



### Top Stories

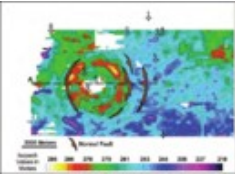
#### Iran: We will also take 'illegal actions' if UN imposes sanctions

Iran has stated Wednesday that if the United Nations proceeds with imposing sanctions on the country or force them to halt their uranium enrichment, they will proceed with "illegal actions."



#### Oil exploration in California, USA reveals giant impact crater

Researchers in San Joaquin County, California have discovered what appears to be a massive impact crater made by an asteroid nearly 50 million years ago, while exploring the area for possible oil deposits.



### Featured story

#### Mass wedding held against racism in Belgium

In February, three couples refused to pledge their wedding vows in front of the black alderman of the city of Sint-Niklaas, because of the colour of his skin. So he decided to organise a mass wedding, to send a positive signal against racial discrimination in Belgium.



### Wikipedia Current Events

- Jamaican Police announce that Bob Woolmer, the coach of the Pakistan national cricket team was murdered on Sunday, and questioned all members of the team.
- NBC, News Limited, AOL, MSN and Yahoo! join forces to develop an ad-supported online video network to compete with YouTube.
- The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube calls for mass protest to force the President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe from power.
- Fighting erupts in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, between Government troops and the personal militia of Jean-Pierre Bemba, defeated presidential candidate in 2006 and recently elected Senator. The Spanish embassy is caught in the crossfire leading to its evacuation under United Nations guard.

- The European Union agrees to open the trans-Atlantic air market to greater competition.
- A senior U.S. District Judge Lowell Reed Jr. strikes down the Child Online Protection Act which made it an offence for commercial website operators to allow minors to access "harmful" material.
- Police arrest three men in England in relation to the 7 July 2005 London bombings.
- United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is left shocked, but uninjured at a press conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri

### Wikipedia Current Events

- Maliki in Baghdad as a nearby bomb explodes.
- Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton claims the United States deliberately resisted calls for an immediate ceasefire during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict.
- Amnesty International calls on governments not to co-operate with U.S. military in trials of detainees at Guantanamo Bay.
- The ventromedial prefrontal cortex is identified as the part of the human brain that combines logic and emotion in order to make moral decisions.
- Clashes flare up in Mogadishu between the interim government forces and local militiamen.
- Heavy fighting between interim government forces from Puntland and local militia erupts in Adado, 500 km north of Mogadishu.

#### Study: Drying up rivers to cause freshwater crisis

Several factors including climate change and pollution may put at risk of drying up some of the largest rivers on the globe, a report by the environmental group WWF says. Following a study of ten rivers currently at risk of drying up, The group warns that without any action the process of drying up might lead to freshwater emergency.

The report analyzes ten rivers, including the Yangtze, the Ganges and the Salween in Asia; the

Danube in Europe and Rio Grande in North America.

The study raises concerns over dams and dikes, which the report says destroy 80 percent of river basin's wetlands and floodplains.

Another problem is the extraction of water for agriculture. The environment group states that active extraction of water, such as in the Indus river, takes its toll on our planet's rivers. Over-extraction might lead to its scarcity and have a serious negative impact on freshwater fish populations, which represents an important food source.

The report says governments should ensure better protection of rivers and provide more sustainable water use, in such a way that people's livelihoods are protected.

According to Dr David Tickner, head of WWF UK's Freshwater programme, the freshwater crisis is a serious problems that could worsen as climate changes. He said that preserving rivers and providing security of water flows should be seen as part of national security, health and economic success.

### **2007 Cricket World Cup: New Zealand vs Canada**

New Zealand beat Canada by 114 runs in Group C of the World Cup at the Beausejour Stadium, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia.

This match saw Brendon McCullum of New Zealand hit the fastest ever Cricket World Cup half century off just 20 balls.

Toss: Canada won, and elected to field first.

### **NFL: Marshall Faulk expected to retire**

Marshall Faulk, the National

Football League's 9th all time rushing yards leader is expected to announce his retirement from professional football March 26th at the NFL's annual owners meeting in Pheonix, Arizona.

The St. Louis Rams runningback released this statement, "It has been an honor and pleasure to play in the National Football League. I'd like to thank all my teammates and coaches with whom I've been associated over the past 13 seasons as well as the fans who supported me throughout the years. I gave the game my passion, and it gave me a wonderful career and memories that I will always be thankful for."

Faulk played for San Diego State University before being drafted by Indianapolis in 1994. After five seasons with the Colts, Faulk was traded to the St. Louis Rams, where he would lead the team to a Super Bowl championship. Faulk spent the entire 2006 NFL season on the injured reserve after having major reconstructive knee surgery.

Besides ranking 9th in career rushing yards with 12,279, Faulk ends his 13 year pro career with 100 career touchdowns, tied for sixth all-time. Faulk was named the NFL's Most Valuable Player in 2000, after setting an NFL single-season record for rushing touchdowns in a single season with 26. He was also named the Offensive Player of the Year three times in his career.

### **US President Bush and NZ Prime Minister Clark meet**

Today, President George Bush welcomed New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark to the White House to discuss common efforts in the War on Terror and review efforts to advance and strengthen bilateral relations.

The Prime Minister spent 30 minutes at the Oval Office with the President, who says the discussions were fruitful and included the importance of America and New Zealand cooperating to help democracy in places such as Afghanistan, commerce, the environment and the need for energy security.

"We talked about the South Pacific, and I praised the prime minister on her leadership in these difficult issues," President Bush said.

He told reporters he understood that countries in the region needed New Zealand's leadership, with US and Australian assistance.

The US would help "in any way we can," he said.

It was Clark's second formal meeting with the President since she became prime minister, although they have met nine times on other occasions.

The talks in the Oval Office marked the development of a closer relationship between New Zealand and the US, and it was only the third time a New Zealand prime minister has visited the White House in 24 years.

He said he had thanked Clark for New Zealand's commitment to the international force in Afghanistan.

Clark, who had lunch with President Bush in the White House after the meeting, said their talks had been constructive.

"Every time I've talked to Helen Clark I've found a very straightforward, honest woman who cares deeply about the country she represents. ... We talked about the importance for the United States and New Zealand to work

cooperatively in helping democracy in places like Afghanistan. We talked about North Korea and Iran, our mutual desire for these problems of nations wanting to have nuclear weapons to be solved in a peaceful way, by using the diplomatic process."

— President Bush

Clark praised U.S. involvement in Pacific affairs that has increased after a preoccupation with events in the Middle East. The Bush administration said last week it is working to boost its diplomatic presence in the Pacific islands after years of inadequate attention.

``The U.S. is focusing on the problems of the South Pacific, Clark said. ``We've had close coordination.

She said this cooperation included addressing the aftermath of a coup by military leaders who seized power in Fiji in December, as well as issues in the Solomon Islands and on Tonga, where a deadly riot destroyed most of the capital in November after the government appointed by the royal family was going to defer a plan to introduce democratic reforms.

The Prime Minister also said that the talks covered a broad list of topics that New Zealand has been a willing partner in helping to address, including counter-terrorism, the work in Afghanistan, work around the North Korean problem and the Iran nuclear issue. However, there was no breakthrough on New Zealand's quest for a free trade deal with the US. Clark feels America is open to the proposal, but says adding any new country to the list at the moment is a fractious issue in Congress which is still trying to deal with the agreements already being negotiated. She also raised

the question of trade with the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi yesterday and asked her to look at New Zealand's request sympathetically.

### **2007 Cricket World Cup: Scotland vs Netherlands**

Netherlands beat Scotland by 8 wickets (with 157 balls remaining) in Group A of the World Cup at the Warner Park Stadium, Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Toss: Netherlands won, and elected to field first.

### **Iran: We will also take 'illegal actions' if UN imposes sanctions**

Iran has stated today that if the United Nations proceeds with imposing sanctions on the country or force them to halt their uranium enrichment, they will proceed with "illegal actions," but it was not clear if those actions meant moving towards a nuclear bomb or not.

"Until today, what we have done has been in accordance with international regulation. But if they take illegal actions, we too can take illegal actions and will do so," said Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the top leader of Iran during an address to his nation.

Khamenei also said that he will attack their "enemies" who attack Iran.

"If they want to treat us with threats and enforcement of coercion and violence, undoubtedly they must know that the Iranian nation and authorities will use all their capacities to strike enemies that attack," added Khamenei.

Despite the warning, the United States has said that the path to resolving their issues with Iran's nuclear enrichment is with

"diplomacy."

"Iran is a country very much on the defensive right now. The United States is committed to pursuing a diplomatic solution to the challenges posed by Iran. This will require patience and persistence," said U.S. Department of State undersecretary for political affairs, Nicholas Burns.

Khamenei also stated that "nuclear energy is a must" and "a necessity in the long term. One day oil will dry up. ... The Iranian nation needs nuclear energy for life, not weapons."

France says that they are hopeful that by the end of this week, sanctions will be drawn up and imposed on Iran.

Russia says that they "will not support excessive sanctions" on the Iranian nation and that "this is how they [the U.S.] acted in past times, during the Cold War, when they scared everyone with the Soviet threat and persuaded everybody to group together in a disciplined block," said Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov.

A meeting that took place on Wednesday between all 15 member nations of the U.N. Security Council was unsuccessful as no conclusion about Iran's nuclear program could be reached.

### **XM and Sirius submit FCC transfer request**

Today, the satellite radio providers XM Satellite Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio submitted a joint application to transfer control of their ground and space-based transmitters to the new, merged company. This is a major step for the XM/Sirius merger deal, as FCC approval represents a major hurdle for the merger. This document also

answers some questions that have plagued subscribers of both services.

While there is not much information for the casual listener, two of the most frequently asked questions have been addressed, at least in part:

Pricing has been clarified, to some extent. From the FCC filing: "After the merger, customers may elect to receive fewer channels at a monthly price lower than \$12.95; substantially similar programming at the existing \$12.95 price; or more channels, including some of the 'best of both' networks, at a modest premium to the cost of one service, and considerably less than the cost of subscribing to both services." The document goes on to explain that channel blocking will be available, and that credit will be given for blocked channels.

The filing also addresses the potential need for new receivers. "Subscribers could continue to use their existing radios or eventually purchase new radios capable of receiving all of the content of both services when they become available." Apparently, some programming will be available on both networks, but this will be limited. To get the full range of programming, subscribers will need new equipment.

Another major stumbling block for the merger deal is the potential for monopoly. To counter the arguments that the merged company will become a monopoly, the document goes on to describe the nature of satellite radio's competition: HD radio, Internet radio, AM and FM radio, portable media players, mobile phones, and even CD players. "It is clear that all of the above providers view themselves as being in direct

competition with each other," the document alleges, and then goes on to quote statements by the National Association of Broadcasters in support of this assertion. "local radio stations compete for listeners with other forms of audio delivery offering an almost unlimited array of content. iPods and other MP3 players, music [subscription] services, podcasting and the Internet streaming of U.S. and foreign radio stations literally provide content from around the world to listeners in each local radio market in America."

As this is only the first step in the FCC process, and the FCC is only one of three major steps in the merger process, the deal is far from over. However, convincing the FCC that the merger should happen will remove a major barrier in the companies' efforts.

### **WebmasterWorld reports 75% of Google's blogspot as spam**

According to a survey conducted by WebmasterWorld some web sites, providing free web space for amateur bloggers contain in many cases mostly spam. Certain queries showed even a rate of 100% spam.

Experts from WebmasterWorld provided precise figures and statistics to their survey. For example the following list shows the percentage of spam on different popular sites providing free bloggers' web space:

- blogspot.com with 77%
- netscape.com with 74%
- hometown.aol.com with 84%
- hometown.aol.de with 91%
- oas.org with 78%
- xoomer.alice.it with 77%
- home.aol.com with 95%
- freewebs.com with 52%
- blogstudio.com with 99%
- maxpages.com with 81%
- usaid.gov with 85%

- blogsharing.com with 93%
- sitegr.com with 100%
- torospace.com with 95%
- blog.hix.com with 100%

The present research was based on most popular queries on the blog sites. Among other the WebmasterWorld experts used the query phentermine on Google's blogspot.com and ringtone on hometown.aol.com. These queries proved that there blogospheres contained more than 74% splogs.

The researchers said that the main reason for this big amount of splogs was the fact that the web-space provided on the mentioned sites was free, thus the spammers don't have to bother buying a domain and paying its support.

### **Sydney ferry hits ship, bridge**

A ferry operated by Sydney Ferries crashed into a whale-watching ship before hitting the Pyrmont Bridge in Darling Harbour at around 1 PM AEDT today. The accident is the second incident involving a Sydney ferry in the past two months.

The Sirius, a First Fleet class ferry was carrying around 100 passengers when it attempted to berth at a Darling Harbour wharf and failed to stop. It is thought the ferry may have suffered a technical fault. The Sirius collided with the Ocean Dreaming, a 34-metre whale watching ship which was moored at the nearby Aquarium wharf. The Ocean Dreaming had a sole crew member on board who escaped uninjured.

Sydney Ferries said that none of its passengers were injured in the accident and all disembarked safely.

Will Ford, the operations manager for the Ocean Dreaming recalled the incident. "It looks like one of

the ferries coming into the Aquarium wharf has not stopped, and skidded past our vessel," he said.

"There's a bit of damage to the bow and it's continued on to Pymont Bridge where it stopped suddenly."

The incident follows an accident in January, when a Rivercat collided with a small boat, killing a fisherman and injuring his son.

Manager of Sydney Ferries, Geoff Smith defended the safety record of his services. He said ferry services have improved "out of sight" over the past year.

Mr Smith urged the public to put the incident into perspective. "We do about 1,500 along-sides every day, so to have one incident like this, one is too many obviously, but you've got to put that into perspective," he said.

"Safety is Sydney Ferries' highest priority."

Mr Smith told ABC Radio that an investigation would be held into the accident which would involve drug and alcohol testing of the Sirius's driver and crew but said he could give no further comments until the investigation was complete.

### **Oil exploration in California, USA reveals giant impact crater**

Researchers in San Joaquin County, California have discovered what appears to be a massive impact crater made by an asteroid nearly 50 million years ago, while exploring the area for possible oil deposits. The period in which it struck the Earth, say researchers, is called the Eocene Epoch.

Images from a seismic survey has shown the crater is about 3 miles (6 kilometers) wide, buried under

sediment at nearly 4,300 feet and may even still contain the asteroid which is said to still be inside the crater nearly 10 miles below the Earth's surface. The crater is reported to be below an area previously covered by water.

"Analyses of a 3-D seismic survey and well logs in the southwestern Sacramento basin, San Joaquin County, California, have revealed a subsurface, circular, 3 mile (~5.5-km-) diameter anomaly that may represent a previously unrecognized complex impact crater. This unique anomaly, buried 4,500-5,000 ft (1,490-1,600 m) below sea level under the southwestern part of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, is provisionally named the Victoria Island structure for an overlying surface geographic feature," J. R. Morrow of San Diego State University during the 38th Lunar and Planetary Science Conference, held in Houston, Texas.

In the images, researchers found that the crater contained a "central uplift," or the peak near the center, which researchers say is a good sign that the discovery is a crater created by an asteroid.

Researchers plan to look at rock samples that will be retrieved during a drilling mission surrounding the impact area. They hope to find shocked quartz, melted rock and glass. The element known as iridium is also expected to be found in elevated levels.

This is the second such crater to be found in the central valley of California. The "Cowell structure" which is said to be 0.8 miles wide, is said to be nearly 25 million years old.

Researchers now call the crater "The Victoria Island Structure." The

impact would have been as strong as 100,000 nuclear bombs all going off at once.

### **Italy confirms swapping Taliban for Mastrogiacomo**

Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo who was held hostage for 15 days, was traded for five Taliban prisoners, as confirmed by Italian and Afgani authorities.

This likely represents the first time during the Iraq War or War in Afghanistan that prisoners were openly exchanged for a hostage. An Afghani government source said the swap "was an exceptional measure taken because we value our relations and friendship with Italy."

The move received sharp criticism from allies of Italy. In Washington, a senior State Department official said the United States was pleased the journalist had been released unharmed, but was troubled by possible ramifications of the swap. A spokesperson at the British Foreign Office said the deal sent "the wrong signal to prospective hostage-takers".

Maxime Verhagen, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands spoke against the swap, "When we create situations where you can buy the freedom of Taliban fighters when you catch a journalist, in the short term there will be no journalists anymore."

"Maybe the enemy will realize the great benefit they gained from this deal, and tomorrow even the reporters in Kabul won't be safe. This is not good. The government can't let the enemy use this strategy."

—Mohammad Qassim Akhgar, political analyst

The international backlash is the latest headache for Italian Prime

Minister Romano Prodi, who has fought hard to keep troops in Afghanistan despite resistance from pacifists within his centre-left coalition.

Prodi briefly resigned last month after a defeat in the Senate over his foreign policy, including Afghanistan, and needs the Senate next week to approve a refinancing of the mission.

An opinion poll published by Mastrogiacomo's newspaper, *La Repubblica*, showed that 51 percent of Italians surveyed supported the exchange, while 41 percent opposed it.

### **Mass wedding held against racism in Belgium**

When Wouter Van Bellinghen became the first black registrar in Belgium, he knew there would be negative reactions, but he admitted that he didn't expect them to be "so direct, so soon." In February, three couples refused to pledge their wedding vows in front of the first black alderman of the city of Sint-Niklaas, because of the colour of his skin. After the racist incident, Van Bellinghen told himself: "If people don't want to marry, then that's not my problem, it's the problem of those people."

But then someone gave him the idea to react with a positive signal against racial discrimination. Together with local NGOs and the Center for Equal Opportunities and against Racial Discrimination, he decided to organise a multicultural group marriage happening to, as mayor of Sint-Niklaas Freddy Willockx describes it, "forge this stupid racist behaviour into an unparalleled positive signal against racism and for tolerance."

Mayor Willockx told the press about when he first heard about the 3

couples: "I was angry and ashamed that there were such people." He elaborated: "We are not a racist city. 400 metres from here is a centre for immigrants, which was installed without contestation from the city council, in spite of fruitless attempts from an intolerant party to set people up against installation of the center."

When asked about the role of the far-right political party *Vlaams Belang*, Van Bellinghen told Wikinews: "It's true that a climate of fear has been created, but to blame it on a single party would be too easy. It's the responsibility of all parties." Van Bellinghen wants to be the councillor of civilian affairs for all citizens, "not just for those who voted for me."

Although Van Bellinghen too denies Sint-Niklaas is a racist city, he is often reminded of the colour of his skin. Mayor Willockx gave the example of an incident last Friday, when someone refused to serve him a plate of mussels, because the person mistook the deputy for a waiter.

A spokeswoman for the organising committee told the press that it all started with a "nice little idea" to have a mass wedding event on March 21, the U.N.-declared International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. However, they were "really surprised that the event became something huge."

Couples who wanted to renew their vows or pledge them for the first time could register on the event website. Stijn De Maeyer, a volunteer working on the registrations, told Wikinews that they had to close the online registration when some 692 couples had registered, because of logistic limitations. On the evening

itself, he estimated that 1 out of 3 couples who showed up hadn't registered beforehand. There were couples from the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom and even a couple from Norway. Some of the Belgian couples were immigrants from Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Kosovo, according to De Maeyer.

While singer Axl Peleman, who demonstrated his concern about racial discrimination in Flanders on the 0110 concerts last October, opened the podium, the couples began to register on the city's Market Square.

The symbolic wedding pledge was open to anyone, from any culture, age, or sexual preference. For Van Bellinghen, "Every person who lives in Flanders is Flemish, it doesn't matter if you live here for a month or for generations."

The couples were from all ages and all layers of society. Some came in their original wedding costume or dress, to relive the moment of their marriage. Even a group of children from a local primary school came to vow eternal fidelity to a classmate.

One duo queuing for the registration were two undercover reporters from the Dutch television, who wanted to become the two first homosexual men to be wed by a black registrar in Belgium. At the end of the evening, they threw their wedding bouquet off the main stage, shouting: "Whoever catches this, is not a racist."

Several organisations promoting diversity provided free soup and Arab mint tea to warm the attendees in the rain and cold. Ahmed Hanouch from the sociocultural youth organisation *Hidâya* told Wikinews: "As new Belgians, we all are looked at

differently from time to time. Then we get the feeling we are second-class citizens. The solution is to be open-minded about cultures, like during this event."

For Ahmed, an event like this one would be welcome each year. Van Bellinghen however told the press: "At the end of the evening, I will drink a pint, and get on with my life."

On the main stage, several performers from the collective "The African Stage" entertained the growing crowd. Speeches, songs and dancing strengthened the message of diversity that the organisation wanted to send.

Several comedy acts followed, such as "Joeri", a Flemish television character. To warm up the crowd to say "I do", he set the example for registrar Van Bellinghen by wedding a special couple; who lived in Sint-Niklaas with their children and who are both deaf. Joeri was assisted by an interpreter for the deaf, who was present all day at the request of Van Bellinghen, whose father became deaf some years before he died.

This Turkish man and his Roma colleague pose in front of a cake with a black and white hand shaking, a symbol for the event.

From left to right: the interpreter for the deaf, the deaf couple, Joeri and host Dimitri Leue, known in Flanders from the culture project

The apotheose came when Van Bellinghen held a final speech on the stage, and then started with the symbolic wedding ceremony. He built up the excitement during his speech, explaining that "excitement is important in a relationship."

The ceremony was planned for at

about 8 p.m., but was postponed to allow as many as possible of the couples that turned up to register. Van Bellinghen then joined in holy matrimony well over 700 couples. He then demonstrated to the couples how to kiss the bride, by kissing his own wife, with whom he has 2 children. The next challenge, a big group hug on the Market Square, wasn't a problem after the kisses.

At that moment, the Flemish radio station Radio 2 took over and started a live DJ set, playing the songs the couples had voted for. The number one wedding dance wasn't Bryan Adams or Clouseau, but Ik hou van u (I love you) by Noordkaap, a song that already proved popular in 2005 when it was reworked for the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the state of Belgium.

For the final challenge, those who like international food could select from the wedding buffet, with desserts provided by local communities such as the Turkish, Syrian, Moroccan and Roma societies, by organisations such as the Red Cross immigration center. There were also desserts from Mexico, Chile and from the Hare Krishna. Together with a wedding cake for 750 people, the organisation hoped to provide for enough desserts for all present, and to end the wedding party in

### Today in History

1775 - American Revolution: Patrick Henry made his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses.  
 1801 - Tsar Alexander I acceded to the Russian throne after his father Paul I was brutally murdered.  
 1940 - Pakistan Movement: The All India Muslim League adopted the Lahore Resolution.  
 1978 - The first UNIFIL troops

arrived in Lebanon for a peacekeeping mission along the Blue Line.

1996 - Lee Teng-hui was elected President of the Republic of China in the first direct presidential election in Taiwan.

March 23 is Republic Day in Pakistan (1956)

### Quote of the Day

We should not be simply fighting evil in the name of good, but struggling against the certainties of people who claim always to know where good and evil are to be found. ~ Tzvetan Todorov

### Word of the Day

zugzwang; n

- (chess) A situation in which one is forced to make a move that will be disadvantageous.

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