

Top Stories

British Army soldiers to be court martialled for war crimes



Three British Army soldiers are to be court martialled for alleged war crimes in Iraq, United Kingdom Attorney General,

Lord Goldsmith, announced yesterday in the House of Lords.

Nearly 25,000 Iraqi civilians killed in Iraq, Iraq Body Count Project claims

A report published by the Iraq Body Count project, a British NGO, says that 24,865 civilians have been killed in Iraq in the two years following the start of the US-led invasion in March 2003.

Featured story

Prayer does not help heart patients, study finds



A multi-center US study of 748 patients with coronary artery disease who were to undergo treatment has found that distant prayer by Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups had no

measurable effects on the medical health of the study subjects.

Wikipedia Current Events

- James Doohan, best known for playing Scotty on the Star Trek TV series and movies, died at his home in Redmond, Washington, at the age of 85. The cause of death was pneumonia and Alzheimer's Disease.
- Police in Pakistan have detained about 200 suspected Islamist extremists in a series of raids on religious schools, mosques and other properties.

Wikipedia Current Events

- In China, authorities evacuate more than a million people from Fujian and Zhejiang provinces when Typhoon Haitang hits Chinese mainland. In Taiwan, death toll rises to 7 with one missing and 31 injured. The typhoon also causes significant agricultural damage.
- Government of Thailand changes the new emergency laws, weakening two articles that would have, among other things, enforced curfews and censorship of personal communication.

New US immigration bill proposes time-limit and employer scrutiny

United States Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said it is unlikely that a new bill to reform immigration legislation will receive action by the legislative body this year. The bill, introduced yesterday by Jon Kyl (R,AZ) and John Cornyn (R,TX), would require immigrant workers to apply from their native countries for a visa to remain in the states. The number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. is estimated to be in the range of 10 to 12 million.

The bill calls for replacing the practice currently in place in the U.S. of issuing paper Social Security cards with the issuance of a tamper-proof cards. The Social Security Administration identification card is treated by most states as no form of personal identification at all. A birth certificate is considered a primary form of identification, along with driver's licenses, passports and other official state or other territory photo-identification cards. The bill proposes that social security cards should be "machine readable" and a primary form of identification.

The bill is in contrast to a different measure by Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and John McCain (R-AZ) submitted two months ago. That bill would create a visa category where temporary workers are not tied to any job in particular and would allow them to apply for

permanent residence regardless of employment. The bill has republican co-sponsorship from Jim Kolbe and Jeff Flake, both from Arizona where the porous US-Mexican border is an issue.

The Kennedy-McCain bill allows illegal aliens already in the U.S. to petition the government to remain. A position that Kyl in effect calls the equivalent of granting "amnesty". Kennedy answered that criticism by saying, "The mass deportation of illegal immigrant persons as contemplated by the Cornyn-Kyl bill is not a realistic solution, and won't solve the security and economic problems we face."

The Kyl-Cornyn bill proposal is an attempt to tie immigrant status to U.S. employment. The legislation would create a guest worker program that would match immigrant workers with jobs mostly not wanted by American citizens. An immigrant worker would be given five years to come into compliance with an employment order. It calls for 10,000 federal agents, at a cost in the range of 2 to 5 billion, to audit employers who hire undocumented workers. Companies that break a proposed new law to monitor undocumented immigrants would be subject to penalties.

The bill drew criticism from immigration groups which include two leading Hispanic organizations because of the "mandatory departure" requirement. Immigrants who wait five years before leaving the U.S. would pay annual fines totaling \$5,000 each year. Or, after making a return trip to their native country, they can again apply from there for a temporary job in the U.S. They would work for two years in the U.S., return home for a year, and then reapply for two more two-year work cycle. The maximum would be six years in the United States. In their home country, they could also apply for U.S. immigrant programs, including the "green card" that grants permanent residency.

Kyl said he believes businesses will not object because his plan would make

verifying legal workers easier by reducing the documentation required. The basics of the plan include:

Requires immigrants to be registered, fingerprinted and checked against criminal and terrorist watch lists.

Allow immigrants two years under the a temporary-worker visa, after which they would have to return home for a year.

Temporary-worker visas could be used three times for a maximum stay of six years total.

Illegal immigrants now in the U.S. register for a "mandatory departure" program that would give them time to leave voluntarily. They could re-enter through the temporary-worker program, but could not apply for permanent residence while in the U.S.

A terrorism-driven drive to turn driver's licenses into a national ID card faces hurdles. Peter Costello, treasurer of Australia, said he will not support national ID cards unless there is convincing evidence it fights terrorism.

Parents aid jailbreak of 18 year old Swede guilty of rape

An 18 year old Swedish man guilty of rape was released from the court of appeal in Sundsvall today, in a way described as chaotic.

According to the news agency TT, the man tried to escape from the custody of the staff of the treatment of offenders. His parents and some friends attacked the staff, and the 18-year-old and an additional 17-year-old managed to escape.

The parents have been arrested, but the young men are reported to be free as of this evening. Both men had been sentenced in the Sundsvall district court, the 18-year-old for rape.

Press freedom groups condemn two-day radio station ban in Burundi



A map showing Burundi, just south of Rwanda.

One of Burundi's only independent radio

stations, Radio Publique Africain, went off-air for two days after an agreement was made with the country's National Communications Council (CNC). The CNC claimed to be unhappy with the station's coverage of Burundi's recent elections, alleging that it had been biased and that it insulted the Council.

The director of RPA said that the claims were unjust, and that the station had given every political party 20 minutes airtime a week during the elections.

The compromise ban was arrived at after mediation by a group of professional journalists and private broadcasters between RPA and the CNC.

Earlier this year, Radio Publique Africain was suspended for two days after being accused of breaking the country's press laws, including "offending public morals", by reporting on the rape of an eight-year-old girl and "deforming" the words of a politician. RPA observed the ban and was allowed to restart broadcasting afterwards.

The ban has been condemned by the international press freedom organisation the Committee to Protect Journalists, who have called on the CNC to lift it "immediately and unconditionally"

A group of Burundian journalists overseas, the "Collectif des Professionnels des Médias de la Diaspora Burundaise" has also spoken out, in an open letter to the CNC, accusing it of being "a body of repression which uses disproportionate sanctions".

Burundi's recent democratic elections were the first since the 1993 assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye plunged the country into a vicious, ethnically-charged civil war.

"Press freedom has been historically related to the emergence of democracy", the letter continues. "It is essential that the media, like other instruments of good governance, is protected".

Radio Publique Africain was launched in early 2001, seeking to promote peace by hiring both Hutus and Tutsis, including ex-combatants, to work on the editorial team. The station's investigative reporting and grassroots approach to issues affecting

ordinary Burundians quickly earned it the nickname "the People's Radio."

"We ask the political leaders to answer their concerns: Why are people kept in prison without trial? Why has their land been taken away? Exposing the truth in this way has brought Hutu and Tutsi communities together and made it harder for politicians to manipulate the public", said RPA director Alexis Sinduhije after receiving a press freedom award last year.

In October 2001 Sinduhije was arrested and beaten up after interviewing a South African peacekeeper against the wishes of the Burundian government. In February 2003 armed men broke into Sinduhije's house and murdered his security guard. In September of the same year Radio Publique Africain was taken off the air after broadcasting an interview with a rebel spokesperson. In a show of solidarity, other independent radio stations refused to broadcast any government news or statements until the ban on RPA was lifted.

Burundi's independent media has become increasingly vocal and vibrant in recent years. The development of the internet has seen the appearance of a number of independent Burundian news websites based overseas, outside the control of Burundi's government and the CNC. When the radio journalist Etienne Ndikuriyo was arrested without charge earlier this year, the Burundian online media helped mobilise international opinion, and he was released eight days later.

Prayer does not help heart patients, study finds

A multi-center US study of 748 patients with coronary artery disease who were to undergo treatment has found that prayer by Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups had no measurable effects on the medical health of the study subjects. The prayers were conducted by established congregations and were held away from the hospitals.

The study, published in the 16 July 2005 issue of *The Lancet*, found that the likelihood of an adverse cardiovascular event in hospital, re-admission or death within six months was unaffected by prayer.

None of the patients were told that they were prayed for, and none of the prayer groups knew who they prayed for. Nevertheless, 67% of the non-prayer group believed they were being prayed for - a potential placebo effect that may have hidden any small differences between the two groups.

The study also examined the effects of "music, imagery, and touch (MIT) therapy" before heart surgery. Practitioners qualified to Level 1 Healing Touch taught the patient relaxation techniques and played soothing music before applying 21 Healing Touch hand positions, over a 40 minute session.

There was no significant change in the combined chance of an adverse cardiovascular event in hospital, re-admission or death within six months. However, while the set of patients was evenly split, only 7 patients who received MIT therapy died, and 20 patients who did not receive it died. The result is not highly significant due to the low overall number of people who died.

A number of studies has recently examined the possible effects of prayer, with mixed results. While some religious groups have hailed studies which found positive results, skeptics have challenged the very notion of scientifically examining prayer, and have described past studies as flawed or even fraudulent.

"The mechanisms through which distant intercessory prayer might convey healing benefit are unknown", the authors of the study explain. One hypothesis they propose for such effects are "non-local features of consciousness based theoretically around observations in quantum physics."

The study was conducted by a team of 16 researchers at Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI), Duke University Medical Center, the Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), and seven other academic medical institutions across the United States.

James Doohan, Star Trek's 'Scotty', dies at 85

James Montgomery Doohan, the Canadian actor best known for playing the role of Star Trek's "Scotty" the engineer died

Wednesday of pneumonia after a long battle with Alzheimer's disease. He was 85 years old.

At the time, he was living in Redmond, Washington in the United States with his wife and their three young children.

Doohan was born in Vancouver and participated in World War II as a captain in the Royal Canadian Artillery. He lost the middle finger of his right hand at the Invasion of Juno Beach on D-Day, a bloody scene immortalized in the 1998 Steven Spielberg film, *Saving Private Ryan*. Doohan was among the film's greatest supporters, thanking the director for not sanitizing the gore of the actual event.



Doohan as Star Trek character "Scotty" in this autographed 1960s-era publicity photo. Source: Wikipedia

He started his acting career with a radio appearance at a CBC show and went on to act in several character roles. Doohan had already made a name for himself in the entertainment business as a featured voice actor in Canadian and U.S. radio dramas and motion picture voice-overs due to his knack for picking up linguistically perfect accents. His ability to affect a near-perfect Scottish accent made him a natural for the role of Scotty, according to producers at the time.

When he auditioned for what would become the role of his life in 1966, Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry asked him which of the different accents Doohan mastered would best suit the role of Scotty. Doohan responded that he believed "all the world's best engineers have been Scottish". After the original Star Trek series had ended, Doohan found himself typecast and had difficulties getting other roles.

Doohan suffered from Parkinson's as well as

Alzheimer's disease. In August last year he received a star on Hollywood's Walk of fame.

After DeForest Kelley, Doohan is the second actor of the original Star Trek cast to die.

He is survived by his wife Wende, with whom he had been married since 1975, and seven children.

British Army soldiers to be court martialled for war crimes



A patrol of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment in Iraq in 2003.

Three British Army soldiers are to be court martialled for alleged war crimes in Iraq, United Kingdom Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, announced yesterday in the House of Lords.

They are among eleven British soldiers charged with the ill treatment of two Iraqi civilians in separate incidents in September 2003. Seven, including the three accused of war crimes, have been charged with incidents that took place in September 2003. Four have been charged with the manslaughter of Ahmed Kareem in May 2003. They are alleged to have forced Mr Kareem — who was detained as a suspected looter — into the Shatt-al-Arab canal in Basra, where he subsequently drowned.

The three — Corporal Donald Payne, 34; Lance-Corporal Wayne Crowcroft, 21; and Private Darren Fallon, 22 — have been charged under the International Criminal Court Act 2001, and will be tried domestically, along with the other eight, rather than by the International Criminal Court at The Hague.

They are from the 1st Battalion, Queen's Lancashire Regiment (QLR). The regiment has been at the centre of previous accusations of abuse in Iraq. The Daily Mirror published in May 2004 photographs

purporting to be of soldiers of the QLR abusing Iraqi prisoners. The photographs were later proven to have been fabricated, and the newspaper's editor, Piers Morgan, resigned.

Lance-Corporal Payne has been charged with manslaughter, inhuman treatment of persons, and perverting the course of justice. He is alleged to have killed Baha D'oud Salim Mousa, a 26-year-old hotel receptionist from Basra. Lance-Corporal Crowcroft and Private Fallon have also been charged with inhuman treatment of persons.

Sergeant Kelvin Stacey, 28, also of the QLR, is alleged to have assaulted an Iraqi detainee and now faces a charge of actual bodily harm.

Colonel Jorge Mendonca, 41, the former commanding officer of the QLR; Major Michael Peebles, 34; and Warrant Officer Mark Davies, 36, both of the Intelligence Corps, have been charged with negligence of duty contrary to the Army Act 1955.

All four charged with the manslaughter of Ahmed Kareem (as well as the alleged beating of other detainees) are from the Foot Guards, the British Army's élite infantry of the Household Division. They are: Sergeant Carle Selman, 38, then of the Coldstream Guards (now with the Scots Guards); Guardsmen Martin McGing, 21, of the Irish Guards; Guardsman Joseph McCleary, 23, of the Irish Guards; and an unnamed 21-year-old lance-corporal was later disclosed to be that of James Stephen Cooke, also of the Irish Guards.

The Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, responded to the charges in a statement. In it, Mr Reid said, "Today the independent Army Prosecuting Authority has brought charges under British military law that will be heard in a British Court-Martial. Anyone accused is innocent until proved guilty and it is for the Courts Martial to consider the evidence in any case and reach a verdict."

In February, three British soldiers were jailed and dismissed from the army when they were found guilty of abusing Iraqis near Basra. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Mike Jackson, condemned those convicted, and apologised to the victims and the people of Iraq.

Allowing the prosecution of British soldiers for war crimes has, however, been criticised by former chiefs of the defence staff. Just last week, some former chiefs in the House of Lords said that prosecutions can be demoralising for the British Armed Forces, and can place the lives of soldiers at risk if the fear of prosecution prevents them from opening fire.

In May 2005, Lord Boyce, who held the post as an Admiral during the Iraq War, said in an interview with the British newspaper *The Observer* that he did not believe he had complete immunity from the International Criminal Court.

In the interview, he said: "If my soldiers went to jail and I did, some other people would go with me."

After being asked whether Prime Minister Tony Blair and Lord Goldsmith would be with him if he was ever brought to account, Lord Boyce said: "Too bloody right!"

The honorary Colonel-of-the-Regiment, Brigadier Geoffrey Sheldon, has said in a statement: "From the moment that Mr Mousa lost his life while in our custody, the regiment has made clear that this was an isolated, tragic incident which should never have happened, and which I and every member of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment bitterly regrets."

The brigadier did, however, state he found it "particularly difficult" to understand why charges had been brought against the former CO of the QLR, saying that: "It was Colonel Jorge Mendonca, then the commanding officer, who, as soon as he learned of Mr Musa's death, initiated the formal inquiry which has now resulted in these charges being brought."

Colonel Mendonca was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) in Iraq, and was promoted to full colonel shortly afterwards. He is now on the Army's General Staff.

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Today in History

1298 – Edward I of England defeated William Wallace's Scottish rebels at the Battle of Falkirk.

1831 – In Brussels, Leopold I was inaugurated as the first King of the Belgians.

1861 – The First Battle of Bull Run, the first major battle in the American Civil War, began.

1970 – After 11 years of construction, the Aswan High Dam in Egypt was completed.

1995 – The Chinese People's Liberation Army began firing missiles into the waters north of Taiwan, starting the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.

July 21 is The National holiday of Belgium

Quote of the Day

"We've arranged a civilization in which most crucial elements profoundly depend on science and technology. We have also arranged things so that almost no one understands science and technology. This is a prescription for disaster. We might get away with it for awhile, but sooner or later this combustible mixture of ignorance and power is going to blow up in our faces." ~ Carl Sagan

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