



Top Stories

Iran nuclear impasse continues

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Featured story

Criticism over Qingzang Railway as opening nears

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Wikipedia Current Events

- The Congress of Mexico passes a bill which, if signed by the President, will decriminalize possession of small amounts of

Wikipedia Current Events

marijuana, cocaine, heroin, opium, LSD, hallucinogenic mushrooms, amphetamines, and peyote.

- Five members of the United States Congress are arrested outside of the Sudanese embassy for protesting the Darfur genocide.

- Around 50,000 people participate in the Puerto Rico Shouts march in San Juan, Puerto Rico demanding a budget agreement to avert a partial shutdown of government offices and public schools.

- Chung Mong Koo, head of Hyundai Motor Company, is arrested in South Korea on charges of embezzlement of 100 billion won (\$106 million USD), among other corruption charges.

- In Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia, memorial services are held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre, in which a lone gunman murdered 35 people at the popular tourist town in the country's worst killing spree. Prime Minister John Howard led prayers at the service.

Opposition leader Alaksandar Milinkievič jailed in Belarus

The leader of the main opposition party, Alaksandar Milinkievič has been jailed for 15 days in Belarus for taking part in an 'unsanctioned rally'. The march, held in the centre of Minsk, marked the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl

nuclear disaster. Held every year, it is a traditional forum for expressing political opposition. At least 6,000 protesters took part, accompanied by riot police.

Demonstrators are said to have asked permission for the rally and to have received authorisation for having the protest on some sites. Protestors say that their protest was on the authorised sites and was not unlawful.

Conflicts between the opposition party and the government, led by Alexander Lukashenko have been numerous since Lukashenko was re-elected as President on March 19, 2006. The opposition party has organised numerous demonstrations and rallies, and over 1,000 of their members being arrested.

Milinkievič has said that he has received "a political sentence". Other opposition leaders Alexander Bukhvostov and Sergei Kalyakin were also jailed on the same day.

US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice has said the US "condemns this act" and called upon Belarus to act within accepted international principles on the treatment of political opposition. NATO chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has also condemned the action.

Criticism over Qingzang Railway as opening nears

The Qingzang Railway is a project by the Chinese Government to build a unique railway linking Tibet with Mainland China. The railway

will include sections at high altitude, crossing 5000 metre high mountains, long tunnels and lots of track laid on permafrost. The railway is being hailed in China as "an engineering miracle", but has attracted criticism from across the world over fears that the railway, the first to link it to outside the region, will increase Chinese control over the Tibetan autonomous region and will erode Tibetan culture and traditions.

Currently, Tibet can only be reached by air and by road. Departing from lower-altitude airports to fly into Tibet carries the risk of experiencing high altitude sickness, and the landing at Lhasa can be 'hair-raising'. Travelling by road means several days on a bus or hitchhiking on trucks over windy mountain roads. When the Quingzang Railway opens, it is expected that direct trains will run from Beijing and other cities.

China has long received criticism over its treatment of Tibet. The Tibet Autonomous Region excludes many areas claimed to be part of 'historic Tibet', and the former government of Tibet, headed by the Dalai Lama, now live in exile in India. China claims that the railway will bring greater freedoms and economic opportunities to the people of Tibet. For an area that has long been in relative isolation though, the railway is bound to have a profound effect. Locals may worry about what would happen to their trade if they were suddenly forced to compete with businesses from Mainland China. Much of Tibet is also ancient, with old buildings and traditional practices, which may be under threat from the new physical link with China.

There are also concerns from environmentalists. The passage between Tibet and China contains

some unique flora and endangered animal species, such as Tibetan antelope, which may be threatened by the railroad. Construction of the railway will generate 7,000 tons of rubbish from 20,000 builders. Some of this rubbish will have been buried on the spot whilst some forms of non-degradable rubbish which may pollute water is said to have been transported to Golmud or Lhasa for treatment. A bridge is also said to have been built at Wudaoliang Basin to enable animals to cross. Once open the railway will generate more waste, and whilst the carriages are said to be enclosed, preventing passengers from throwing out rubbish, it remains to be seen what additional impact the running of the railway will create.

As well as passengers, the railway will also have a strong use in transporting freight, currently carried on trucks. This will mean that more coal and petroleum-based products will be brought into Tibet. Whilst China claims that this will enable Tibetans to stop logging pine trees for fuel, aiding the local ecology, the railway will accelerate Tibet's use of climate-damaging fossil fuels.

Some Canadian student groups had called for a boycott of the Bombardier Transportation group, who has a contract with China to provide some of the carriages.

Most of the line is now complete, ahead of schedule. Signaling equipment is currently being installed, with trials said to begin in July. The railway is scheduled to open fully in 2007. Luxury carriages will carry tourists, with sleeping compartments and oxygen tanks to enable breathing within the high-altitude areas.

Iran nuclear impasse continues

The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned the United States against any attack on his country saying "The Americans should know that if they launch an assault against Islamic Iran, their interests in every possible part of the world will be harmed". Earlier this week Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that Iran was ready to begin offering nuclear technology to developing countries.

Speaking at a rally in North-West Iran this Thursday, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying "Those who want to prevent Iranians from obtaining their right, should know that we do not give a damn about such resolutions."

Iran says that its nuclear program is meant for producing energy and that it has a right under Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to enrich fuel for that purpose. The President of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad stated, "[Iran] won't back down one iota". The US has called on Iran to stop its enrichment work and accuses Iran of trying to build a nuclear bomb. US "is leaving all options on the table" not excluding military strikes with nuclear weapons or with conventional weapons in the eventuality of sanctions being ineffective. Iranian leaders have made strong statements against possible sanctions or military action against their country. The Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The Iranian nation will give a double response to any strike". Tehran has vowed to respond against US targets worldwide in the case of a US led attack against Iran.

According to some claims, the US

has already started attacking Iran. On April 18, Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) wrote a letter to George W. Bush requesting information about claims that the US has already sent US covert operatives and/or retrained ex-members of MEK and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PEJAK, associated with the PKK) into Iranian territory in order to provoke existing ethnic tensions by incidents of violence. MEK and PKK are classified by the U.S. State Department and by the Council of the European Union as terrorist organizations.

The UN Security Council has called on Iran to suspend its enrichment work by Friday and permit additional inspections of its nuclear programme. Iran has rejected the demands. The IAEA is scheduled to report on Iran's compliance of the Security Council resolution on Friday.

A 90 minute meeting between Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, the president of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the IAEA provided no breakthrough and no new proposals were made, although Aghazadeh's deputy Mohammed Saidi said the talks were "encouraging."

Speaking Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke in Vienna at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers over Iran's nuclear program. "The United States believes ... that in order to be credible the Security Council of course has to act," to reporters. Condoleezza Rice also said that it was "highly unlikely" Tehran would comply with the US's demands and that the UN "cannot have its word and its will simply ignored by a member state". "I look forward to discussing this with my

colleagues and to I and others making that case, and I would certainly hope the Security Council is prepared to take some action."

The German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said, "We expect [Iran] to meet international standards and ... to allay world suspicions that its civil nuclear operations are being used to develop a possible weapons program."

Russia and China have called for negotiations to resolve the issue with President Vladimir Putin saying that the IAEA must retain the lead in the process.

Widespread resentment of western influence on past Iranian internal affairs, such as Operation Ajax which removed the democratically elected prime minister of Iran in 1953, has called some experts to bring into question the possibility of a coalition of NATO or U.S.-led forces against Iran. The likelihood of any preventive strike against Iran is uncertain, apart from the claims that US troops and or proxy troops have already started small scale attacks. With a large young population increasingly pro-western, there are fears that any strike against Iran could damage any democratic movement as the population as a whole resents pro-Western influence in its internal affairs.

Iran has nearly four times the land area of Iraq. Iran's military is estimated [1] to 768,000/350,000 active/reserve military troops and the paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps include 11,000,000 troops.

Pakistani militants behead suspected US informant

Pro-Taliban militants in Pakistan's troubled Waziristan province

decapitated a cab driver on suspicions that he was an American informant. This is the fourth such killing in the region this month.

The deceased was found on Tuesday in a town 25 kilometres south of Wana in an area where US forces are hunting Al-Qaeda militants. Two weeks ago, another decapitated body was found with a note saying the victim was an American spy and that other US sympathizers could expect to meet the same fate. Waziristan, like Baluchistan, is engaged in a small-scale civil conflict with the Pakistani military.

Canadian government in row over flag lowering

The Conservative government of Canada announced on Monday, April 24 that it will no longer lower the flag on top of the Peace Tower at Parliament Hill whenever a Canadian soldier has been killed in action, reversing a practice set down by the previous government in 2002. Instead, a spokesperson for Prime Minister Harper said that all casualties of war would be honored equally on Remembrance Day. This announcement came after the news of four Canadian soldiers killed by an improvised roadside bomb in Afghanistan.

The government has said that in the event of a Canadian soldier death, flags would fly at half-mast at the soldier's operational base, at their home base, and at the Defence Headquarters in Ottawa. The flag at Peace Tower will only be lowered to half-mast outside of the Remembrance Day in the case of the death of a former governors general, senators or prime minister.

Liberal MPs and some newspaper editorials have spoken against the

decision.

Family devastated by body mix-up

The mother of Australian soldier, Private Jake Kovco, has spoken of her anger at being told it was not her son's body in the casket delivered to Melbourne Airport. She says all hell broke loose when the Defence Minister Brendan Nelson told Private Kovco's wife and family that there had been a mix-up.

Quote

"They've told us at some stage somebody was told it was a Bosnian in that coffin," she told The Age

Prime Minister John Howard, speaking on Southern Cross Radio, says the family has every right to be upset.

Quote

"I just want to say again how incredibly sorry I am for what has happened," he said.

Mr Howard received an angry phone call from Private Kovco's widow Shelley last night and told Southern Cross Radio he completely understands Mrs Kovco's reaction.

Judy Kovco says she is still seeking a full explanation from the Army about her son's death, she insists he did not shoot himself. Dr Nelson has told Macquarie radio that reports Private Kovco accidentally shot himself while cleaning his gun are incorrect, "It was near him in his vicinity and he made some kind of movement which suggests that it discharged," he said.

Today in History

1770 - James Cook and the crew of HM Bark Endeavour made their first landfall on Australia.

1862 - Union forces under David Farragut captured New Orleans, securing access into the Mississippi River during the American Civil War.

1882 - Ernst Werner von Siemens began operating his "Elektromote", the world's first trolleybus.

1945 - Adolf Hitler dictated his last will and testament to his secretary in the Führerbunker, and then married Eva Braun in a brief ceremony.

1992 - The acquittal of policemen who had beaten Rodney King sparked civil unrest in Los Angeles.

April 29 is Queen's Day in the Netherlands (2006), Greenery Day in Japan, International Dance Day.

Quote of the Day

"Despite the best that has been done by everyone — the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State, and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people — the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest." ~ Hirohito

Word of the Day

libidinous; *adj*

Definition

1. Having lustful desires; characterized by lewdness; sensual; lascivious.

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