Successful launch of Space Shuttle Atlantis

Space Shuttle Atlantis successfully launched this morning after 4 years of inactivity.

Liftoff, from Launch Complex 39B at the Kennedy Space Center occurred at 15:14:55 GMT, with the spacecraft reaching orbit about 8 1/2 minutes later.

Michael Schumacher wins Italian Grand Prix, announces plans to retire

Michael Schumacher won the FIA Formula-1 Italian Grand Prix on the on the Autodromo Nazionale Monza racing track and announced that he will retire from racing.

Experts: obesity is a bigger threat than AIDS or bird flu

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 billion people in the world today are overweight, and 300 million of those are obese. Obesity and overweightness cause many health problems, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and stroke, and certain forms of cancer.

Extremely drug-resistant tuberculosis strain emerges in South Africa

New research findings from South Africa on an extremely drug-resistant (XDR) strain of the bacterium that causes tuberculosis (TB) alarm experts. XDR-TB is defined as resistance to three or more second line antibiotics for TB.

The condition remains treatable with other types of medications, but those are less effective, costlier and toxic. If the afflicted persons can’t be diagnosed timely and given proper treatment, they can die within a month. In the new study, 52 out of 53 people affected have subsided.

Dr. Tony Moll discovered the Extremely Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (XDR-TB) in the South African region KwaZulu-Natal. In an interview, he said the new variant was "very highly troubling and alarming because of the very high fatality rate." Some patients might have contracted the bug in the hospital, Dr. Moll thinks, and at least two were hospital health workers. In one year time, an infected person may infect 10 to 15 close contacts. However, the percentage of XDR-TB in the entire group of people with tuberculosis still seems to be low; 6,000 of the total 330,000 people infected at any particular moment in South Africa.

The typical symptoms of TB (like prolonged coughing, fever, night sweats, weight loss and chest pain), and signs on X-ray are identical for XDR-TB. To ascertain the presence of this resistant form, a laboratory test on the patient’s sputum is necessary, but these tests are often too expensive in the poor countries where TB is present. Also, these countries frequently have high HIV-rates too; 44 patient’s in the study by Dr. Moll were seropositive. These patients are particularly
vulnerable. Dr. Karin Weyer, director of the South African Medical Research Council's Unit for TB Research, cautioned that "In a country with such high prevalence of HIV, the emergence of XDR-TB is a nightmare." Because TB is often a hallmark of AIDS, many people afraid of the social stigma don't seek medical attention.

These distressing findings urged a two-day meeting in Johannesburg to discuss the situation. Experts like Dr. Moll believe the new strain is also present in other provinces then KwaZulu-Natal. Conference organizers report cases in Mozambique and Botswana too. The World Health Organization has called for renewed efforts to combat the disease. Meanwhile, officials of the Health Ministry are suspected to be enforcing a media ban on the topics of AIDS and possibly TB.

During the 1990s, multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), defined as resistance to at least isoniazid and rifampin, emerged as a threat to TB control, both in the United States and worldwide.

**Thai election rerun likely in November**

Following on from the April 2 snap-election, the Thai News Agency is reporting that current caretaker PM, Thaksin Shinawatra expects the new election to be held in November.

April's snap-election followed months of building criticism and protests and was apparently called by the beleaguered PM to renew his mandate. This effort was derailed by mass-protests calling for his resignation and an opposition boycott that left Thai Rak Thai the only credible contender in the election where over 10 million people chose to abstain.

Irregularities led to the annullment of the April 2 results, and the eventual removal of the country's election commission, Friday saw the Thai Senate appoint a new election commission. With the likely date of them assuming their duties being only a month prior to the currently scheduled October 15 election rerun, the senate anticipated a delay of a month would be requested.

**Jack Layton reaffirmed as Canadian New Democratic leader with 92% support**

Jack Layton's leadership of the New Democratic Party of Canada has been reaffirmed, this morning, at the party's federal convention in Quebec City where 92% of delegates voted against having a new leadership convention. The vote was the first formal say by party members on Layton's stewardship of the NDP since his election as party leader at the 2003 NDP leadership convention.

Layton, 56, has led the NDP through two federal elections and to its highest level of support since the 1980s. With 29 of 308 seats in the Canadian House of Commons, however, the party is still not a contender for government though it was able to hold the effective balance of power from 2004 to 2006 when the Liberal Party ruled with a minority government.

The resounding endorsement of Layton's leadership will help boost the leader's reputation after it was bruised at the opening of the convention with the news that Carl Hetu, who had been the Quebec co-chair of Layton's 2003 leadership campaign and star candidate Paul Summerville had bolted the party. Hetu criticised Layton for not doing enough to build the party in w:Quebec while

Summerville, a former banker who had been the NDP's economic spokesperson in the last election, denounced the party as being hostile to the idea of a market economy and joined the Liberals.

Earlier in the convention, an estimated 90% of delegates voted for a resolution supporting Layton's call for Canada to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

**Michael Schumacher wins Italian Grand Prix, announces plans to retire**

Michael Schumacher won the FIA Formula One Italian Grand Prix on the on the Autodromo Nazionale Monza racing track. The "Red Baron" passed the checkered flag and won the race, the 90th win in his long career. Kimi Räikkönen, the McLaren Mercedes driver started from pole, but was unable to keep up with Schumacher after the first pit-stop and finished second.

As expected, Ferrari's winner spoke of his future in Formula One after the race. He announced that he will retire from Formula One as the man who wins the most then the other drivers - a true champion of this sport. He will surely struggle the last three races and it will be much easier because of a good standings in drivers' and constructors' championship.

His closest competitor Fernando Alonso, the first Renault pilot, held an unbelievable race, but was out due to the engine failure 9 laps to go. He was heading for the third place. This closed his gap from Schumacher. Alonso spoke of his future in Formula One after the race. He announced that he will retire from Formula One as the man who wins the most then the other drivers - a true champion of this sport. He will surely struggle the last three races and it will be much easier because of a good standings in drivers' and constructors' championship.

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A fantastic race for the first Poland
Robert Kubica - BMW Sauber
driver won his first podium. In the
final protocol he placed himself
third though started seventh. He
replaced on the podium his co-
driver Nick Heidfeld who started
third, but finished eighth due to
the penalty for speeding on the
pit-lane and a failed start.

Felipe Massa, who will replace
Schumacher in Ferrari next year,
had an extra pit-stop due to a tire
problem thus allowed Kubica to
end the race alone.

Honda drivers managed two good
results - Jenson Button and
Rubens Barrichello finished 5th
and 6th, accordingly.

Michael Schumacher Formula One
career major records
Most race wins: 90 (previous
record beaten in 2001)
Most race wins with one team: 71
Most podium finishes: 153
Most second place finishes: 43
Most points finishes: 188
Most pole positions: 68
Most fastest laps: 75
Most race wins from pole position: 40
Most "clean-sweeps" (pole
position, race win, and fastest
lap): 22
Most championship points: 1,354

Michael Schumacher began his
career on 1991 Italian Grand Prix.

South Africa defeat Australia in
final match of the 2006 Tri
Nations rugby series
In the final game of the 2006 Tri
Nations Series rugby union
tournament, South Africa defeated
Australia 24 points to 16 at Ellis
Park in Johannesburg. Despite
winning their last two games,
South Africa finished third on the
table, Australia second, and the All
Blacks as winners.

The loss for Australia in
Johannesburg extends their poor
record in South Africa - their last
win there was in 2000, and their
last win at Ellis Park was over 40
gers ago. Fourie du Preez and
Breyton Paulse both scored tries
for South Africa with Andre
Pretorius kicking one conversion,
three penalties goals and one drop
goal. Stephen Larkham scored
Australia's only try and Stirling
Mortlock kicking the one
conversion and three penalty
goals. International rugby
continues throughout the rest of
the year, with a number of teams
involved in 2007 Rugby World Cup
qualifying, and November Tests
matches in the northern
hemisphere.

Today in History
1297 - Scots under William
Wallace defeated English troops in
the Battle of Stirling Bridge.
1857 - Paiutes and Mormon
militias killed about 120 California-
bound pioneers in a wagon train in
the Mountain Meadows massacre.
1922 - The British Mandate of
Palestine began.
1973 - A military coup in Chile
headed by Augusto Pinochet
overthrew the government of
President Salvador Allende.
2001 - September 11 Attacks:
Three passenger airliners were
hijacked to destroy the World
Trade Center in New York City and
part of The Pentagon in
Washington, D.C.; a fourth aircraft
crashed in Pennsylvania. In total,
almost 3,000 people were killed.
September 11 is New Year's Day in
the Coptic and the Ethiopian
calendars, National Day of
Catalonia, Teacher's Day in parts
of Latin America.

Quote of the Day
"Organisms are not billiard balls,
propelled by simple and
measurable external forces to
predictable new positions on life's
pool table. Sufficiently complex
systems have greater richness.
Organisms have a history that
constrains their future in myriad,
subtle ways."
~ Stephen Jay Gould

Word of the Day
galvanise; v
1. To shock or stimulate into
sudden activity.
2. To coat with rust-resistant
zinc.
3. (chemistry): To coat with a
thin layer of metal by
electrochemical means.

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