



Top Stories

Bomb threat that diverted Ryanair jetliner reportedly a hoax

A bomb threat received by the cabin crew of a Ryanair jetliner was reportedly a hoax, according to Reuters. However, passengers are still being questioned.

Israeli PM Ariel Sharon declared 'permanently incapacitated'

Israeli Cabinet declared Prime Minister Ariel Sharon 'permanently incapacitated' today, formally ending his tenure as Prime Minister.

Featured story

Bush, Straw dismiss Iran nuclear attack plan

US President George W. Bush and UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw have both dismissed the nuclear 'first-strike' plan reported in the New Yorker magazine on Saturday.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The city of Essen, Germany is selected to be the European Capital of Culture of 2010 by the EU jury.
- A suspected suicide bomber detonates a bomb at a religious gathering in Karachi, Pakistan, killing at least 47 and injuring more than 80 celebrating the controversial Mawlid al-Nabi.
- Bernardo Provenzano, boss of the Sicilian Mafia, is caught near the town of Corleone.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Venus Express spacecraft of the European Space Agency approaches Venus approximately 5 months after it was launched and starts its main engine burn to slow itself down and allow the capture into orbit around Venus.
- Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: a bus carrying soldiers from Trincomalee hits a claymore mine, killing 10 navy sailors, their driver and leaving another 8 wounded. A pair of British tourists are also injured in the blast.
- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announces that Iran has successfully enriched uranium. In a televised address from the northeastern city of Mashhad, Ahmadinejad said "I am officially announcing that Iran has joined the group of those countries which have nuclear technology".

U.S. claims of Iraqi bioweapons labs contradicted early in classified Pentagon report

In an article published on Wednesday by the The Washington Post, reporter Joby Warrick alleged that the Bush administration and the CIA "possessed powerful evidence" that contradicted assertions made by President Bush one month after the current conflict began, that trailers found in Iraq were mobile biological weapons labs.

On May 27, 2003, two days before President Bush made public

statements on these trailers, asserting that "We have found the weapons of mass destruction" and the CIA published their whitepaper detailing how these trailers were allegedly used to produce biological weapons, a fact-finding group comprised of U.S. and British civilian experts that investigated the labs concluded unanimously that these had nothing to do with biological weapons production and relayed their results back to Washington, according to the Washington Post. The Washington Post said it interviewed six of the nine group members.

According to the Washington post, this preliminary report was followed up with a detailed 122 page final report three weeks later, titled "Final Technical Engineering Exploitation Report on Iraqi Suspected Biological Weapons-Associated Trailers." The report remains classified to this date.

Reuters reports that an unnamed U.S. official confirmed the existence of the field report filed on May 27, 2003, and said that the field report had not been evaluated at the time of Bush's statement. "You don't change a report that has been coordinated in the (intelligence) community based on a field report," he reportedly said. The Bush administration continued to make claims about having found mobile biological weapons facilities throughout 2003.

On June 8, 2003, an unnamed senior CIA official stood by the

interpretation that the trailers were mobile bioweapons labs saying "It is what we think it is, to the best of our knowledge".

Then Secretary of State Colin Powell claimed in June 2003 that "confidence level is increasing" that the trailers were intended for biological weapons production.

White House speaker Scott McClellan said on July 16, 2003, that "We've seen some of the evidence of his weapons of mass destruction program through two mobile biological weapon labs that have been discovered."

Vice President Dick Cheney claimed in September 2003 that the trailers were "mobile biological facilities". Then CIA director George Tenet claimed in a speech on February 5, 2004, that the trailers "could be made to work" as biological weapons labs.

The alleged existence of mobile biological weapons laboratories was one of the cornerstones in Colin Powell's presentation in front of the United Nations to make the case for war on February 5, 2003. Much of the information came from an Iraqi defector dubbed Curveball who was an asset of the German BND. The credibility of this source was disputed.

The Iraq Survey Group reported in September 2004 that the trailers were impractical for biological agent production" and "almost certainly designed and built for the generation of hydrogen." Asked about the prospects to turn the trailers into biological weapons labs, Rod Barton, a member of the Iraq Survey Group, said "It would be easier to start all over with just a bucket".

The Washington Post cites

unnamed sources among officials and members of the initial survey group as claiming that the original classified report from May 27th 2003 and the classified final report three weeks later came to the same conclusions as the unclassified findings of the Iraqi Survey Group.

Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector, wrote September 8, 2003: "However, it now is clear that these so- called labs were nothing more than hydrogen generation units based upon British technology acquired by Iraq in the 1980s, used to fill weather balloons in support of conventional artillery operations, and have absolutely no application for the production of biological agents."

In today's press conference Scott McClellan referred to the account as "reckless reporting" and said that Bush's statement was based on findings of the CIA and the DIA. He did not answer repeated questions whether the President knew of the secret report at the time he was asserting that "we found biological laboratories" on May 29 2005. When asked why the secret report was not made public earlier McClellan responded by saying that "it takes a substantial amount of time to coordinate and run through a declassification process".

Bomb threat that diverted Ryanair jetliner reportedly a hoax

According to the UK Department of Transport, Ryanair flight FR25, carrying 172 passengers and crew en-route from Paris to Dublin, was diverted to Prestwick Airport in Scotland following a bomb threat discovered by the plane's cabin crew. The threat, a written note, was found in a magazine on the

plane. The UK's Times Online and Reuters are now reporting that the threat was a hoax.

"This obviously had the potential to be a major incident and one which was taken extremely seriously by the security forces and indeed the police. I am extremely glad it appears to have been nothing more than a hoax, but I am disappointed about the inconvenience passengers have suffered. I'm very glad that the response has been entirely appropriate and that at the end of the day no harm has been done," said MSP John Scott, whose Ayr constituency covers the airport.

Reuters also reports that police have not found a bomb on the plane, though passengers were still being questioned.

The Ryanair jet liner, a Boeing 737, was diverted, and escorted while landing by two Royal Air Force Tornados.

"At approximately 13.45 today a Tornado F3 from RAF Leuchars was diverted from a routine training flight in order to assist a Ryanair flight from Paris to Dublin. Two additional Tornados were also scrambled from RAF Coningsby. The plane has now safely landed at Prestwick Airport and the three jets have now landed back at base. The incident is now a matter for Strathclyde Police," said a spokesman for the UK Ministry of Defence.

"There is an ongoing incident at Glasgow Prestwick Airport. Police and emergency services are in attendance," said a spokesman for the airport.

"A note was passed to the cabin crew onboard claiming that there was a bomb. The captain

immediately reported this to UK air traffic control and was instructed to divert to Glasgow Prestwick Airport. said a spokesman for Ryanair.

The scare caused the airport to close for two hours, according to police; a security alert remains in place.

All 172 passengers were evacuated from the plane. Authorities are still searching luggage and passengers, but there is no word on whether or not explosives have been found or if there have been any arrests. Three other flights were not allowed to leave the airport and four arriving flights were diverted to Stansted and Edinburgh Airports in Scotland. Most of the passengers are reported to be in their twenties. Reports also note that at least 71 schoolchildren were on the plane.

They were "quite distressed," said Strathclyde Police Assistant Chief Constable John Neilson. "As soon as they landed they were fine. There's appropriate support from the health services for them." He also said "people are still being interviewed" and that he thinks "we will know for sure what's happened once everybody has been interviewed."

"All [passengers and crew] are safe and well and are being interviewed by Strathclyde Police," said a spokesman for the Strathclyde Police.

"All passengers together with Ryanair are co-operating fully with the police and local safety authorities. The aircraft will now be subject to a detailed search, following which we expect it will be cleared to travel onwards to Dublin. Ryanair apologises

sincerely for any inconvenience caused to these passengers, however the safety of our passengers and aircraft will always be our number one priority," added the Ryanair spokesman.

Australian PM to face Cole inquiry

Australian Prime Minister John Howard will face the Cole inquiry into Iraqi kickbacks by wheat exporter AWB on Thursday.

Mr Howard said in a statement that he has been asked to appear at the inquiry. "The Cole Commission of Inquiry has requested that I appear at its hearings" he said.

Mr Howard expects that he will give evidence around 10AM. "The Inquiry has indicated that it would suit its convenience for me to do that at 10am tomorrow" said Mr Howard.

It will be the first time an Australian Prime Minister has appeared before an inquiry since Bob Hawke faced the Hope Inquiry into Australia's intelligence services in 1983.

Australian foreign minister tells inquiry it was the UN's job to investigate Iraq kickback claims

Alexander Downer, Australia's foreign affairs minister, told the Cole Inquiry yesterday that it was not his department's job to investigate claims that wheat exporter AWB was paying kickbacks to Saddam Hussein in the lead up to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Mr Downer, who entered the inquiry via a back entrance to avoid the crowd waiting outside told the inquiry numerous times that he did not read a series of

diplomatic cables which raised concerns about AWB in Iraq. Mr Downer admitted that he did not have the time to read diplomatic cables and the only time he did so was when he is "stuck on a plane" and has nothing else to read.

The claims are in stark contrast to a statement made to parliament in February where Mr Downer said "Of course I would have read them".

When asked why the department of foreign affairs and trade did nothing about the allegations first received in 2000, he told the inquiry that his department couldn't investigate AWB and responsibility for the oil for food program layed with the UN. " The department does not have the legal authority to go into AWB and access their files" he said.

"They (the UN) also had people on the ground in Iraq because insofar as there could be infringements of the sanctions regime, those infringements could take place within Iraq and Australia had no access to Iraq during that period." Mr Downer told the inquiry.

Mr Downer admitted that the department of foreign affairs and trade had dealt with each cable, despite he not reading them and that were satisfied with assurances from AWB that there was no substance to the allegations.

Mr Downer was also asked about an unassessed intelligence report, sent to the National Security Committee of cabinet which raised concerns about Alia, the Jordanian trucking company used by the AWB to transport wheat around Iraq. The document alleged that Alia may have been paying kickbacks to the Iraqi regime.

Mr Downer told the inquiry that the intelligence may not have been dealt with."There is so much intelligence. It's a very major challenge, to deal with intelligence" he said.

When asked by Terry Forrest, counsel for AWB executives what the point of sending intelligence to his department when it was never read, Mr Downer conceded that it was "physically impossible" to read it all.

Mr Downer was also questioned about a cable delivered in June 2003 from US army captain Puckett which claimed that every contract under the UN's oil for food program contained a kickback. Mr Downer told the inquiry he didn't see the cable as being important because the information was provided by "a junior officer in the US army".

Mr Downer denied claims made by former AWB executive Andrew Lindberg that he had been told about the possibility that money may have been paid to Iraq by Alia. According to Mr Downer it is common practice in his department to have two advisors at such meetings, where one of them takes notes so there is a record of what is said. According to Mr Downer, no notes were taken during the meeting despite it being "the usual practice".

Mr Downer told the inquiry that he had no idea why notes weren't taken during the meeting, despite the meeting being quite important. He also told the inquiry that he couldn't recall if he noticed that nobody was taking notes as he would have been "focused a little more on the meeting than on somebody taking notes".

Today in History

1204 - Fourth Crusade: Forces under Boniface the Marquess of Montferrat and Enrico Dandolo the Doge of Venice captured Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire.

1598 - King Henry IV of France issued the Edict of Nantes, allowing freedom of religion to the Huguenots.

1860 - The Pony Express, the first mail service across the North American continent from the Missouri River to the Pacific coast, was successfully completed for the first time.

1919 - British and Gurkha troops opened fire on a peaceful political gathering in Amritsar, Punjab in India, killing hundreds of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims.

1943 - World War II: Germany announced the discovery of a mass grave of Polish prisoners-of-war executed by Soviet forces in the Katyn Forest Massacre.
April 13 is Thai New Year's Day

Quote of the Day

"I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than to those attending too small a degree of it."
~ Thomas Jefferson

Word of the Day

salient; *adj*

Definition

1. Prominent, worthy of note; pertinent or relevant
2. Of an heraldic animal, depicted in a leaping posture.

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