



Top Stories

Strong earthquakes strike Japan; Tsunami warnings issued

According to the USGS numerous earthquakes ranging from magnitudes 5.1 to 6.1 have been reported off the western coast of Japan, prompting tsunami warnings to be issued.

Islamic vigilantes acquitted of murder by Iran supreme court

The members of a paramilitary group, who killed a couple for "moral corruption", say they are allowed to kill in defense of Islamic laws.

Featured story

Sealing ships trapped in ice off coast of Newfoundland

About a hundred ships have been trapped in ice floes off the northeast coast of Newfoundland for a week now, during the annual seal hunt.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Fidel Castro meets briefly with Wu Guanzheng, a member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party in his first official duties since July 2006.
- The G4 group of nations, which includes Brazil, India, Germany and Japan, says that it would revive efforts for United Nations Security Council reform.
- India and People's Republic of China resume talks to resolve border disputes.
- The United States has asked India

Wikipedia Current Events

to stop military cooperation with Iran.

- The U.S. state of Virginia observes a day of mourning for the victims in the Virginia Tech massacre.
- Shelling and gunfire has continued in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, after 21 died in fighting and a suicide attack at an Ethiopian base the previous day.
- Scientists prove that eating less salt reduces the chances for a stroke or heart attack in the first long-term study on salt's effect on health.
- A series of earthquakes, the strongest being 6.1 magnitude, strikes the Okinawa island chain of Japan. A tsunami warning is issued at first, but later cancelled.
- A new study of pigs at a hog farm in California points to the possibility that melamine has gotten into the human food supply.
- Johnson Space Center Shooting: NASA spokesperson says that one of the buildings at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas has been evacuated after an employee opens fire. The gunman killed a male hostage as well as himself.

Gunman kills self and hostage in Texas NASA building

Around 1:40 p.m. CDT, NASA employees reported that two shots were fired in the NASA Building 44 in the Johnson Space Center in

Houston, Texas. A SWAT team later reported that Bill Phillips, a contract engineer with Jacobs engineering, had killed David Beverly as well as himself, leaving a female hostage physically unharmed.

Phillips entered a conference room with gun drawn and ordered all but one person out. Phillips barricaded himself on the second floor of the two-story building, with David Beverly and another female hostage. The building was evacuated and police were summoned. NASA security, Houston police and a SWAT team were on the scene.

Houston news reported at 5:22 p.m. CDT that Bill Phillips, the gunman, and David Beverly, the hostage, were both dead. Police reported that the SWAT team heard one shot and decided to engage, but before they reached the room they heard another shot. When SWAT reached the scene, the male hostage was dead from a bullet to the chest, the gunman was dead from a bullet to the head, and the female hostage was gagged and bound to a chair with duct tape, but was otherwise unharmed.

All NASA employees had first been warned to stay in their buildings but were later told by NASA they were free to go home if their working day was over. Mission Control locked its doors during this incident, as this is a standard procedure in such situations. No NASA Mission has been affected by this incident according to NASA.

In the first press conference, police said that communication to the gunman was not yet established, but that negotiators had already tried it two times unsuccessfully.

The motive of the hostage-taking, and whether the three people had any connection to each other, is currently under investigation.

The Houston Chronicle reports that last month Phillips had received one e-mail from his employer, Jacob engineering Inc., "describing problems with his work and offering suggestions on improvement." Jacobs printed that e-mail on March 18, the same day he bought the 38-caliber gun that police suspect was used in the shooting.

Despite reassurances by Cranshaw and Beverly, Phillips would not believe the management were not going to fire him, according to Cranshaw. During the 3-hour standoff Philips used a dry-erase board in the room indicating he was tired of being called "stupid", police said last Saturday.

Michael Sampson, the co-manager of the space agency's Electronic Parts and Packaging Program, who had known Beverly for ten years described him as friendly, peaceful person, with a positive attitude to his co-workers.

Relatives describe Phillips as a loner who always kept to himself. He had lost his father in 2003, but had decided not to return to his hometown Tennessee. Smith, a cousin of Phillips remarked that in the Christmas card he had received from him last year, Phillips said feeling lonely and without family, but nothing suggesting anything so tragic.

Research In Motion comments on BlackBerry outage

All eight million users of BlackBerry have been relieved of a large system failure that left them without email for two days.

Emails were lost after a large system failure blocked all of their users worldwide, Tuesday. It is reported at 8 p.m. ET on Tuesday the system failure began. It ended Wednesday morning leaving its millions of users with a backlog of emails.

BlackBerry, owned by Waterloo, Ontario based Research In Motion (RIM), apologised for the outage Wednesday and said they will take further measures to ensure this will never happen again.

Research In Motion said that a system upgrade caused the large system failure and when they tried to fix the problem "it did not fully perform to its expectations".

"It wasn't a capacity issue, it wasn't a security issue. It was an outage overnight when there was an upgrade," said Co-CEO of RIM, Jim Balsillie. "I think it's pretty likely that the systems are in place that this kind of thing, as incredibly unlikely as it is to happen, is all the more unlikely to happen again."

Vatican abolishes Limbo

The Vatican has abolished limbo, which, according to the Roman Catholic Church, is a permanent status of the unbaptized who die in infancy, without having committed any personal sins, but without having been freed from original sin, or in some cases abortion.

Pope Benedict XVI, a theologian, showed doubt about the concept of limbo. He cited his concerns about it when he was a cardinal.

"The conclusion of this study is that there are theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved and brought into eternal happiness even if there is not an explicit teaching on this question found in revelation," the 41-page document said. "There are reasons to hope that God will save these infants precisely because it was not possible (to baptise them)."

Baptism, in the Catholic Church, is a religious act of purification by water. Baptism removes original sin.

"People find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants, who have no personal sins, from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian."

The Church has never made limbo an official doctrine but most Catholics believe in it. The Church also concludes that baptism will stay and further states that it has nothing to do with the abolition of limbo.

2007 Cricket World Cup: Australia vs New Zealand

Australia has defeated New Zealand by 215 runs in the penultimate game of the Super 8 phase in the 2007 Cricket World Cup at Queen's Park, St. George's, Grenada.

Toss: Australia, who elected to bat first.

Strong earthquakes strike Japan; Tsunami warnings issued

According to the USGS numerous earthquakes ranging from magnitudes 5.1 to 6.1 have been reported off the western coast of Japan, prompting tsunami warnings to be issued. The warnings were lifted a short time later.

The first quake, a 6.0 magnitude, was reported at 9:26 a.m. local time (00:26 UTC), 165 km (105 miles) north, north east of Ishigaki-jima, in the Ryukyu Islands in Japan.

The second quake of 5.6 magnitude struck just five minutes after the first and a 6.1 magnitude quake struck just over an hour later, followed by a magnitude 5.9 about 15 minutes later.

Japan's weather agency says the first and last quakes were actually 6.7 magnitude.

Three smaller quakes ranging from 5.1 to 5.3 magnitudes shortly followed.

The tsunami warnings were issued only after Japan's weather agency said that an 18-inch (46cm) wave could be a possibility.

There are no reports of damage, injuries, deaths or tsunamis.

RAF Hawk jet crashes in the United Kingdom

An RAF Hawk training jet has crashed at Mona Airfield on Anglesey Island in the United Kingdom. The crash occurred at 12:25 p.m. local time.

The pilot is reported to have ejected prior to the crash. No injuries are reported at this time.

"I can confirm that a Hawk aircraft has crashed at RAF Mona, which is a small satellite airfield connected to RAF Valley. One person was on board but we do not know the extent of the pilot's injuries at this time," said spokesman for RAF Valley, Squadron Leader Mark Byrne.

According to the U.K.'s Defense

Ministry, the aircraft carries up to two pilots, but only one was on board the plane at the time of the crash.

The plane was put into service in 1976 for flying and weapons training. The T1 version of the Hawk is for training pilots in fast flying at an advanced level and the T1A Hawk is designed to train pilots to use weapons at an advanced level. It is also the aircraft used by the Red Arrows RAF display team.

Search and rescue personnel are on their way to the scene and an investigation is being launched. The wreckage of the plane is said to be in two pieces. It is not known what caused the crash.

"We will not speculate about the cause of the accident as an investigation will be carried out to establish what has happened," added Byrne.

Islamic vigilantes acquitted of murder by Iran supreme court
Iran's Supreme Court has nullified the death sentences awarded to several members of the Basij and Ansar-e Hezbollah paramilitary groups for killing people they accused of moral corruption under Islamic laws.

Ali Maleki and several of his associates killed Reza Nejadmalayeri and Shohreh Nikpour in Kerman in 2002, accusing them of fornication.

Iran's Islamic laws permit summary execution of those who commit blasphemy, sacrilege, repeated fornication, adultery, slander Imam Khomeini, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei or the Islamic prophets, and otherwise behave in a way that is out of sync with the Islamic criteria.

Members of the paramilitary group (Basij) - which is variously characterized as a pro-government vigilante group or militia - who had been convicted escaped the death penalty because they argued before the Islamic court that they acted in defense of Islamic laws. The members, who pledge allegiance to Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stoned one of their victims to death and tied up four others, including Nejadmalayeri and Nikpour, before throwing them into a swimming pool where they drowned.

The accused stated in their confession the teachings of one Islamic cleric who had said that they were allowed to kill immoral people if they had ignored two warnings to stop their bad behavior.

In Iran, courts have previously imposed severe penalties for what they considered immoral behaviour. In 2004, a 16 year old girl, Atefah Sahaaleh, was executed for committing "acts incompatible with chastity", after she testified that she had been repeatedly raped while in an abusive relationship with an ex-revolutionary guard, Ali Darabi. Dabari received a sentence of 95 lashes. In 1998 a German businessman, Helmut Hofer, was sentenced to death for having a relationship with a 26-year-old single Iranian woman.

Sealing ships trapped in ice off coast of Newfoundland

For the past week, approximately 100 sealing ships have been trapped in ice floes off the northeast coast of Newfoundland. The ships and their crew had been participating in the annual seal hunt off Canada's easternmost province.

Several of the vessels have been damaged by the ice and supplies

are now running low for those sailors awaiting rescue by the Canadian Coast Guard. As of Thursday, 6:00 p.m. EDT, some 20 crew members, out of an estimated 400, had been rescued.

A Coast Guard icebreaker, the Sir Wilfred Grenfell, on mission to free the trapped ships, itself became stuck in the ice. A Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) spokesperson indicated to CTV News that, although the Grenfell had since been freed, another icebreaker, the Ann Harvey, was now trapped. "It's just such heavy ice that even ice breakers are having trouble," said Erika Pittman, a communications officer with the DFO.

In addition to the crushing ice, extreme weather conditions have been hampering rescue efforts. Pittman suggested that conditions wouldn't improve until sometime next week. The amount and thickness of the pack ice, according to Pittman, is the worst it has been for sealers in the past 15 years.

In addition to three icebreakers on hand, the Coast Guard is flying helicopters in to provide food and support to the stranded sailors. Most of the sealing ship captains have refused to abandon their ships, instead staying with them and hoping for a change in conditions or to be freed by the Coast Guard.

"Usually you try to stay with the ship because you think the safety is with the ship because the ship is big, but sometimes it is too late. In this case, we're hoping that as it changes and the breakers and helicopters are there and we can get them all out," said Brian Penney, a superintendent with the Coast Guard.

"They're putting a lot of effort into pulling them out," said Penny. "But the sheer numbers, it's a very, very slow process." According to Penny, approximately 15 of the longliners ships have had their hulls damaged by the ice to the extent that the ships are at risk of sinking.

Critics of the seal hunt point out that the annual hunt is not only "cruel to animals", but is also a dangerous occupation for the sealers. When sealers have to be rescued by the Coast Guard, "Canadian taxpayers foot the bill," suggested Rebecca Aldworth, director of Canadian wildlife issues for the Humane Society of the United States.

Iraq has fourth highest execution rate, says Amnesty

The human rights organisation Amnesty International says that Iraq now ranks fourth in the list of countries with high execution rates.

Since mid 2004, Iraq has sentenced 270 people to death, at least 100 of whom have already been hanged. Amnesty says that Iraq's reintroduction of the death sentence goes against a general global trend for its abolition.

In a press release, Amnesty says many of the trials are unfair, criticising the use of televised pre-trial confessions and a failure to investigate allegations of torture.

Kate Allen, Amnesty's UK director said: "The clock has been turned back in Iraq and we've seen a return to large numbers of people being condemned to death and hastily executed after unfair trials,"

The criticisms have been dismissed by Iraqi officials.

Canadian Conservatives regret participation in Sikh parade

The Conservatives have expressed regret for participating in a Sikh Parade in Surrey, British Columbia because a display of Indian saints included Talwinder Tarmar, the terrorist that led the 1985 Air India bomb plot. The president of the temple that organized the parade claims that he is not guilty.

Seven year-old finds cocaine in pocket

A bag of cocaine worth around \$8,900 was found by a first grade boy while checking his jacket pocket. The bag contained 89 grams of crack cocaine. "The boy got scared and told his teacher", said a Tampa police spokeswoman.

Today in History

753 BC - Romulus and Remus founded Rome, according to the calculations by Varro Reatinus.

1836 - Texan forces led by Sam Houston defeated General Antonio López de Santa Anna and his Mexican troops in the Battle of San Jacinto, the decisive battle in the Texas Revolution.

1960 - Brasília, a planned city based on principles of Le Corbusier, was officially inaugurated as the capital of Brazil.

1966 - Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia visited Jamaica and was greeted by more than a hundred thousand Rastafarians.

1967 - Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos overthrew the government of Prime Minister Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, establishing the Regime of the Colonels in Greece.

April 21 is First day of Festival of Ridván in the Bahá'í Faith, Tiradentes Day in Brazil.

Quote of the Day

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. ~ Charlotte Brontë

Word of the Day

kink; v

1. To form a tight curl or bend in a length of thin material.

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