



Top Stories

India: Jaish militant Mohd Afzal to be hanged on 20 October



India's Supreme Court confirms that Mohammed Afzal will hang for his role in the 2001 attack on Parliament. His execution is to be carried out on 20 October. Another accused, Shaukat Hussain gets 10 years rigorous imprisonment.

Afghan women's rights official shot dead



Suspected Taliban militants shot dead Safia Ahmed-jan, a senior official in the Women's Affairs ministry and a staunch advocate of women's rights, in Khandahar. She is the first woman official to be targeted by the militant group.

Featured story

Google convicted in case brought by Belgian press

A Belgian court has ruled that Google News could not use material from "Belgian publishers of the French- and German-speaking daily press" without paying a copyright fee, in a case brought by Copiepresse, an association of newspaper editors

Wikipedia Current Events

• Tony Blair makes his final speech at a Labour Party Conference and receives a standing ovation.

Wikipedia Current Events

- A jury rules in favor of Merck & Co. Inc. in federal Vioxx case, rejecting claims that the painkiller caused the plaintiff's heart attack.
- The Bush administration releases excerpts of a report which states that the war in Iraq has bred deep resentment in the Muslim world and provided Islamist militants with a "cause celebre" that allowed the global movement to cultivate supporters.
- The archbishop of Zambia, Emmanuel Milingo, is excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Benedict
- Former WorldCom chief Bernard Ebbers has reported to a federal prison in Louisiana to begin a 25-year prison term.
- At least 18 people are killed in an explosion outside a government office in Lashkar Gah in southern Afghanistan.
- The Diet of Japan confirms Shinzo Abe as the Prime Minister. At 52, he is the youngest Prime Minister since World War II.
- The European Commission confirms that Bulgaria and Romania are set to join the European Union on 1 January 2007, in what may be the last EU expansion before a European constitution is established.

Bulgaria and Romania to enter European Union

The European Commission has

accepted Bulgaria and Romania as members of the EU from January 1, 2007 under what analysts call the strictest terms in recent history.

The Commission emphasizes that the new members will have to do a better job fighting organized crime but also fight political corruption, which has plagued both since the fall of the Soviet Union. Both governments have been criticized for not being tough enough on corruption, a hot political ticket in the duo.

The president of the Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, has called for a pause in enlargement of the EU afterwards in order to carry out institutional reform within the Union and solve the question of a constitution for the EU, which was hit back last year when French and Dutch voters rejected the proposal. An EU treaty currently mandates institutional changes within the Union before the number of members go beyond the 27 maximum, which the Union will reach by the accession of the two new members.

If the two countries will not be able to comply with the terms, they may face consequences, some of which are directed specifically at the accession process but most of which are general requirements that all members face if they fail to meet certain standards. Specific to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria is losing up to a quarter of farm payments unless they succeed in

setting up an operational database for animals called IACS by April 2007.

Furthermore, corruption and organized crime have to be addressed. Some members of the Commission have said that allowing them to enter may actually help them tackle corruption more than it would be leaving them outside of the Union. Every six months, both countries will have to report on the progress to fight corruption.

Although both economies are growing rapidly, they will be the poorest countries within the EU with GDP per capita only at about one third of the EU average. As always, there are debates about whether that's good or bad in terms of accession, some arguing that it will result in mass migration of workforce to richer countries resulting in unemployment, others by that the richer countries of the Union benefit the Union by going for cheap labor within itself, as opposed to for example India or China.

Trade of pigs from the two countries will still be forbidden as farmers from both countries have had to deal with serious diseases in pigs.

All members of the EU have to ratify the entry of new members. France, Germany, Denmark and Belgium have yet to ratify the entry of the two countries, but analysts say that they're expected to do so soon, a refusal to do so being extremely unlikely.

Taipei chosen to host Wikimania 2007

At 2am, September 25, UTC time, the jury of Wikimania 2007 City Contest announced that Taipei has been chosen as the host city of

Wikimania 2007.

"Taipei had the winning combination of a dedicated and experienced bidding team, a great venue with centralized accomodation and community areas, and strong sponsorship opportunities. Taipei also provides the opportunity to focus attention on the growing Asian language projects and the international aspect of the Wikimedia Foundation, as well as learning about other free knowledge efforts and projects in the region.", the jury said.

"This was a very difficult decision. Every one of the shortlisted bids this year were outstanding.", the jury continues. The other 3 bidding cities are Turin (Italy), Alexandria (Egypt) and London (United Kingdom).

Wikimania is a conference for users of the wiki projects operated by the Wikimedia Foundation. Researchers and speakers presented studies and experiments on Wikipedia and other projects operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, on wiki culture and technology, and on the world of free knowledge. The first conference was held in Frankfurt, Germany from August 4 to 8 in 2005; the second ran from August 4 to 6 in 2006 in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the United States. The third run will be hold in Chien Tan Overseas Youth Activity Center, Taipei, Taiwan from August 3 to 5 in 2007.

Afghan women's rights official shot dead

Safia Ahmed-jan, the director of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs for the Khandahar province and an advocate of women's rights and a strong critic of the Taliban's repression of those rights, was

shot dead by unidentified gunmen outside her home in Khandahar city in southern Afghanistan on Monday.

Safia Ama-jan, as she was known locally, is the first woman official to be targeted by the Taliban-led insurgency since it was deposed in 2001.

Safia Ahmed-jan taught at a girls' school and was a high-school principal in Khandahar prior to the Taliban's 1996 rise to power in Afghanistan. When the Taliban regime banned education for girls and fobade women from working outside the home, she ran an underground school for girls at her home, said her son Naqibullah, speaking to the Associated Press.

After the Taliban government was overthrown in 2001, Ahmed-jan became the provincial chief for women's affairs in 2002, when the ministry was established and has since then held that position, worked for women's rights and particularly, championed the cause of educating girls. Her secretary, Abdullah Khan told Associated Press that among her most successful projects were the vocational training schools she opened in Khandahar, where almost 1000 women were taught baking, tailoring and other skills.

Ahmed-jan has also been fiercely critical of the repression of women during the Taliban rule, in a region that has remained conservative and emerged as a hotbed of the Taliban's insurgent activity. Her requests for personal security guards and transport went unheeded by the government, according to local media reports, though her nephew, Muhammad Asif told the New York Times that Ahmed-jan preferred to keep a low profile and used a taxi or public

transport even though her office maintained cars and drivers.

Ahmed-jan was shot dead outside her house at about 7:30 a.m. local time (UTC+4:30) on Monday, as she left for work in a taxi. The gunmen are believed to have left scene on a motorcycle, and tyre marks have been found by the police, said the provincial governor Asadullah Khaled, who visited the scene of the attack.

Ahmed-jan was shot four times with a pistol, Muhammad Haidar, who worked in her office told the New York Times. Mohammad Nader, the head nurse at Khandahar's main hospital where Ahmed-jan was taken to, confirmed to the Chicago Tribune that she was shot four times, including once in the head.

She was about 65 years old.

Accounts of the shooting are sketchy, several reports suggesting no one witnessed it. However, one man, identified as Allaudin told Al Jazeera that he saw two men on motorcycles waiting on the road, who attacked Ahmed-jan as she left her house.

A spokesman for the Khandahar governor, Daud Ahmadi confirmed the death and said that Ahmed-jan had died on the spot. An investigation into the attack has begun, and local officials have blamed the Taliban.

Hundreds of men and women, including the Governor Asadullah Khaled were present at Ahmed-jan's funeral on Monday evening, which took place in Khandahar's main Shia mosque.

The killing has been strongly condemned by the Afghan President Hamid Karzai as well as

aid and human rights organisations in Afghanistan.

Aleem Siddique, a spokesman for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), said that UNAMA was "appalled at the senseless murder" of a woman who was working to ensure a full and equal part in the future of Afghanistan for its women. He added, "We share the sentiment of the majority of Afghan people who are appalled at this killing."

Abdul Quadar Noorzai, head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) for the Khandahar region told IRIN News that Ahmed-jan's death will have a "serious impact on women's activities in the south where women are already suffering from ... the deteriorating security and conservative traditions,".

Fariba Ahmedi, a woman MP from Khandahar who was present at Ahmed-jan's funeral told the Associated Press, "The enemy of Afghanistan killed her, but they should know it will not derail women from the path we are on. We will continue on our way,".

Sonja Bachmann, a U.N. political officer who knew Ahmed-jan well told the New York Times that Ahmed-jan "did a good job, she worked in a very low-key way and worked hard to raise awareness about women's issues."

Reuters and Associated Press recieved phone calls, claiming responsibility for the attacks on behalf of Mullah Sadullah, a regional Taliban commander, but no confirmation of the claim has been possible.

Another caller, who identified himself as Taliban commander Mullah Hayat Khan told Al Jazeera

that Ahmed-jan was killed because she worked for the government.

The Taliban-led insurgency has stepped up attacks in recent months, killing hundreds of people this year.

Last week, 19 Afghans working for reconstruction projects in the region were killed after their bus was ambushed. The Governor of Paktia province, a close associate of President Karzai, was killed in a suicide bombing on September 10.

Attacks on schools have also been stepped up. According to the Afghan education ministry, there have been 158 attacks on schools this year, compared to 146 last year. The attacks on schools are believed to be due partly to the Taliban's opposition to educating girls, as well as a way to undermine the Afghan government and it's reconstruction efforts.

Twelve suspected militants and two Afghan police officers were reported killed on Monday in separate incidents which also left eight others and a U.S. soldier wounded.

"People are scared, of course," Ahmad-jan's co-worker Haidar said, "How can we feel secure when the head of our department is killed in front of her house?"

CoolBrands: New Zealand coolest place in the world

New Zealand has been voted the coolest place in the world by United Kingdom brand: CoolBrands.

Coolbrands is owned by a consultancy firm in the UK, called Superbrands. It started in 2001, CoolBrands is a way of telling how 'cool' a brand is. Superbrands defines "brands that have become

extremely desirable among many style leaders and influencers. They have a magic about them, signifying that users have an exceptional sense of taste and style."

George Hickton, chief executive of Tourism New Zealand, said: "This win is a vindication of the recent work we've put in to the UK market, with the Chelsea Flower Show and our 100% Pure New Zealand advertising campaign ensuring New Zealand stays top of mind with potential travellers."

"It's very gratifying to see we are such a desirable destination, especially as this poll includes opinion leaders who can have an real influence on people's travel choices." says Mr Hickton. "this is the second award New Zealand has received in the UK this September, with Conde Nast Traveller magazine also voting New Zealand best destination this month."

Editor of Condé Nast Traveler Magazine, Sarah Miller, called New Zealand a "point of authenticity." And professional nation brander, Wally Olin, said "New Zealand has been very, very clever. It has turned its disadvantages into advantages."

"Reaping the benefits of its recent marketing campaign, New Zealand is apparently the hottest place to be," said the London News.

650 brands were chosen by researchers which were then put before 23 judges and were made available for the public, of which 1,725 people participated in an online survey. Five percent of the original 650 made it to the finals, including Morocco, Maldives and Australia.

New Zealand receives most of its tourists from Australia, closely followed by the UK.

The top ten destinations included:

1. New Zealand
2. Morocco
3. Fiji
4. Prague
5. Australia
6. Maldives
7. Amsterdam
8. Brighton
9. Bahamas
10. Bermuda

Today in History

1580 - The Golden Hind sailed into Plymouth, England, as Francis Drake completed his circumnavigation of the globe.

1687 - The Parthenon in Athens was partially destroyed during an armed conflict between Venetian and Ottoman forces.

1907 - Newfoundland and New Zealand became dominions within the British Empire.

1957 - West Side Story, a musical written by Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, and produced and directed by Jerome Robbins, made its debut on Broadway.

1983 - Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov of the Soviet Union averted a possible worldwide nuclear war.

September 27 is European Day of Languages

Quote of the Day

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take

Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

~ T. S. Eliot in The Four Quartets

Word of the Day

synecdoche; n

1. A form of metaphor, whereby an inclusive term stands for something included, or vice versa.

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