



Top Stories

School children and teachers taken hostage in Philippines

The head of a day care centre in Manilla, Philippines, has boarded a bus containing 32 children and 2 teachers from the centre and is currently holding them hostage, demanding better education rights and better housing for them.

UK freezes business arrangements with Iran; detained sailors and marines shown on TV

The United Kingdom has frozen all bilateral business deals with Iran until all 15 British sailors and marines, which were detained by Iranian forces on March 23, 2007, be released and the sailors and marines recently appeared on Iranian TV.

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

- More than ninety people are burnt to death after a fire following a petrol spill in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

- The village of Um el-Nasser in the Gaza Strip is flooded with sewage after the wall of a sewage pond gives way resulting in at least four deaths.

- Heavy flooding after several days of heavy rain in Hispaniola have resulted in 11 people dying and thousands of people being evacuated in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

- A 12-km stretch of the Rhine River near Cologne, Germany is closed to shipping following the loss of 31 containers from a container ship with 200 ships backed up.

- Suicide car bombings kill at least 55 people and injure 120 in Tal Afar.

- The United States Senate votes 50-48 to set a deadline for withdrawal from the war in Iraq as part of a measure providing continuing funding.

- United States District Court Judge Thomas Hogan dismisses a case of alleged torture against former United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld brought by nine former prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- Taiwan unveils an upgraded version of their Ching-kuo fighter aircraft called the Hsung Ying made by the Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation.

- The Prime Minister of Israel Ehud

Northern Ireland MEP Jim Allister resigns from DUP

Jim Allister, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Northern Ireland, resigns because of his party's decision to enter into a power-sharing Government with Sinn Féin. Mr Allister said that party colleagues had been "lured by office" and that he had not returned to politics in 2004 to "help ease Sinn Féin into Government". He acknowledged that although he had fought within the DUP against Sinn Féin being permitted to be members of the Stormont Assembly Executive, he had failed to persuade the vast majority of the party's ruling executive on the issue. Yesterday, Ian Paisley, DUP leader, and Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin President, agreed to enter into a power sharing executive in May. This is the second time that Jim Allister has resigned from the DUP over disagreements with Ian Paisley entering pacts with other political parties.

UK prepared to go 'into different phase' if sailors and marines not released by Iran within days

On Tuesday Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair said in a televised interview that if the 15 sailors and marines who were arrested by Iranian forces are not released then Britain will be forced to "move into a different phase" of operations, and that Iran has only days to release all 15 sailors and marines.

"I hope we manage to get them [the Iranian government] to realize they have to release them. If not, then this will move into a different phase. I hope that this is resolved in the next few days," said Blair also adding that it would be "easier for all of us."

"there is absolutely no justification whatever for holding them."
—Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

He was asked if he could elaborate on what he meant and responded by saying that "we will just have to see, but what they should understand is that we cannot have a situation where our servicemen and women are seized when actually they are in Iraqi waters under a UN mandate, patrolling perfectly rightly and in accordance with that mandate, and then effectively captured and taken to Iran."

The sailors and marines from the frigate HMS Cornwall had been inspecting, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1723, a ship that was believed to be smuggling cars into Iraq (though it was subsequently cleared after inspection), when Iranian gunboats surrounded the sailors and arrested them at gunpoint.

Blair also added that the British government is still trying to resolve the issue by "diplomatic means."

"What we are trying to do at the moment is to pursue this through the diplomatic channels and make the Iranian government understand these people have to be released and that there is absolutely no justification whatever for holding them," added Blair.

Iran stated Tuesday that the sailors and marines are being treated

"humanely" and are in "good health."

"They are in completely good health. Rest assured that they have been treated with humanitarian and moral behavior," said Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammad Ali Hosseini who also added that the one female sailor had "complete privacy."

On Sunday, The Australian reported that an internet website "run by associates of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" states that the 15 British sailors who were arrested by Iranian Revolutionary Guards could face charges of espionage. The source website for this claim remains unknown; however, Rajanews.com, a news website run by some of supporters of Ahmadinejad said on their website: "If the charges of espionage is brought against them the result would be heavy punishment by current law."

NHL: Penguins complete sweep of Capitals, clinch playoff berth

The Pittsburgh Penguins secured a spot in the 2007 Stanley Cup Playoffs when they defeated the Washington Capitals Thursday night, before 18,227 at the Verizon Center.

The Capitals got off to a fast start, after Washington's Alexander Semin took a pass from Alexander Ovechkin, and backhanded it past Pittsburgh goalie Marc-Andre Fleury at 5:59 in the first period. Less than five minutes later, Boyd Gordon would double the Capitals lead, scoring his 6th goal of the season. Michel Ouellet took advantage of a Penguins power play at 12:08, sending an Erik Christensen pass past Olaf Kolzig to narrow the Capitals lead to one goal. Pittsburgh dominated the second period, with Sidney Crosby

picking up his 35th goal in between two goals by Ryan Whitney. In a last minute desperate attempt at a comeback, Milan Jurcina scored to make it 4-3. Unfortunatley for the Capitals, Jurcina's goal came with only 32 seconds remaining in regulation. Washington was unable to score again, lifting the Penguins to victory, and securing their berth into the 2007 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Washington has dropped 13 of their last 15 games while the Penguins have won 3 strait. The Caps return to the ice Friday, when they will travel to Miami to battle the Panthers. The Pens will travel to Boston to take on the Bruins, Thursday. The Penguins defeated Boston 5-0 Sunday afternoon in Pittsburgh.

Body of missing Briton Lindsey Ann Hawker found in bathtub

A woman found buried in sand in a bathtub has been named as missing Briton Lindsey Ann Hawker.

The body of the 22-year-old English language teacher was identified by colleagues after it had been found on the balcony of a flat in Ichikawa, Chiba Prefecture, Japan. She arrived from England about three months ago, and worked in a conversation school.

Police in Chiba prefecture are hunting a man who fled the apartment, to which she went each Saturday to give lessons to a Mr Tatsuya Ichihachi.

Ribena fined over misleading advertising

The makers of blackcurrant-flavoured drink Ribena, GlaxoSmithKline, are in a New Zealand court today after it was discovered that the company's 55-year advertising campaign is misleading to consumers. Ribena

had promoted the drink as being rich in vitamin C, with four times as much as oranges, and claimed the "Ready to Drink" Ribena had 7mg of vitamin C per 100ml. Tests have shown that "Ready to Drink" Ribena does not have any detectable vitamin C content.

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), an international leading healthcare company second only to Pfizer, pleaded guilty to all 15 charges laid against them by New Zealand's Commerce Commission in Auckland's District Court. GSK did, however, fight the expected fine of up to \$350,000 and corrective advertisements, proposing instead a \$60,000 fine with no corrective advertisements. In the end, they were fined \$217,000 for their breaches of New Zealand's fair trading act, and will have to publish correcting advertisements.

It was first revealed that Ribena did not contain any traces of vitamin C when two 14-year-old Pakuranga College students did tests. At first Anna Devathan and Jenny Suo thought they had conducted their tests incorrectly, so they tried again, but the same result came up. They contacted the firm three times, and approached the Commerce Commission after receiving no response.

Ms Devathan said, "We did the study for a bit of fun."

A study in January 2007 also revealed that the drink contains only 5% actual blackcurrant juice.

Guantanamo detainee David Hicks pleads guilty to providing "material support"

David Hicks of Australia who has been detained by the United States since 2001, pleaded guilty on Monday to charges of providing material support to terrorist organizations.

Hicks answered "yes, sir," when the judge, Marine Colonel Kohlmann, asked if "guilty" was in fact his plea. The plea appears to be the result of an agreement between prosecutors and defense attorneys. Under a long-standing agreement, Hicks will be able to serve his sentence in Australia.

Hicks is the first detainee to face prosecution at the U.S. Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba under revised military tribunal laws. He was accused of attending al-Qaeda training camps and briefly fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Liberal minority government elected in Quebec

According to preliminary official results, Jean Charest's Parti libéral du Québec have won a minority government in today's Quebec general election with 48 seats in total. The Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) are currently in second with 41 seats, the Parti Québécois (PQ) are in third place with 36 seats. About 63 seats are required for a majority government in Quebec. The Quebec Liberals won 76 seats in the 2003 election.

Premier Jean Charest, 48, won a close race for his seat in Sherbrooke, despite having already been declared defeated by a PQ candidate. Quebec's chief electoral officer telephoned the premier to relay the news that he had retained his seat. CBC's French language network Télévision de Radio-Canada indicated the initial results were erroneous.

The ADQ have won well over the seats needed for them to have official party status. In the 2003 Quebec election they won a total of 4 seats, and would have needed 8 more seats to obtain party status.

In the 2003 election, the ADQ garnered 21% of the vote. If the results of the 2007 election holds, with 31% of the vote for the ADQ, it would represent a significant gain for the party.

The Liberal campaign, under Charest's leadership, stumbled in the latter stages of the campaign when Charest allotted a \$700 million windfall, in the form of a transfer from the federal Conservative government, to tax cuts for Quebecers. The move to apply the money so quickly to tax cuts during the campaign, resonated with some as a cynical move to buy votes, and may have harmed the Liberal chances.

The results represent a substantial drop in fortune for the PQ, which entered the election with 45 seats. It is expected that PQ leader André Boisclair may be forced to resign the leadership.

This is the first minority government in Quebec in more than 100 years since the year 1878. Compared to the 2003 election, voter turnout is up by approximately 3%, according to Elections Quebec.

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Ontario ombudsman hands over lottery investigation to police

At a news conference in Toronto, Canada on March 26, 2007, Ontario Ombudsman André Marin called on the provincial government to transfer regulation of its lottery system from the Ontario Lottery

and Gaming Corporation (OLG) to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario. This request follows an investigation the ombudsman's office undertook, 3 months ago, into the allegations of theft and fraud carried out by ticket retailers.

The results of the investigation into the allegations were detailed in Marin's report, entitled *A Game of Trust*, released earlier in the day. The OLG has been ordered to transfer relevant files over to the Ontario Provincial Police, to determine whether a criminal investigation is warranted.

"The OLG is fixated on profit rather than on public service," Marin suggested in his opening statement. "It is too close to its retailers, who are not just its frontline sales force but some of its best customers," he continued. "It has lost sight of the fact that it is supposed to be a guardian of the public trust."

The investigation was launched by Marin at his own initiative, rather than in response to an individual complaint. Ombudsman investigators looked into the case of Bob Edmonds, a 78-year-old man who was cheated out of a CA\$250,000 winning ticket by an unscrupulous retailer, as highlighted in a CBC television exposé. Over the course of the investigation, the Ombudsman's Office received more than 400 other complaints related to OLG.

"Insiders have been winning big lottery prizes for years."
—André Marin

Marin indicated that, since 1999, "at least 247 retail owners or their employees have won major lottery prizes", some of which he acknowledged were legitimate. He

also reported that the OLG paid out "millions of dollars in prizes to retailers making dishonest claims...in amounts anywhere from \$250,000 to \$12.5 million."

Marin found a systemic pattern of wrongdoing by some retailers, who he deemed to be the OLG's "partners in profit", with the OLG overlooking the abuse. Marin suggested that rather than get tough, "the OLG actually considered relaxing the rules on insiders."

In his report, Marin proposed 23 recommendations including a zero-tolerance policy for retailer dishonesty, an adjudicative process to deal with disputed prize claims, a retailer code of conduct and the use of "secret shoppers" to test the retailers adherence to it.

"We accept the findings of these reports and the organization is moving quickly to implement the recommendations," said OLG Board Chair Michael Gough in a news release. "OLG has learned a great deal from the Ombudsman's report. It is fair, comprehensive and thoughtful," continued Gough.

The total revenue from lotteries to the provincial government in Ontario for fiscal 2005-2006 was CA\$6.36 billion. News of the resignation of OLG's CEO Duncan Brown, was reported just days before the ombudsman's report was tabled.

US Senate passes spending bill with Iraq withdrawal date

The US Senate endorsed a spending bill that provides \$121.6 billion mostly for the ongoing efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It included a withdrawal date of March 31, 2008. The House version of the bill has a mandatory

withdrawal date of September 30, 2008. President George W. Bush has publicly stated that he would veto any legislation that included a withdrawal date.

Tony Snow's cancer spreads to liver

White House Press Secretary Tony Snow survived colon cancer two years ago, but reported today that the disease has spread to his liver. "I'm gonna beat it again," he vowed.

Intelligence officers in Pakistan killed

Five members of Pakistan's ISI agency were killed in Bajaur, a tribal region. They died when masked men, riding on motorcycles, fired guns and lobbed hand grenades at their vehicle.

Today in History

193 - Praetorian Guards assassinated Roman Emperor Pertinax and sold the throne in an auction to Didius Julianus.

845 - Viking raiders, probably under Ragnar Lodbrok, captured Paris and held the city for a huge ransom.

1862 - American Civil War: An invasion of New Mexico Territory by the Confederate States Army was halted in the Battle of Glorieta Pass.

1979 - A nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania suffered a loss of coolant and a partial meltdown. March 28 is Teachers' Day in the Czech Republic

Quote of the Day

Of course, there is no doubt that if we lived in a police state, it would be easier to catch terrorists. If we lived in a country that allowed the police to search your home at any time for any reason; if we lived in a country that allowed the government to open your mail,

eavesdrop on your phone conversations, or intercept your email communications; if we lived in a country that allowed the government to hold people in jail indefinitely based on what they write or think, or based on mere suspicion that they are up to no good, then the government would no doubt discover and arrest more terrorists. But that probably would not be a country in which we would want to live. And that would not be a country for which we could, in good conscience, ask our young people to fight and die. In short, that would not be America.
~ Russ Feingold

Word of the Day

negligibly; adv

1. To a degree that is negligible; so small or slight that it may be ignored.

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