



Top Stories

Al-Jazeera airs new video of Ayman al-Zawahiri



Video release by an Arabic-language news site confirms the survival of a top al-Qaeda member from an air strike where he was allegedly the target.

U.S. Senate confirms Supreme Court nominee Alito



After several weeks of at times contentious deliberation in the Senate Judiciary Committee, the United States Senate confirmed Judge

Samuel A. Alito, Jr. to the Supreme Court with 58 votes in favor and 42 against.

Featured story

Congressional staff actions prompt Wikipedia investigation



Edits by Massachusetts congressman Marty Meehan's staff on his Wikipedia article

spurred a Lowell Sun story and a subsequent Wikipedia investigation of all Internet addresses assigned to the Congress of the United States.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Iran reacts with anger to its referral to the U.N. Security Council, saying diplomatic

Wikipedia Current Events

avenues have been closed.

•The International Atomic Energy Agency has announced it has evidence within its report for the Thursday meeting that Iran obtained documents showing how to mold highly enriched grade uranium into the core of warheads.

•In the United States, a female ex-postal worker opened fire at a mail processing plant, killing six people and critically wounding another before committing suicide in what's believed to be the deadliest workplace shooting ever carried out by a woman in US history.

•Russian President Vladimir Putin has voiced renewed opposition to the US decision to abandon the 30 year old Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in favour of missile defence saying it would damage world security. He also claimed that Russia has developed a new category of hypersonic intercontinental missile which can zig-zag in flight and is immune to any missile defense system.

•Nominations for the 78th Academy Awards were announced in Beverly Hills, California, by Academy President Sid Ganis and actress Mira Sorvino.

•Coretta Scott King, widow of assassinated civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr, dies at age 78.

•A former US Marine, Jim Massey,

Wikipedia Current Events

has claimed on the Irish radio station Live 95FM that the US military has been illegally shipping depleted uranium through Shannon Airport for use in Iraq. If true, this would be a major breach of Irish neutrality and Irish-US agreements on the use of Shannon. The airport's use by the US military is already highly controversial, in part due to the connection with CIA captives.

•U.S. oil company ExxonMobil announced profits for 2005 of \$36.1 billion, a record amount in US corporate history. In anticipation of a public backlash, the company simultaneously posted newspaper advertisements in the US to explain its success.

•A tourist coach crash in Egypt on the highway between Hurghada and Luxor kills 14 and injures another 30 people. All casualties are from Hong Kong and were joining Jetour Holidays tours.

Nominations announced for 78th Academy Awards

Best Picture nominees this year are Brokeback Mountain, Capote, Crash, Good Night, and Good Luck., and Munich. The director of each of these films received director nominations. Nominees include George Clooney (Good Night, and Good Luck.), Paul Haggis (Crash), Ang Lee (Brokeback Mountain), Bennett Miller (Capote), and Steven Spielberg (Munich). This is the first

time since 1981 that every Best Picture nominee also received a nod for Direction.

Brokeback Mountain leads this year's Oscar pack overall, with eight nominations. Brokeback is followed by Crash, Good Night, and Good Luck., and Memoirs of a Geisha, who each earned six. Capote, Munich, and Walk the Line each received five nominations. King Kong, Pride and Prejudice, and The Constant Gardener picked up four nominations, while Cinderella Man, The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, and War of the Worlds pick up three. A History of Violence, Hustle & Flow, Mrs. Henderson Presents, North Country, Syriana, and Transamerica each received two nods each.

Best Animated Feature Film nominees are Howl's Moving Castle, Tim Burton's Corpse Bride, and Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit. None of these films used primarily CGI-animation, the first year this can be claimed, since the 2001 creation of the award category. Corpse Bride marks both Tim Burton and Mike Johnson's first nominations. Wallace & Gromit's Steve Box is celebrating his first nomination, while co-producer Nick Park has three Oscars for Best Animation Short, a fourth nomination, of which he lost to himself in 1990. Hayao Miyazaki won the Best Animated Feature award in 2002, for Spirited Away.

Uniquely neither animation powerhouse, Disney or DreamWorks, is directly nominated in the category. Disney's Buena Vista Entertainment distributes Miyazaki film Howl's Moving Castle, while DreamWorks distributed Wallace

and Gromit, animated by Aardman Animations.

Best Foreign Language Film nominees include Italian film Don't Tell, France's Joyeux Noël, Palestine's Paradise Now, Germany's Sophie Scholl - The Final Days, and South Africa's Tsotsi. Italy has been up for an Oscar 27 times, France 34 times, and Germany has had six nominations. This is only South Africa's second nomination, with the first coming last year, and Palestine's first ever Academy Award nomination.

The 78th Academy Awards presentation will be held on Sunday, March 5.

Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role
Philip Seymour Hoffman - Capote
Terrence Howard - Hustle & Flow
Heath Ledger - Brokeback Mountain
Joaquin Phoenix - Walk the Line
David Strathairn - Good Night, and Good Luck

Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role
George Clooney - Syriana
Matt Dillon - Crash
Paul Giamatti - Cinderella Man
Jake Gyllenhaal - Brokeback Mountain
William Hurt - A History of Violence

Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role
Judi Dench - Mrs. Henderson Presents
Felicity Huffman - Transamerica
Keira Knightley - Pride & Prejudice
Charlize Theron - North Country
Reese Witherspoon - Walk the Line

Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role
Amy Adams - Junebug

Catherine Keener - Capote
Frances McDormand - North Country
Rachel Weisz - The Constant Gardener
Michelle Williams - Brokeback Mountain

Adapted Screenplay
Brokeback Mountain
Capote
The Constant Gardener
A History of Violence
Munich

Original Screenplay
Crash
Good Night, and Good Luck
Match Point
The Squid and the Whale
Syriana

Achievement in Art Direction
Good Night, and Good Luck
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
King Kong
Memoirs of a Geisha
Pride & Prejudice

Achievement in Cinematography
Batman Begins
Brokeback Mountain
Good Night, and Good Luck
Memoirs of a Geisha
The New World

Achievement in Costume Design
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Memoirs of a Geisha
Mrs. Henderson Presents
Pride & Prejudice
Walk the Line

Best Documentary Feature
Darwin's Nightmare
Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room
March of the Penguins
Murderball
Street Fight

Best Documentary Short Subject
The Death of Kevin Carter:
Casualty of the Bang Bang Club

God Sleeps in Rwanda
The Mushroom Club
A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin

Achievement in Film Editing
Cinderella Man
The Constant Gardener
Crash
Munich
Walk the Line

Achievement in Makeup
The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
Cinderella Man
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

Achievement in Music Written For Motion Pictures (Original Score)
Brokeback Mountain
The Constant Gardener
Memoirs of a Geisha
Munich
Pride & Prejudice

Achievement in Music Written For Motion Pictures (Original Song)
In the Deep - Crash
It's Hard Out Here For a Pimp - Hustle & Flow
Travelin' Thru - Transamerica

Best Animated Short Film
Badgered
The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation
The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello
9
One Man Band

Best Live Action Short Film
Ausreisser (The Runaway)
Cashback
The Last Farm
Our Time is Up
Six Shooter

Achievement in Sound Editing
King Kong
Memoirs of a Geisha
War of the Worlds

Achievement in Sound Mixing
The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
King Kong
Memoirs of a Geisha
Walk the Line
War of the Worlds

Achievement in Visual Effects
The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
King Kong
War of the Worlds

Virginia takes action against Zebra Mussels in private pond

In a first ever effort in the United States to eliminate the presence of Zebra mussels in a large body of water, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) announced on Monday that a private pond in Prince William County, Virginia is undergoing water treatment using a chemical potash of potassium chloride in concentrations high enough to kill invasive and native shellfish species.

The pond at the Millbrook Quarry will undergo treatment for 3 to 4 weeks in an effort to eliminate an infestation of zebra mussels, a condition of its waters that was confirmed by state environmental officials in 2002. The treatment is not expected to pose a threat to non-molluscan aquatic wildlife, vegetation, or land-dwelling creatures at the site. Officials expect the one-time treatment process will provide protection from the possibility of future infestation for 33 years.

The entire body of water will be treated with potassium chloride to a level of 90 ppm, well below the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) standard of 250 ppm for potable water. There are no expected health risks for

humans, or contamination of drinking water wells in the immediate vicinity.

The freshwater Zebra Mussel species is a threat to native mussels of the region because of their high reproduction rate and their ability to attach themselves in clusters to native mussels, which kills them since they are prevented from opening and closing their shells to feed or burrow. Bottom-dwelling marine species are often covered by the Zebra Mussel.

Measures to prevent the spread of zebra mussels vary by region where the species is present. In Maryland, boat owners who launch water craft on reservoirs that serve as sources of drinking water are required to register their boat for use only on those reservoirs, to reduce chances of the mussel being transferred from other waters. Drinking water treatment and power production facilities where the mussels are present must regularly treat their systems to keep them clear of decaying debris that fouls intake pipes.

Zebra mussels were first discovered in North America in 1988, in Lake Saint Clair, a lake between Lake Erie and Lake Huron. By 1990 they appeared in all of the Great Lakes. It is believed that the mussels were accidentally brought over from Europe on the hulls of ships.

U.S. Senate confirms Supreme Court nominee Alito

After several weeks of at times contentious deliberation in the Senate Judiciary Committee, the United States Senate confirmed Judge Samuel A. Alito, Jr. to the Supreme Court with 58 votes in favor and 42 against. Only one Republican, Lincoln Chafee of

Rhode Island, voted against confirmation. Four Democrats, including former Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia, voted for confirmation. Alito was sworn-in later in the day.

Alito had been nominated by President George W. Bush following the withdrawal of his original Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, a criminal lawyer and close associate of Bush since before his tenure as Governor of Texas from 1994-2000. Miers, facing harsh criticism of her qualifications for a position on the high court, along with growing opposition from members of the conservative movement, elected to withdraw in October 2005.

Alito was nominated shortly after Miers' withdrawal, and faced the Judiciary Committee in January 2006.

With the Bush Administration facing poor approval ratings following the withdrawal of Miers, Senate Democrats put forth a strong offensive to the confirmation of Alito. They questioned Alito extensively of his record on abortion, exercise of executive authority, his opinions on various legal issues while studying at Princeton University and his membership in the CAP group there.

Following the Judiciary Committee's party-line vote approving Alito, efforts were spearheaded by Ranking Judiciary Committee member Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Sen. John F. Kerry (D-MA) to filibuster Alito's confirmation. However, the motion to end debate on Alito ended with a 72-25 cloture vote; Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) acknowledged that a filibuster was not a realistic option to stop Alito's

confirmation.

Alito is the second judge to be appointed and confirmed to the Supreme Court by President Bush. His first appointee, Judge John Roberts, was confirmed by the Senate in the autumn of 2005. Following the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Roberts was immediately selected to fill Rehnquist's post.

Alito will be replacing Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was a crucial swing vote in an ideologically divided Court. With the appointment of Alito, the Court will most likely experience a shift to the political right. How much of a shift cannot be precisely determined, as it remains to be seen how Alito will rule in cases involving crucial social issues.

Alito earned a bachelor's degree in law from Princeton University, and did his graduate work at Yale Law School. Most of his bench experience has come at the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, where he has served as a justice since 1990, when President George H.W. Bush nominated him for the post. He follows current Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia as the second Italian-American member of the high court.

Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) told the AP that the United States would "be better and stronger and more unified if we were confirming a different nominee, a nominee who could have united us more than divided us".

And Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) said he is concerned with Alito's "philosophy of the Constitution [and] his great effort of many years to expand presidential power at a time when there are real

serious questions about the powers the president has".

However, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said there are no doubts about Alito's "qualification in terms of education, professional career and his service on the court of appeals."

And in a written statement, President Bush called Alito a "brilliant and fair-minded judge who strictly interprets the Constitution and laws and does not legislate from the bench. He is a man of deep character and integrity, and he will make all Americans proud as a Justice on our highest court."

100th British soldier killed in Iraq

The total death toll of the British Army in Iraq (excluding British soldiers employed privately as mercenaries) reached 100 this morning with a soldier dying from injuries suffered in an explosion at Um Qasr. Um Qasr is an Iraqi port in the southern Basra province where British troops operate.

The ministry of defence has yet to name the soldier, a member of the 7th Armoured Brigade who are better known as "the Desert Rats". They stated that the blast which took place at around 8.30am also injuring three other soldiers.

Sympathy has been widely expressed by various Political and social figures. An official spokesman for Tony Blair the British Prime minister who ordered the country's troops into Iraq, said that he was "deeply saddened" by the death, as he is by all fatalities of service personnel. Dr Liam Fox, the opposition Conservatives defence spokesman, also

expressed his sympathies.

Critics of the War also expressed their sympathies but blamed the government for the soldiers' death. Reg Keys who was the father of a military policeman who died in an ambush in Iraq said that "We have had 100 chances to learn our lesson. It just goes on and on". George Galloway, the Respect MP for Bethnal Green and Bow said "Our hearts go out to the family of the hundredth British soldier to die in Iraq. These one hundred deaths are the all too predictable consequences of the illegal and immoral war in Iraq. I don't want another British soldier to die occupying other people's countries." Respect echoed the call by the Stop the War Coalition for a demonstration Parliament Square were the names of the all dead will be read out.

However, Sir Malcolm Rifkind Conservative foreign secretary, who had opposed the war claimed that Britain could not just leave Iraq.

The UK has the second highest number of casualties of the countries that sent soldiers, above Italy with 27 and Ukraine with 18, but is well below the US's figure of 2242. The number of Iraqi military casualties is agreed to be larger than this, but may lie anywhere between 5000 and 45,000 according to different estimates.

The number of Iraqi civilian casualties from March 2003 to September 2004 is estimated as 100,000 (excluding the Fallujah attack), with most of the violent deaths due to air strikes.

Americans spent more than they earned in 2005

Americans are spending more than they are earning, pushing the

national savings rate to lows not seen since the Great Depression. The Commerce Department released a report saying that personal savings fell to a negative .5% in 2005.

This means that people spent everything they earned and more. This is the third time that the savings rate has been negative, the previous two times were both during the Great Depression in 1932 and 1933. The savings rate has been declining since 1984 when it stood at 10.8%, in 2004 it was 1.8%.

Al-Jazeera airs new video of Ayman al-Zawahri

The Qatar-based Arabic language television network al-Jazeera has aired a new tape of al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahri. In his first video appearance to mention the Peshawar province missile attack in Pakistan, Al-Zawahri refers to the alleged strike on himself and calls the U.S. President George W. Bush, a "butcher" and a "failure".

On the tape, al-Zawahri says he survived an American air strike targeting him in eastern Pakistan on 13 January. The air strike killed 13 villagers and led to widespread demonstrations in Pakistan for the alleged deaths of civilians. The U.S. has made no official claim of responsibility for the cross-border attack from Afghanistan.

"Butcher of Washington, you are not only defeated and a liar, but also a failure. You are a curse on your own nation and you have brought and will bring them only catastrophes and tragedies," Zawahri said, referring to President Bush. "Bush, do you know where I am? I am among the Muslim masses."

al-Zawahri also threatened the citizens of Britain and the U.S.A. in the tape; "The lion of Islam, Sheik Osama bin Laden, may God protect him, offered you a decent exit from your dilemma. But your leaders, who are keen to accumulate wealth, insist on throwing you in battles and killing your souls in Iraq and Afghanistan and — God willing — on your own land."

A U.S. counterterrorism official said to AP reporters on condition of anonymity, that the message broadcast by al-Jazeera indicates that al-Qaeda believed it was important to show that al-Zawahri is alive. The U.S. official also noted that the video was delivered quickly, demonstrating al-Zawahri's ability to get his message out even faster than bin Laden. As al-Zawahri make a reference to Osama Bin Laden's offering of a truce, it appears this tape is recorded not more than 12 days ago, which make a very short time according to al-Qaeda standards.

It has been widely reported, but not confirmed, that some al-Qaeda operatives were killed by the U.S. airstrike on the village of Damadola in Pakistan.

West Papuan refugees may face death if deported

Refugee rights advocates and Australian Parliamentarians on Christmas Island have expressed alarm at the Indonesian Government's direct request to Prime Minister John Howard for the return of 43 Papuan asylum seekers, who arrived on Cape York by boat on January 18th. Rob Wesley-Smith from Australians for a Free West Papua said the asylum seekers escaped because their lives were threatened, and would

certainly face death if forced to return.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has assured Mr Howard that the group will not be prosecuted if they are returned.

The West Papuan asylum seekers are currently being detained in an Australian Immigration Detention Centre on the remote Christmas Island, 2,600 kilometres off Perth, Western Australia. The group claims genocide at the hands of the Indonesian Government.

The Federal government flew the 36 adults and seven children to Christmas Island, where the families were put into immigration department housing and the single men in the detention centre.

Rob Wesley-Smith says the asylum seekers should be dealt with according to Australian law.

"The people have escaped... because their lives are at risk," he said. "Their fathers have been killed, one of them was in jail for a number of years himself, and this is the reality of the situation in West Papua - so no way should they go back - they'd be killed."

Supporters of the "West Papuan 43" say that the West Papuans "are entitled to the support of community groups and their fellow country people. They should also have easy access to translators, medical care and independent legal assistance."

The Indonesia Human Rights Committee has called on the Government to plea for the immediate release of the asylum seekers into the Australian community, and for their claims to be processed fairly and as expeditiously as possible.

Immigration Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone said it was not always possible to keep women and children out of detention.

The New Zealand Green Party has called for some of the asylum seekers to be processed in New Zealand.

Mr Wesley-Smith says they have legitimate claims for refugee status. "There's evidence that some have been mistreated and tortured and they're a cohesive group and strongly politically motivated, and that there is no way that they would be seen as a group to be sent back - that that's just a preliminary assessment," he said.

The 43 asylum seekers told of graphic, disturbing accounts of beatings and torture by Indonesian military, during interviews with Immigration officers over the past week.

According to The Melbourne Age newspaper, an Immigration source said the refugees had a "very strong case" for refugee status. "Some of what has come out of the interviews has been absolutely heart-wrenching," the source said. The group described accounts of vicious lashings while in prison and attacks on villages and livestock in retaliation for the Papuans agitating for independence.

Despite human rights organisations and academic reports, detailing thousands of deaths and even "genocide", Indonesia says "abuses no longer occur in West Papua."

Under the control of the Indonesian military an estimated 100,000 West Papuans have lost

their lives over the last four decades. Two days after the West Papuan refugees arrived in Australia, Indonesian troops opened fire in the Paniai district, killing a 13-year-old and wounding two others.

West Papuan leaders and academics say that the indigenous people may be wiped out because of new threats such as an HIV/Aids epidemic and the unchecked environmental devastation caused the exploitation of forestry and mineral resources.

The Australian government have yet to make a decision on the asylum seekers, the general affairs counsellor of the Australian Embassy said in Jakarta.

"There is no decision yet, not at all," Elizabeth O'Neill said. She said verification and interviews by Australian authorities were "standard procedure" and valid for anybody arriving in the country without official documents. The process, she said, was in line with United Nations Conventions and Australian laws.

She said the two governments have had good relations since the Bali bombing in October 2002 and the tsunami in December 2004. Reports in Jakarta media say John Howard has given assurance to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono that the handling of the West Papuan group, who's territory is under Indonesian authority, would not disturb the relation between the two countries.

"Prime Minister Howard has even reiterated his support that Papua is part of the Indonesian sovereignty, and promised to have close communication both at the

high level, ministerial and official levels to handle the case without disturbing our relation," said a spokesman.

A Department of Immigration spokesman said lawyers were currently interviewing the West Papuans on Christmas Island about their asylum claims.

The Papuans' boat was only the third boat of asylum seekers to arrive on the mainland since 2001. Asylum seekers who arrive by boat are sent to remote detention centres for processing, in what the Howard Government calls the Pacific Solution.

Australia's borders are protected by mandatory detention legislation. The Australian government detains all persons entering the country by boat without a valid visa, including children. Since the late 1990's unauthorised arrivals have been transferred to one of the Australian immigration detention facilities on the Australian mainland, or to Manus Island, Nauru or Christmas Island as part of the Pacific Solution. Mandatory detention remains a very controversial aspect of Australian immigration policy.

A High Court decision in 2005 means that detention can also be indefinite - the Court ruled that the government had the right to keep a Palestinian asylum seeker in detention, even without any prospect of release.

Greens senator Kerry Nettle visited Christmas Island at the weekend and talked with some of the Papuans. She called on the Government to move the group to the Australian mainland, where there is an established West Papuan community.

Today in History

1796 - The capital of Upper Canada was moved from Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake) to York (now Toronto), which was deemed to be less vulnerable to attack by the United States.

1884 - The first fascicle of the Oxford English Dictionary was published.

1946 - Norwegian politician Trygve Lie was elected the first UN Secretary-General.

1958 - Egypt and Syria merged to form the United Arab Republic.

2003 - The NASA Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated over Texas during reentry into the Earth's atmosphere on its 28th and final mission. This was the second total loss of a Space Shuttle.

February 01 is Imbolc and St. Brigid's Day in Ireland

Quote of the Day

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

~ Langston Hughes ~

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