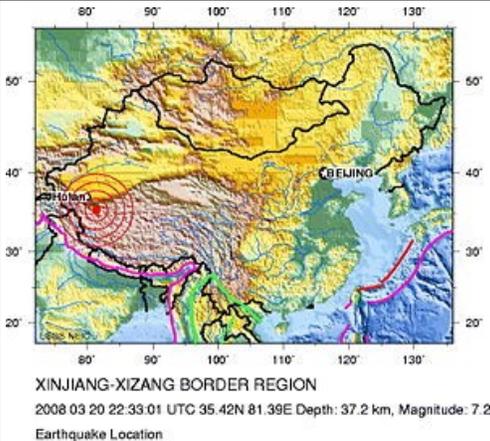




### Top Stories



### Large 7.2 earthquake strikes China

A large magnitude 7.2 earthquake has struck western China in the Xinjiang region which houses the Tarim Basin where at least 1/3 of China's oil reserve supply is held.

### Senator Obama's passport records breached in January 2008

MSNBC is reporting that two low-level United States Department of State employees have been fired, and a third employee disciplined, over accessing the passport files of



Senator Barack Obama "without a need to do so."

### After 9 months, Belgian coalition delivers government



After almost nine and a half months, government formation talks in Belgium have resulted in a new

### Top Stories

government. New Prime Minister Yves Leterme was sworn in by King Albert II today. The coalition partners have set out several deadlines for major decisions on which agreement still could not be reached during the formation.

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

### Wikinews interviews author and filmmaker John Gaspard

Author and filmmaker John Gaspard spoke with Wikinews on his three low budget feature films and books. He told us how he was able to make his latest movie, Grown Men, for under \$13,000 and how his popular book, Digital Filmmaking 101, came to be. He even had a few tips for the amateur filmmakers reading this.

### Wikipedia Current Events

Yves Leterme is sworn in as Prime Minister of Belgium.

- The Vice-President of the United States Dick Cheney makes an unannounced visit to Afghanistan to hold discussions with the President of Afghanistan.
- The Xinhua news agency reports for the first time that protests have spread to neighbouring provinces of Sichuan and Gansu as the Chinese authorities attempt to regain control.
- The Dalai Lama offers to meet with senior Chinese officials including the President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao.

### Wikipedia Current Events

•China dispatches convoys to Tibet consisting of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of police vehicles.

### Bill restricting Post Office closures defeated in UK Parliament; MP tells Wikinews why she supported the bill

Yesterday, the U.K. Labour Party successfully prevented a bill restricting the closure of post offices from being passed, although the governing Labour party only had a majority of 20 due to 19 of its MPs' voting against the party line. One of these was Diane Abbott, who told Wikinews why she voted for the bill.

She told Wikinews: "Post offices are central spaces within a community." She added that they provided invaluable services and a point of contact for vulnerable people. She also claimed they were more important in places like her constituency which has a large number of elderly people.

She added: "they are particularly important [in] places in areas like Hackney where there are fewer bank branches and a large elderly population who rely on the post office to collect their pensions." She was "appalled" to hear of the Post Office closures in her constituency.

The Shadow Minister for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform Alan Duncan of the Conservative Party was also contacted by

Wikinews. He directed Wikinews to his website for more information on his opinion. On his website he says that it is "simply not good enough" to allow post offices to close.

### **After 9 months, Belgian coalition delivers government**

After almost nine and a half months, government formation talks in Belgium have resulted in a new government. New Prime Minister Yves Leterme was sworn in by King Albert II today, together with 15 new Ministers and 7 Secretaries of State. A confidence vote in the Brussels parliament on Saturday is expected to confirm the coalition's promise of a government before Easter. The election was on 10 June of last year.

In his inaugural speech, Flemish Christian Democrat Leterme replied to criticism from the media and opposition that his government's manifest was vague and that there was no mutual trust between the coalition partners: "We want to increase the faith in the government, not with empty promises, but with specific measures, by investing in health care, the environment, safety and governmental services."

The coalition partners have set out several deadlines for major decisions on which agreement still could not be reached during the formation. By July 15, a council of 'wise men' has to fill the current empty space of the promised constitutional reforms. Yesterday, a survey published in the media showed that the majority of Belgians lacked confidence in the new government, and believed it will collapse within months. On a party convention yesterday, Leterme pledged he would keep his promise to his constituency,

vowing to break up the government if more powers are not devolved to the regions.

The record-breaking political stalemate had promised to be difficult from the start, after the Christian Democrats won the elections in Flanders in coalition with the nationalist party N-VA. The cartel promised more regional autonomy for the northern Dutch-speaking two-thirds majority of Belgium. Negotiations promised to be tough in a country where separate parties for the main ideologies exist in each half of the country.

Leader of the separatist N-VA Bart De Wever expressed his disdain about the new government: "There are more francophone than Dutch-speaking members in this administration, which doesn't respect the proportions: Flanders has two thirds of the population and three quarters of the wealth."

During the political crisis the previous PM Guy Verhofstadt, who recognised his defeat in the elections and had seemingly withdrawn from the political stage, returned to head a caretaker government at the request of the Belgian King. In his inaugural speech today, the new PM expressed his gratefulness to Verhofstadt for his services. After almost 9 years as the Belgian PM, Verhofstadt presented his successor with the keys of his new residence at Rue de la Loi 16/Wetstraat 16 ("16 Law St."), in Brussels.

'Madame No' Joëlle Milquet, leader of the Walloon Christian Democrats, gave her Flemish colleague Leterme a hard time during the coalition talks because she consistently resisted the Flemish demands for regional

autonomy. In the new government she becomes the federal Minister of Work, a department that the Flemish nationalists want to devolve to the regional level.

As the largest political fraction, the liberals seem to have weighed heavily on the coalition. They deliver the vice-Premier and the Ministers for Constitutional Reforms, Finances, Economy, Internal and Foreign Affairs, Asylum and Migration, Agriculture, Sciences and Humanitarian Aid. The French-speaking socialists joined the coalition talks late in the process, while the Flemish socialists remain in the opposition, giving an unprecedented asymmetry to the federal government.

### **UN: Military attacks on Darfur violated international law**

A United Nations report released Thursday states that recent attacks carried out on four villages in Darfur by the Sudanese military and armed militias were a violation of international law.

The attacks, which involved aerial bombardment in two of the villages, left a total of 115 people dead and over 30,000 forcibly displaced, according to the report. Damage to civilian property was extensive; homes, schools, and shops were systematically destroyed, vandalized, or set ablaze, food reserves were burned, and livestock was looted. In addition, there were several reports of rape in one village.

The report, issued jointly by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN African Union Mission in Darfur, describes attacks on the West Darfur villages of Saraf Jidad, Sirba, Silea and Abu Suruj in January and February. The attacks were part of

a Sudanese military campaign to regain control of West Darfur's northern corridor and drive out rebel insurgents from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

The damage to civilians was deemed to be a "deliberate and integral part" of the military strategy. In failing to "distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives", the UN accused the Sudanese military of violating international humanitarian law. The activities of the JEM were also denounced, as they were found to be in violation of the 2004 N'Djamena Ceasefire Agreement.

In Saraf Jidad, which was attacked three times in January, 26 civilians were killed, and almost the entire population was displaced. Witnesses described the attackers as Arab men called Janjaweed, who have had the assistance of the Sudanese government. The men were seen riding horses and camels, and some were in military vehicles. After exchanging fire with the JEM, they entered the town, where they started torching homes and shooting at civilians.

"An Antonov flew into the area and dropped three bombs ... I saw many houses set ablaze by the bombing. People started running randomly in fear and confusion."  
—Witness to the Silea attack

One of the victims from Saraf Jidad, who was around 80 years old, recalled the January 24 attack. "The attackers entered my house," he said. "They were four, in military uniforms. One of them hit my head with the butt of his gun. I fell down. He told me, 'If you do not all move from here we will burn you alive.' At that, they set my house on fire. I was inside, but managed to escape though I

had my arms injured by the fire."

In the other three villages, witnesses reported seeing Antonov planes and military helicopters along with the armed militiamen and Sudanese troops. In Silea, the ground offensive was preceded by three aerial bombardments in different areas of the town. Nearly the entire population of 10,600 was displaced, with some having to go across the border to Chad.

One witness of the Silea attack reported, "An Antonov flew into the area and dropped three bombs ... I saw many houses set ablaze by the bombing. People started running randomly in fear and confusion. I witnessed SAF and Janjaweed looting houses, shops and NGO offices. They would load the stolen goods in their cars and on their camels and horses and take them away."

The village of Abu Suruj was also bombed, but no casualties were reported from this bombing. However, over 75 percent of the town was burnt down by ground troops, and 30 people were killed.

In Sirba, the pattern of attack was similar to that of Abu Suruj. Half of the village was burned down and 45 people were killed. One victim described an encounter with an armed man: "I was holding tight my four-year-old brother; I was scared that the man was going to shoot him. Instead he left. After a few seconds the roof of the house was burning. He saw we were inside and he set the hut on fire to burn us alive. We escaped from the window and ran in different directions."

Witnesses reported acts of sexual violence being committed by the attackers in Sirba, and UN investigators believe at least 10

women were victims of rape. An eyewitness reported four girls being taken into a hut and raped at gunpoint by Sudanese soldiers.

There were also reports of air and ground attacks in Jebel Moon, where many victims had fled following the attacks, but the UN was denied access to the area.

On March 3, the UN met with a West Darfur security official to address their concerns. The official argued that the JEM had taken control of the villages and a deployment of troops was necessary to regain these areas. He also denied that the Sudanese military was involved in the Saraf Jidad attacks, stating they were done by Arab tribes who had nothing to do with the military campaign.

### **Constitutionality of DNC Florida primary to be decided in appeal**

The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia agreed to hear Victor DiMaio's suit against the Democratic National Committee on Monday. Dimaio sued the DNC over their decision to ignore the results of Florida's Democratic primary.

DiMaio claims that excluding Florida's Democratic voters and allowing some states to vote earlier than others violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution. The DNC countered that they have the power to exclude any state that does not follow their rules, and that the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld the right of political parties to make and enforce their own rules as protected by the Freedom of Association in the First Amendment. The DNC's rules currently allow early primaries to be held in only four states: Iowa,

Nevada, New Hampshire, and South Carolina.

The appellate court's decision could take more than a month. Whichever way this court decides, the losing party is expected to petition the U.S. Supreme Court to review the question.

Meanwhile, a furor is brewing inside the Democratic Party over what will be done with the delegates representing the voters of Florida and Michigan. Schemes to offer an inexpensive mail-in revote in Florida have been abandoned by the Florida Democratic Party as being at risk of vote tampering.

A plan to distribute Florida's delegates among the candidates was proposed Wednesday by Florida state senators Steven Gelleras and Jeremy Ring. The plan recommends seating half of Florida's 210 delegates based on the votes cast in Florida's primary. Their remaining delegates could be allocated evenly or in proportion to each candidate's national tally.

The Michigan legislature was considering a re-run of the Michigan Democratic primary for June 3rd but Barack Obama questioned the legality of the planned vote. The Michigan legislature adjourned for spring recess today (Thursday) before reaching a decision which has effectively ended the possibility of a re-vote on June 3rd. Last minute deals are still possible but the re-ballot would have to occur before June 10 to comply with DNC rules.

### **Osama bin Laden warns European Union in new audio tape**

A video released by as-Sahab features an audio track that is reputedly of Osama bin Laden, the

al-Qaeda leader, entitled "The Response Will Be What You See, Not What You Hear".

In it, bin Laden warns that the recent republication of the controversial Muhammad cartoons is more offensive than the killing of women and children and says that a "reckoning for it will be more severe."

"If there is no check in the freedom of your words, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions," bin Laden said. In the audio, he sought to reason with the "intelligent ones" in the European Union.

In 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published a series of cartoons, most of which depicted the Islamic prophet Muhammad. This eventually touched off a series of international protests and boycotts.

In February, tensions flared up again after Danish police arrested three men in an alleged plot to murder cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. Newspapers in Denmark and elsewhere in the EU republished the cartoons in a display of free speech. This was met by protests and boycotts in Muslim nations.

### **Zenit rocket launches DirecTV-11 satellite**

A Sea Launch Zenit-3SL rocket has successfully launched the DirecTV-11 Communications satellite for DirecTV. The Ukrainian-built rocket lifted off from the Norwegian Ocean Odyssey launch platform in the Pacific Ocean at 22:47:59 (UTC) yesterday evening, with spacecraft separation from the carrier rocket occurring at 23:49:03.

The mission, which marked the 13th orbital launch of 2008, is the 25th commercial launch to be conducted by the international Sea Launch consortium, the first of which also lofted a DirecTV satellite. This is also the 250th flight of the Block DM upper stage, which is used on some variants of the Zenit and Proton rockets. Launch had been delayed from November 2007 due to damage to the launch platform caused by the failure of an earlier Zenit launch. Delays from earlier this month were caused by a problem with the satellite, resulting in a ten-day delay, and a further two-day delay from Monday evening due to an undisclosed problem with the rocket.

DirecTV-11 is a Boeing 702 satellite, which will provide Direct-to-home High-definition television broadcasting services to houses in the United States, by means of Ka-band communications. It is one of three such satellites operated by DirecTV. The satellite made its first contact with the ground several hours after launch, at 05:44 GMT.

The launch was dedicated to Arthur C. Clarke who died on Tuesday. Clarke, who was most well known for writing the book which 2001: A Space Odyssey was based on, was also the first person to suggest placing satellites into geosynchronous and geostationary orbits. DirecTV-11 will be placed into such an orbit.

Sea Launch President Rob Peckham said that he "feels good" about the mission success, and that Sea Launch was "proud of [its] role in DirecTV's continued success". Steve O'Neill, the President of Boeing Satellite Systems, said that the launch was "a great ride", and thanked Sea Launch for their "excellent work".

The satellite's initial orbit was confirmed to be 250km x 36484.8km x 0°, differing by only 2.8km from the planned orbit.

Sea Launch have a further four launches planned for this year. In addition, its subsidiary Land Launch will conduct its first launch, using a Zenit-3SLB rocket from area 45/1 at the Baikonur Cosmodrome to launch the AMOS-60 satellite. This is currently scheduled for mid-April. The next Sea Launch mission, with the Galaxy 18 satellite, is scheduled for May.

### Three of Serbia's neighbours recognize Kosovo

Croatia, Bulgaria and Hungary, all of which border Serbia, announced in a joint statement Wednesday that they will recognize Kosovo as an independent state.

"The decision on the recognition of Kosovo is based on thorough consideration," the statement said.

Croatia and Hungary later confirmed they had officially recognized Kosovo, while Bulgaria is expected to make an announcement Thursday.

Yesterday, Bulgaria's security council held a meeting regarding Kosovo. Angel Naidenov, spokesman of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, praised Kosovo for their efforts in establishing a "multi-ethnic and democratic country."

The statement says Kosovo's declaration of independence was prompted by the international community's failure to work out a solution between Serbia and Kosovo. "In these circumstances the change of the unsustainable status quo was unavoidable," the statement said.

The three nations express their interest in helping the European Union with stabilizing the region, and they wish to develop ties with a Kosovo that "maintains good relations with its neighbors, enjoys economic growth, and keeps its European orientation."

Serbian foreign minister Vuk Jeremić criticized their decision. "Every country that decides to recognize the illegally declared state of Kosovo breaches international law," he said, adding that countries who recognize Kosovo "cannot have good ties with Serbia."

"I call on states, particularly those of the region, not to take this step. Do not injure our country's territorial integrity and sovereignty," Jeremić said.

Boris Tadić, Serbia's president, had previously warned Croatia that recognizing Kosovo would have a negative effect on their relations. "We want to have the best possible relations with this country," Tadić said. "But recognition of Kosovo is certainly not an act of goodwill between neighbours."

Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader says he does not expect relations to worsen. "I do understand this is a difficult one for Serbia to swallow. That's one of the reasons we have waited until now. But I don't expect a worsening of political and economic relations because there is no alternative to good neighbourly relations."

Kosovo's deputy prime minister, Hajredin Kuçi said the decision was "very good for the Serbian perception and the people of Serbia that everybody who is in the neighbourhood is recognizing

the new reality."

### Today in History

1556 – Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, one of the founders of Anglicanism, was burnt at the stake in Oxford, England for heresy.

1800 – Pius VII was crowned Pope in Venice with a temporary papal tiara made of papier-mâché.

1804 – The Napoleonic code, the French civil code established under Napoleon, entered into force.

1960 – Police in Sharpeville, South Africa opened fire on a group of unarmed black demonstrators who were protesting pass laws, killing almost 70 people and wounding about 180 others.

1980 – The United States announced the boycott of the Summer Olympics in Moscow to protest the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.

1990 – Formerly known as South West Africa, Namibia gained independence from South Africa, with Sam Nujoma as its first President.

March 21 is Good Friday (Western Christianity, 2008); Purim ends at sundown (Judaism, 2008); Naw-Rúz in the Bahá'í calendar, Benito Juárez Day in Mexico, World Poetry Day.

### Quote of the Day

If Spring came but once in a century, instead of once a year, or burst forth with the sound of an earthquake, and not in silence, what wonder and expectation there would be in all hearts to behold the miraculous change! But now the silent succession suggests nothing but necessity. To most men only the cessation of the miracle would be miraculous and the perpetual exercise of God's power seems less wonderful than its withdrawal would be.

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Word of the Day**

ambivalent adj

1. Simultaneously feeling opposing or contradictory feelings.
2. Alternately having one opinion or feeling, and then the opposite.

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