



Top Stories

Major explosions at UK oil depot



A large explosion was heard in Hertfordshire, UK Sunday 11 Dec at around

6:00 a.m. local time. The cause is unknown. The explosion was heard as far away as Oxford , and Central London.

Australian Senate agrees ban on tertiary-sector mandatory student unions



The controversial "voluntary student unionism" bill has been passed by the Australian

Senate after an unexpected urgency motion. This follows similar "urgent" motions in recent weeks gagging debate on major, controversial changes to Australian law in industrial relations and in law-enforcement.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Brian Chase of Nashville, Tennessee admits putting false information about John Seigenthaler Sr. into a Wikipedia article, leading to widespread debate.
- A suicide bombing in Kandahar, Afghanistan, injures 1 person.
- 2005 Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal fire: Explosions are reported at the Buncefield oil depot north of London ten miles from the Luton airport.
- Racially motivated violence erupts in the suburbs of Sydney, leading authorities to condemn the incidents as "shameful".
- Korean Airline, both national and international has been shut down due to the strike going on in Korea. The national airplane circulation has been stopped already and the Korean Airline planes that were in a foreign country are returning to Korea.

News 24 reported an additional, fourth large explosion. Hertfordshire Police Constabulary are currently treating the explosion as an accident. 70 fireman are on the scene with 10 fire appliances and 1 specialist foamer.

Reports say the explosion was heard as far away as Oxford, and Whitehall, Central London which is 60km (38 miles) away. Eyewitness statements report that the explosion was heard from at least 160km (100 miles) away and as far away as France and The Netherlands. Pilots reported the noticing the blast from the North Sea and the West Country area of the UK. The M1 motorway which runs close by has been closed in both directions near the blast which is causing travel chaos as other roads become congested.

Malcom Stewart, a BBC News24 eyewitness who is a tanker driver for the site has reported that the site supplies several oil companies and is a joint operation between Total UK and Texaco, it is also used by BP, Shell and the British Pipeline association. The complex is not a refinery but a storage facility for refined petroleum awaiting distribution to airports and filling stations. The eyewitness reports that the depot has approximately 20 tanks which can hold about 3 million gallons (11 million litres or 70,000 barrels) each. Another News24 eyewitness has just reported that he has seen at least 5 of these tanks on fire.

The depot operates on a 24 hour basis and is split into 2 parts -

Major explosions at UK oil depot

A series of large explosions has occurred close to Hemel Hempstead.

The first 'blast' was heard near Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire, UK on Sunday 11 Dec at 6 am. The source of the explosions has been confirmed as the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal (HOSL), Hemel Hempstead, known locally as the Buncefield complex. Following smaller explosions followed at 6:24am , 6:26am, 6:30am. BBC

Featured story

Interview with Jimbo Wales

In part, the interview was in the Wikinews IRC channel because Wikinews was one of the prime topics for the interview. The project is a bit over a year old, with the English and Deutsch editions opening their sites officially the first week of December, 2004. Since then the project has produced more than 13 000 articles in 16 languages, with recently created editions in Hebrew, Russian, and Japanese.

aviation fuel and domestic fuel. A number of eyewitnesses have reported on UK news that the aviation fuel side appears to be the part of the site that has been affected.

The blast was felt for 100 miles around.

Local authorities were not immediately available for comment but there have been reports of casualties.

Some reports on live television state that, "Several other neighbours said they did see a plane go into the depot." BBC News 24 were also discussing the idea a possible plane crash as the cause of the explosions. Hertfordshire police have now gone on the record to say that there is no plane involved (BBC News24).

The police have issued a contact number 0800 096 0095 and asked that people do not call the emergency services in Hertfordshire directly unless it is an emergency.

In addition to being an oil storage depot it is a major hub on the UK oil pipeline network with pipelines to Killingholme Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR), Humberside (10 inch), Merseyside (10 and 12 inch), Coryton on the Thames Estuary (14 inch) and Heathrow (6 and 8 inch) and Gatwick airports radiating from here.

The disaster is believed to be the worst explosion at a petrochemical plant in the UK since the Flixborough disaster of 1974. Hertfordshire's Chief Fire Officer Roy Wilsher said: "This is possibly the largest incident of its kind in peacetime Europe."

A firefighting press officer said that they are stock piling foam from neighboring regions for a prolonged attack which they hope will stop the spread of the fire, however, the inferno itself will have to burn out which could take between 24 hours and a few days.

Despite the authorities saying that there is no need to panic buy petrol, filling stations have had above average queues since this morning and some small garages have ran out.

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott has visited the scene. Houses half a mile away have had windows smashed and garage doors blown in.

BBC News24 (UK) have reported that a nearby building has been destroyed, it is possible that this may be a building belong to Geest Limited.

BBC News24 eyewitnesses reported that the entire depot complex appears to be on fire with buildings on the nearby industrial estate on fire.

Police said at a news conference that 36 people were injured, four of them seriously. Police later revised the numbers to 43 injured, two seriously.

A fire service spokesman said that the explosions caused a "fairly major fire at a factory" on the adjoining industrial estate.

Police are discounting the reports of a small plane being heard nearby just before the explosion.

An oil industry specialist reported on BBC News that a vapour leak could have built up to explosive concentrations because of the ground frost in the area keeping vapour concentration at ground level. This would have resulted in a fuel-air explosion.

A BBC News 24 interview with a petrol tanker driver, who was about to load his tanker at 6am, reported a cloud of mist rolling in from the tank farm area behind the loading bay. All electric lights were turned off and they were ordered to leave the site on foot. As he was doing so a blast blew him off his feet. In another interview a security guard in a nearby office building reported an unusual smell of petrol inside his building before the explosion.

Author of Wikipedia character assassination takes responsibility

Brian Chase, 38, of Nashville, Tenn., hand-delivered a letter to the offices of John Seigenthaler Sr. in which he admits responsibility for false information he anonymously posted in a Wikipedia article. Initially a prank played on a friend, the false story claimed that Seigenthaler was a suspect in the assassination of President Kennedy.

The fake biography made rounds in the media after Seigenthaler discovered and denounced it in a USA Today op-ed article titled A false Wikipedia 'biography'. A known free speech advocate, Seigenthaler refused to press charges. He recommended that Chase be re-hired for the job he was forced to quit when reporters, following leads from ad-hoc cyber detective Daniel Brandt, 57, of San Antonio, Texas, started calling the offices of his employer.

Car entrapped by ice in Halifax

Following the first major snow storm of the season, several cars were reported to be 'entrapped' by slick ice in the seaside city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The ice was believed to be created when the

snow, which fell during the night of December 9-10, was packed down by successive cars and trucks passing over it. By morning, several areas of the city had patches of slippery, low-traction crystalline water lying in wait for the next unsuspecting motor vehicle to pass over them. Soon enough, your correspondent witnessed cars which had slowed to a stop or were parked find that, try as they might, they were unable to move forward on the ice and were therefore stuck.

Luckily, most of the cars were able to extricate themselves after either slowly accelerating in a low gear, or 'rocking' the car back-and-forth to build up momentum. No one was reported injured, and the only damage believed to be done was the excessive wear and tear on the entrapped vehicles.

NYC's transit workers approve strike authorization

New York City is on track to grind to a halt on December 15 when the Transport Workers Union Local 100 contract with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority expires. Union members gathered at Jacob Javits today and unanimously approved a strike authorization if the negotiations between the TWU and MTA fail. Among the many disagreements are the MTA's employee rules and salary increases.

MTA employees have complained about the rule that requires them to call and alert a supervisor prior to taking a bathroom break of no more than ten minutes. Workers have pointed out that supervisors are not always accessible, especially during the overnight shifts. Another rule in dispute is the employee's uniform: "Sikh workers, whose religion requires

they wear a turban, must wear one made of TA-issued fabric with the TA logo front and center." [1] But the major sticking point has been the pay raises. The union has demanded an 8% increase per year for the next three years, but the MTA has offered 5% over two years. The MTA was running a deficit during the previous contract negotiation in 2002, forcing the TWU to accept what the MTA offered. But now, reportedly US\$1 billion in the black and offering free rides for the holidays to its riders, the union is looking to cash in on the MTA's good fortunes.

The TWU began broadcasting radio advertisements on the news stations 1010 WINS-AM and 880 WCBS-AM to gain public support. Part of it goes "MTA bosses are making buses run faster, while carrying more people, and don't even give the operators enough time for a bathroom break" and "Security alert levels are still high, but MTA bosses are taking conductors off trains, closing token booths and installing turnstiles that make emergency evacuation very difficult." Michael Bloomberg had stressed in the negotiations of 2002 that the city would enforce the Taylor Law, which prohibits public employees from striking and fines strikers two days wages each striking day. Echoing his previous position three years ago, Mayor Bloomberg said "They should stay in a room until they come to an agreement." Corporation Counsel Michael Cardozo said a strike could cost as much as US\$10 million a day in police overtime and other expenses.

The last transit strike was in April 1980, and lasted for eleven days. TWU President Roger Toussaint called the proposed health provisions, pension givebacks, and wage increase "an insult to our

members", and went on to suggest that the odds of a strike were 50/50. Both Toussaint and chief MTA negotiator Gary Dellaverson said they were confident that a strike could be averted, but union members made clear that they will strike if - or as most commuters fear, when - the negotiations fail and the deadline is passed.

US, UK persuade Russia and China of laptop authenticity

Iran's nuclear issue is heating up as United States and Britain try to persuade Russia and China to accept the authenticity of the evidence found in "The Laptop" given to the U.S. nuclear experts showing Iran's detailed plans for building a nuclear bomb.

The Islamic Republic's long time main opposition group Mujahedin-e-Khalq, a.k.a. People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), has been bringing the nuclear issue to the world's attention.

In a press conference in Washington, in August 2002, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq revealed Iran's secret nuclear plan for the first time shocking the western intelligence communities.

Three years since then, new evidence emerging each month has created more suspicions about what Iran claims to be a peaceful project for civilian use.

Driven by increasing pressure from the European allies who have backed down from talks, the Islamic republic has hyped up their global campaign to discredit the Mujahedin-e-Khalq. Some policy makers who offered to put the Iranian opposition in the list of terrorist organizations now repent from their past policy. The PMOI

has been officially designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the United States and is proscribed by the European Union.

The National Council of Resistance to Iran quoted Lord Alton of Liverpool, a lawmaker from the British House of Lords, as saying on November 29 in a symposium in the House of Lords, "Having been involved with the activities of the Iranian Resistance over this 25 years, I have learned a great deal about that misinformation campaign and the attempts by the Iranian regime to discredit the PMOI."

The new campaign has concerned Iranian dissidents abroad. An outspoken former national soccer champion, Mr. Hassan Naeb Agha, an active member of the opposition, claims to have been approached by family members under influence of Iran Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) in a psychological warfare in an attempt to penetrate his personal life to stop his activities.

Today in History

1531 - The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe: Juan Diego Cuahtlatotzin saw the Blessed Virgin Mary outside of modern-day Mexico City.

1897 - Belo Horizonte, the first planned city of Brazil, was inaugurated.

1901 - Guglielmo Marconi received the first trans-Atlantic radio signal, from Poldhu Wireless Station in Cornwall, England to Cabot Tower in St. John's, Newfoundland.

1915 - President Yuan Shikai (pictured) of the Republic of China reinstated monarchy and declared himself Emperor.

1964 - Jomo Kenyatta became the first President of the Republic of Kenya.

Recent days: December 11 – December 10 – December 9
December 12 is Independence Day in Kenya (1963).

Quote of the Day

"I had some great things and I had some bad things. The best and the worst... In other words, I had a life." ~ Richard Pryor

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