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Top Stories

Spirit Rover on Mars finds water made 'silica-rich soil'
NASA's Spirit Rover on Mars has found "silica-rich soil" in Gusev Crater that scientists say is so rich that it would require that water have been present at some point, in order for the deposits to be there.

Pirate attacks bring UN aid to Somalia to a halt
On Saturday, a ship chartered by the UN World Food Programme, came under attack off the coast of Somalia after making a delivery in Merca. This month alone, four ships have been hijacked by pirates.

Featured story

Cell-phone senator comes a cropper
California state senator Carole Midgen crashed her state provided SUV into a Honda Sedan while on her phone Monday. In 2006, Midgen voted to fine drivers a minimum \$20 fee for driving while talking on the phone without a hands-free device.

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- Silas Rondeau, the Energy Minister of Brazil, resigns over allegations of corruption in a public works project.
- A total of seven rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip and landed in western Negev, but caused no injuries. The IAF also

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fired missiles in an air strike at a munitions base, and secondary explosions were reported after the strike. The air strike wounded seven people in the attack on Jabaliya, Gaza City, according to local residents and hospital officials.

• Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual head of the Anglican community, declines to invite gay Bishop of New Hampshire Gene Robinson and unrecognized conservative Bishop Martyn Minns of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America to the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

• Skybus Airlines, a new U.S.-based ultra-low-cost carrier airline, launches inaugural flights to and from Columbus, Ohio, with \$10 tickets enabled by on-plane advertising and charging people for baggage, pillows, boarding priority, and refreshments.

• An explosion occurs in a shopping district located within Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Authorities say there were four fatalities, with others reporting 10 deaths at a shopping centre in the Ulus district of Ankara.

• The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issues its forecast for an above-normal 2007 Atlantic hurricane season with 13 to 17 named storms, 7 to 10 hurricanes and 3 to 5 major hurricanes.

• The UK Crown Prosecution Service announces that Andrei Lugovoi, an ex-KGB agent, will be

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charged in connection with the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, also a former KGB agent.

• A car bomb kills 25 people and injures at least 60 in a commercial area in southwestern Baghdad.

California senator opposed to cell-phones gets her comeuppance

California state senator Carole Midgen crashed her state provided SUV into a Honda sedan while reaching for her phone. Midgen has favored a new law penalizing drivers who talk on their cellular phones (aka mobile phones).

The crash occurred on Highway 12 in Solano County, California Friday morning. The driver of the Honda was taken to a near-by hospital for minor injuries.

In 2006, Midgen voted to fine drivers a minimum \$20 fee for driving while talking on the phone without a hands-free device. The law will not go into effect until July 2008, so she will not receive a fine for using her phone. She said that she has taken full responsibility for the accident.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) is now looking into reports of another accident involving Midgen.

"We're getting information now from the officers following up this morning that there was a second

accident involving the center divider. Witnesses have her driving to the left of the number one lane and brushing against the guardrail," said Marvin Williford, spokesperson for the CHP in the Solano area.

Large explosion rocks Turkish capital

A large explosion, now confirmed to have been a bomb, shook Ankara, Turkey, killing at least 6 people and injuring at least 80. The explosion happened in the middle of a shopping district in the Turkish capital during the rush hour, while many people were out shopping.

At first, the explosion was believed to be an accident, but officials later explained that it may have been caused by a bomb, either triggered by a remote-controlled device or a suicide bomber. There was widespread damage to the area; several buildings had their windows blown out.

"This is the most horrific scene I have ever seen. It gives me great grief," Mayor Melih Gokcek said.

"We have seen a vicious, ruthless terror attack at Ankara's busiest time," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told reporters. "Is it a suicide bomber or a parcel bomb? Technical teams are working on this."

Adebayor signs his new Arsenal contract

Emmanuel Adebayor of Arsenal F.C., an English Football Association team, has signed a new "long-term" contract with The Gunners.

The striker was one of French football manager Arsène Wenger's most in-demand players last season. He has played in 57

matches, scoring 16 goals in his time with Arsenal. Adebayor, who is also one of the leaders of Togo national football team, with 36 games and 15 goals, joined the Emirates Stadium's home team in 2006, coming for £3 million from AS Monaco Football Club.

The details of the deal are not known yet.

Spirit Rover on Mars finds water made 'silica-rich soil'

NASA's Spirit Rover on Mars has found "silica-rich soil" in Gusev Crater that scientists say is so rich that it would require that water have been present at some point, in order for the deposits to be there.

"You could hear people gasp in astonishment. This is a remarkable discovery. And the fact that we found something this new and different after nearly 1,200 days on Mars makes it even more remarkable. It makes you wonder what else is still out there," said Steve Squyres, principal investigator for the Mars rovers' science instruments at Cornell University located in Ithaca, New York.

The Martian soil was analyzed by Spirit's alpha particle X-ray spectrometer, and the soil was found to contain at least 90% pure silica. The findings were announced during a teleconference between Squyres and the other rovers' team members.

But Spirit did not make this discovery on purpose. One of the six wheels on the rover is no longer functioning, and where ever Spirit goes, a deep gash is left in the soil in its wake. That is what caused the soil to be exposed and this discovery to be made. Spirit has made other discoveries using

this 'method'. Spirit had previously found other indicators of long-ago water at the site, such as patches of water-bearing, sulfur-rich soil and alteration of minerals.

"This unexpected new discovery is a reminder that Spirit and Opportunity are still doing cutting-edge exploration more than three years into their extended missions. It also reinforces the fact that significant amounts of water were present in Mars' past, which continues to spur the hope that we can show that Mars was once habitable and possibly supported life."

The discovery is being called the best one yet to support the theory that Mars once had an abundance of water on it.

"This is some of the best evidence Spirit has found for water at Gusev," said a geochemist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, Albert Yen who also added that this is the best indication so far that there could have been "favorable conditions" for there to have been life on Mars in the past.

There are some interactions that scientists say could have caused the silica to be deposited, but all of them include water. One is that volcanic activity, which produces acid vapors, interacted with the water inside the soil. Another theory is an ancient hot spring located in the area.

Both Spirit, and its partner rover Opportunity have both been in operation on Mars for almost 1,200 days. Both of the rovers finished their initial mission back in 2004, but both have been operating since and making new discoveries.

Thai puppeteer Sakorn Yang-keawsot dies at 85

Sakorn Yang-keawsot, a legendary puppet master, died Monday as he was being taken to the hospital. He had recently received treatment for lung problems. He was 85.

Sakorn, considered by many in Thailand to be a national treasure, was the only one to carry on the Khru Gae tradition of puppetry.

Born in 1922, the son of two puppeteers, Sakorn gained popularity after World War II and earned the English nickname, Joe Louis.

He was credited with reviving the art in 1985, when he and his children started the Joe Louis Theatre. There they performed mystical plays and traditional Asian epics with metre-high papier-mâché puppets.

Sakorn is survived by nine children. Funeral rites which start today will continue through May 28. They take place at Wat Bangpai in Bang Bua Thong in Nonthaburi Province.

Murder charge to be brought in Litvinenko death

The United Kingdom Crown Prosecution Service has announced that it has sufficient evidence that a former FSB (formerly KGB) officer should be charged with the murder last year of Alexander Litvinenko.

Andrey Lugovoy is charged with the murder of Mr Litvinenko, by the administration of the highly radioactive Polonium-210 in a hotel in Mayfair, London, on 1st November 2006. Mr Litvinenko, 43, died of radiation sickness in University College Hospital on 23rd November. The case received

considerable publicity at the time, with pictures of Litvinenko in hospital and showing the effects of the radiation poisoning.

Litvinenko was himself a former Russian FSB agent and was a critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He had tried to publish a book in Russia describing Putin's rise to power as having been organised by the KGB. He was forced to flee from Russia and had lived for some time in London, being granted British Citizenship in October 2006.

He continued his dissent throughout the remainder of his life, culminating in a posthumous statement published on 24th November 2006 alleging that Putin was responsible for his death.

"I have today concluded that the evidence sent to us by the police is sufficient to charge Andrey Lugovoy with the murder of Mr Litvinenko by deliberate poisoning" —Sir Ken Macdonald, CPS

Litvinenko's murder led to a lengthy investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service and additional specialist police forces following a trail of sites which had been contaminated with radiation, leading eventually to Moscow. A file of evidence was sent in January 2007 to the Crown Prosecution Service for consideration as to whether any criminal charges might be brought.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald, QC, in announcing the decision to prosecute, said: "Prosecutors from CPS Counter Terrorism Division have carefully considered the material contained in that police file. They have also asked the police to carry out further inquiries, which are now complete.

And, finally, they have consulted with me."

"I have today concluded that the evidence sent to us by the police is sufficient to charge Andrey Lugovoy with the murder of Mr Litvinenko by deliberate poisoning. I have further concluded that a prosecution of this case would clearly be in the public interest."

"In those circumstances, I have instructed CPS lawyers to take immediate steps to seek the early extradition of Andrey Lugovoy from Russia to the United Kingdom, so that he may be charged with murder - and be brought swiftly before a court in London to be prosecuted for this extraordinarily grave crime."

The announcement followed the summoning of the Russian Ambassador to London to the Foreign Office to be told by Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett that she expected that the Russian authorities would co-operate fully with Britain to arrange the extradition of Mr Lugovoy to stand trial in London. However there are indications from Moscow that the extradition of Lugovoy, who denies any involvement in the murder, is unlikely to happen. Marina Gridneva, spokeswoman for the Russian Prosecutor General's Office said that "under Russian law, a citizen of the Russian Federation cannot be handed over to a foreign country".

There is no bilateral extradition treaty between Russia and the UK. Legislation passed by Russia to deal with individual requests from countries in Europe rules out the extradition of its citizens, even to the extent that when in 1966 it became a signatory to the European convention on extradition, it granted itself an

exemption from such a course.

However it has been reported that such a ban on extradition would not necessarily prevent Lugovoi being tried in Russia using evidence from the UK.

French Open 2007: Zvonareva withdraws

Vera Zvonareva, no. 19 in the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour ranking, has withdrawn from the 2007 Roland Garros due to her left wrist injury. She will be replaced by the Ukraine's Yulia Beygelzimer.

Xavier Malisse (Belgium) and Alberto Martin (Spain) have also opted out of playing in the tournament beginning on 28th May.

The following have previously announced their withdrawals from the 2007 French Open: Martina Hingis, Tommy Haas, Tatiana Golovin, Paradorn Srichaphan and Andy Murray.

Two bomb explosions witnessed in Beirut

By Monday evening, Beirut had already witnessed two bomb explosions. A bomb exploded in Verdun, a busy residential and business area located in the Sunni Muslim west Beirut district. Seven people were injured as a result.

The Verdun bombing was the second one within a twenty-four hour period. Hours after the Sunday gun battle in Tripoli between the Lebanese Army and Palestinian Fatah al-Islam, a bomb exploded in the parking space of the ABC Mall; in the Christian east Beirut district of Achrafieh. An elderly woman was killed while ten others were injured. The ABC Mall owner, Robert Abu Fadil, was quoted as saying to the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation:

"We were expecting this kind of thing. For sure this will affect us in part, but we've been through more difficult times. But God is the Almighty. We will rebuild."

Some civilians and the Lebanese government held Fatah al-Islam responsible for the two attacks, however the group denied it had any involvement in either of them.

Imam Khamenei says anti-US policies stronger than Hiroshima bomb

Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said, "The Islamic system (of Iran) detonated a powerful bomb in the world of politics, which was thousands-fold stronger than the bomb detonated by the U.S. in Hiroshima." He was speaking to Iran's paramilitary forces, which conflicting reports put the membership between 400,000 and the force's commander's claim of eleven million.

This paramilitary group is called the Basij, a volunteer force. Most of its younger members are students, making it "connected to the university and the scholarly atmosphere on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is connected to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps." In the course of his remarks to the Iranian Volunteer Forces, Khamenei said, "Even Europeans are speechless before this oppressive America," and that Iran has countered America's power.

Khamenei asserted that the awakening of the people in Lebanon, Palestinian territories, and Latin America was a consequence of the solid determination of Imam Khomeini, who preceded Khamenei.

Khamenei's remarks were broadcast via state television and

radio.

Kazakhstan: term limit exemption for Nazarbayev

A new constitution for Kazakhstan, which was passed overwhelmingly by parliament, will let President Nursultan Nazarbayev run for re-election infinitely.

Nazarbayev, who has been president for 17 years, has lead the Central-Asian nation through an economic boom that has given the country a higher standard of living than its neighbors.

No election in Kazakhstan has been deemed fair and free by international observers.

US and China to hold high level trade talks

This week the United States and China will be holding talks called the Strategic Economic Dialogue. China has sent 16 ministers, nearly half the cabinet, whom were received at Andrews Air Force Base by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson.

The Chinese delegation is led by Vice-Premier Wu Yi and includes Finance Minister Jin Renqing. Wu Yi is expected to meet with President George W. Bush on Thursday.

It is the second meeting of the Strategic Economic Dialogue series.

Uganda forest gets reprieve

The government of Uganda has said that it will look to find other land for the Sugar Company of Uganda Ltd (SCOUL), which wants to expand its sugar plantations.

In April, there was civil unrest after a proposal to cut down 7000 acres of forest. 2 Asian employees of SCOUL's parent company Mehta

Group were killed.

Ultimately, it seems, that it was warnings from environmental experts about soil erosion, watershed for streams that feed Lake Victoria and the threat to endangered species such as the rare Tit-hylia bird, that changed the government's position.

US funding bill compromise

In a compromise, that some see as a victory for United States President George W. Bush, Democrats dropped their demand for a withdrawal date from Iraq.

"The president has made it very clear that he is not going to sign timelines," said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland. "We can't pass timelines over his veto."

"Democrats have finally conceded defeat in their effort to include mandatory surrender dates in a funding bill for the troops," said House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio.

"We don't have a veto-proof Congress," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

Today in History

1430 - Hundred Years' War: Joan of Arc was captured at the Siege of Compiègne.

1533 - The marriage of Henry VIII of England and his first wife Catherine of Aragon was annulled.

1568 - The Eighty Years' War broke out when Dutch rebels led by Louis of Nassau invaded Friesland in the Battle of Heiligerlee.

1934 - American bank robbers Bonnie and Clyde were ambushed by police and killed in Black Lake, Louisiana.

1945 - End of World War II in Europe: Reichspräsident Karl

Dönitz was captured and his Flensburg government was dissolved.

1995 - The Java programming language by James Gosling and colleagues was officially announced.

1998 - The Belfast Agreement was accepted in a referendum, with a high margin of three-fourths 'yes' votes to Northern Ireland.

May 23 is Shavuot in Judaism (2007)

Quote of the Day

What I mean by the Muse is that unimpeded clearness of the intuitive powers, which a perfectly truthful adherence to every admonition of the higher instincts would bring to a finely organized human being. It may appear as prophecy or as poesy. ... should these faculties have free play, I believe they will open new, deeper and purer sources of joyous inspiration than have as yet refreshed the earth.
~ Margaret Fuller

Word of the Day

Linnaean; adj

1. Of or relating to naturalist Carolus Linnaeus or his works.
2. Of or pertaining to the system of binomial nomenclature originated by Linnaeus.

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