and a yacht which disappeared after departing the Seychelles has been reported as hijacked.

Yesterday MV Nipayia, a 9,000-ton tanker owned by Athens, Greece-based Lotus Shipping and flagged in Panama, was seized. The vessel has eighteen crew members from the Philippines and a captain from Russia. She was hijacked 380 miles from Hobyo.

Early today the MV Bow Asir, a 23,000-ton oil and chemicals tanker, was also seized in the same area, a 750,000 square mile ocean expanse near the Gulf of Aden. The vessel is owned by the Isle of Man's Star Tankers and is managed by Norwegian firm Salhus Shipping. There are conflicting crew numbers of 23 or 27 crew on board, but it is known that five of these are Polish and the captain is Russian.

Salhus was alerted at 0729GMT by the Bahamas-flagged ship that two small boats were chasing the vessel; at 0745GMT another message said they had boarded and three hours later an email confirmed the ship had been seized. There are sixteen to eighteen pirates on board, armed with machine guns.

The Seychelles' state broadcaster reported yesterday that a small yacht from the islands is thought to have been seized. The Serenity, with two people from the Seychelles on board, departed the nation on February 28 and headed into the Indian Ocean. The ship never arrived at her destination of

Madagascar. Nothing has been heard from the ship since she left port.

Three other ships were also targeted in two separate failed attacks yesterday. At 0907GMT MV Explorer III and MV Ocean Explorer stated that two small boats were chasing them. The ships were able to outrun the pirates. Later, at 2055GMT, the MV FD Gennaro Aurilia increased speed after a fishing boat began to approach. The master radioed nearby warships for help, after which the boat turned off its light and retreated.

"Freedom Tower" renamed "1 World Trade Center"

The 108-floor central component of the new World Trade Center in New York City has been officially renamed 1 World Trade Center, ending the Freedom Tower moniker it had sported since 2003.

Freedom Tower was envisioned as a symbol of America's victory over terrorism. It is currently on track for completion in 2013, with 10 floors finished so far.

Port Authority Chairman Anthony Coscia commented on the change, "It's the one that is easiest for people to identify with — and frankly, we've gotten a very interested and warm reception to it."

Former Governor George Pataki, who revealed the Freedom Tower name nearly six years ago, was critical of the switch, saying "The Freedom Tower is not simply another piece of real estate and not just a name for marketing purposes."

1 World Trade Center has been the building's legal name and address for the past two years, with the

public change precipitated by the ramp up of construction and the commencement of lease marketing.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg seemed ambivalent to the change, saying "I would like to see it stay the Freedom Tower, but it's their building, and they don't need me dumping on it. If they could rent the whole thing by changing the name, I guess they're going to do that, and they probably, from a responsible point of view, should. From a patriotic point of view, is it going to make any difference?"

The change was approved following the signing of a two-decades-long lease by a Chinese real estate company, who plans to occupy floors 64 through 69. Other future tenants include the U.S. General Services Administration and the New York State Office of General Services.

Dozens of cats removed from feces-ridden New Jersey house

Almost 100 cats and one dog were found living in a feces- and filth-ridden New Jersey house, in what local authorities are calling among the worst cases of animal cruelty they have ever seen.

Authorities had to wear masks to help them breathe through the stench of urine as they removed cats from the million-dollar, two-story brick house in Chester Township.

"The conditions were absolutely horrific," said Rick Yocum, a lieutenant with the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "There wasn't one inch of that house that wasn't covered in feces or urine. There were three foot piles of feces in the hallways.

Wanda Oughton, the homeowner who lives there with two adult children, is expected to face criminal and civil charges, possibly as early as this weekend.

According to media reports, the floors, couches and tables of the home were littered with waste, and garbage was crammed into microwaves and ovens. The bottom of a bathtub had an eight-inch mound of feces, authorities said.

"It was horrible to go in there," SPCA spokesman Matt Stanton said. "Our people had to fill their nostrils with Vick's VapoRub and wear masks. They could only go in for five minutes at a time and had to come out to get fresh air again."

Oughton refused to leave the house during the initial investigation and declined to speak to reporters.

"Go away. Go away. We have a call in to the police," two women yelled at reporters through the front door.

SPCA officials believe Oughton and her family to be animal hoarders, not "horrible people", said SPCA Superintendent Frank Rizzo.

"For hoarders, the animal is the most important thing," Rizzo said. "More important than their own health."

Yocum said they plan to ask Oughton to undergo a mental health assessment.

About 20 cats were removed from the house Thursday and are being treated for upper respiratory problems. The remaining cats are to be taken out Friday, and will be distributed to different veterinarians so no one office is

too overwhelmed.

Wind-powered land vehicle breaks speed record

Richard Jenkins, an engineer from the United Kingdom, broke a record for the fastest speed attained in a wind-powered land vehicle on Friday.

Jenkins managed to reach a speed of 126.1 miles per hour (202.9 kilometres per hour) in his Greenbird car along the plains of Nevada's Ivanpah Lake.

Jenkins said that he had worked for ten years to break the record, and that "things couldn't have been better" on the day he broke the record. "It's great. It's one of those things that you spend so long trying to do and when it actually happens, it's almost too easy," he said to the BBC.

"It has been an incredibly difficult challenge. Half the challenge is technical, having to create a more efficient vehicle than the previous record holder, then the rest is luck, being in the right place, at the right time, to get the perfect conditions, with the right people watching. I must have been on record standby at some remote location around the world for at least two months of every year for the past ten years," he said. "Then everything came together perfectly and the Greenbird stepped up to the mark and performed amazingly. I am absolutely delighted."

The previous record for the fastest wind-powered land vehicle belonged to Bob Schumacher from the United States, who reached 116 miles per hour in his Iron Duck machine.

The Greenbird is a fifth generation in an array of vehicles created by

Jenkins in his ten-year effort to break the speed record. It is composed out of carbon fibre composite, and powered only by wind. According to Jenkins, it weighs 600 kilograms.

14 killed in Russian bus-truck collision

Fourteen have died and four more have been injured after a bus and a truck collided near Moscow, Russia. The bus caught fire in the accident.

"According to our latest information, 14 people died -- the driver of the truck and 13 people on the bus," said a spokeswoman for the Emergency Ministry. The crash occurred in Petushinsky, a district 100 kilometres (60 miles) to Moscow's east.

The crash occurred on the Moscow-Nizhny Novgorod-Ufa highway, and the death toll may yet rise as the burnt-out wreckage makes identifications difficult. The death toll has already been revised from 25. A criminal investigation has been launched regarding possible violations of traffic laws.

It is unclear where the vehicles were going. Reports suggest both were headed towards Moscow. It is thought that the truck left its lane and crossed into the path of the bus.

Courts uphold firing of Pennsylvania cop who lost sense of smell

An appeals court said a Pennsylvania police department was justified in firing an officer because he lost his sense of smell in an off-duty motorcycle accident.

The court said the Coller Township firing was valid because police need their sense of smell to detect substances like drugs, alcohol,

hazardous materials, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled.

David Agostino, 44, suffered anosmia, a partial or full lack of sense of smell, due to head trauma suffered from a 2004 crash in Ohio. Officials in Coller Township, a Pittsburgh suburb in Allegheny County, honorably discharged him because they were worried the condition created a risk.

Attorneys for Agostino unsuccessfully argued a sense of smell is not part of the physical exam for prospective police officers, and that there was no statute or police regulation that cited lack of sense of smell as grounds for firing a police officer.

But during the court hearing, a fellow officer testified Agostino could not smell the odor of marijuana and alcohol after pulling over a motorist following a high-speed chase. His police chief also said he failed to smell leaking gas from an elderly resident's furnace.

"[The chief] explained that Agostino's inability to smell if the furnace was leaking gas created a hazardous situation, placing Agostino, the resident and the public in danger because 'it could have possibly caused an explosion,'" Judge Bernard L. McGinley wrote in the decision.

Agostino, of South Fayette Township, could not be reached for comment by media reports after the decision by the three-judge Commonwealth Court panel.

Dam in Indonesia bursts, dozens killed

On Friday, a dam burst in a southwestern suburb of Jakarta, Indonesia, killing at least 52

people and displacing a further 1,490. Officials, however, warn that the death toll will likely increase.

The cause of the accident appears to be due to heavy rains that night, which overfilled the Situ Gintung lake behind the broken dam. "The dam was an old dam, 16 metres deep. Last night, because of heavy rain, the dam could not hold back the water so it broke," said the governor of the Banten province, Ratu Atut Chosiyah.

The breach occurred at approximately 02:00 local time (UTC+7), when many people were in bed, asleep. "People were still sleeping and couldn't do anything. Many people are still trapped and the rescue is ongoing," a local official said to Agence France-Presse.

Rescue efforts were hampered due to a deluge of mud and debris from the dam. "We're still trying to get into the houses, but the problem is, mud is getting in our way," social affairs spokesman Mardjito said.

The President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, offered his condolences to the victims of the disaster. "On behalf of the government, I express my condolences to the families of the dead victims and may their souls be accepted by God almighty," he said.

Indonesia's Vice President Yusuf Kalla has visited the scene of the incident. "We will provide emergency help to the victims. For those whose homes were destroyed, the government will help with the repairs," he told Metro TV.

A major concern following this flood is the risk of water-borne diseases such as malaria. These problems are made worse by the local climate being very hot and humid.

The Situ Gintung dam was built early last century, during the Dutch colonial rule. It was holding back a lake of about two million cubic metres (70 million cubic feet) of water.

Today in History

1461 – Yorkist troops defeated Lancastrian forces at the Battle of Towton in Yorkshire, England, the largest battle in the Wars of the Roses up until that time with approximately 20,000 casualties.
 1638 – Swedish settlers founded New Sweden near Delaware Bay, the first Swedish colony in America.

1807 – German astronomer Heinrich Wilhelm Matthäus Olbers discovered 4 Vesta, the brightest asteroid and the second-most massive body in the asteroid belt.

1831 – Bosniak general Husein Gradaščević began an uprising against Sultan Mahmud II and the Ottoman Empire.

1911 – The M1911 single-action, semi-automatic pistol developed by American firearms designer John Browning became the standard-issue side arm in the United States Army.

1974 – NASA's Mariner 10, launched in November 1973, became the first spaceprobe to fly by the planet Mercury.

Quote of the Day

On seeing his shadow fall on such ancient rocks, he had to question himself in a different context and ask the same old question as before, "Who am I?", and the answer now came more emphatically than ever before, "No-one."

But a no-one with a crown of light about his head. He would remember a verse from Pindar: "Man is a dream about a shadow. But when some splendour falls upon him from God, a glory comes to him and his life is sweet."

~ R. S. Thomas ~

Word of the Day

alkaline adj

1. Of, or relating to an alkali, one of a class of caustic bases.
2. (chemistry) Having a pH greater than 7.

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