



Top Stories

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Featured story

Labour peer tells Blair to step down as Prime Minister

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Wikipedia Current Events

- An Iraqi general claims that a suicide bombing in a Shiite cafe in northern Iraq has killed 25 people.
- Hezbollah rockets hit the major Israeli city of Haifa, killing 8 civilians and wounding 53. More than a hundred rockets were fired against numerous urban

Wikipedia Current Events

areas in the north of Israel, forcing local trains and universities to close down. 25 Lebanese are killed in Israeli Air Force strikes against Hezbollah targets, focusing on long-range rocket launchers.

- Israel increases the alert level in Tel Aviv in preparation to further attacks.
- Lebanon security officials claim that an Israeli air strike on Tyre kills at least 16 people and wounds 42.
- Since Wednesday morning, Hezbollah militants fired more than 1400 rockets and mortar shells against Israeli towns, killing 12 civilians and wounding more than 500. More than 130 Lebanese have been killed and hundreds were injured, including many civilians and an undisclosed number of Hezbollah militants.

Seven Canadians killed by Israeli airstrike

Seven Canadians were killed, and six others were in critical condition, after an Israeli raid in Lebanon on Sunday, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay announced. The deaths were believed to be the first recent casualties in Lebanon from any G8 country.

Associated Press reports anonymous Lebanese officials saying the family of Canadians were killed at their home in the town of Aitaroun. Many Lebanese citizens have emigrated to Canada

and often return to spend their summers in the south of Lebanon.

Sixteen thousand Canadians have registered with the embassy in Beirut, but MacKay said the number of those present could be as high as 40,000. "We're calling for restraint in all sectors right now and hope to be able to have those ships in place and citizens moving out of Lebanon as quickly as possible." MacKay said.

Parliament Hill demonstrators in Ottawa on Sunday protested the Harper government's position regarding the ongoing strikes. One placard declared, "Killing children is not a 'measured response'," referring to the G8 statement released earlier.

During a protest in Montreal on Sunday, one woman said she had just been informed that two of her family members were killed in the Israeli airstrike. The unnamed woman screamed 'My father, my uncle ' they're dead. What's happening?' She said her family members were in the Middle East for a summer vacation.

The deaths occurred on the fifth day of Israel's military attacks in Lebanon, instigated by the capture of 2 Israeli soldiers and killing of 8 others by the Shiite Hezbollah in a cross-border attack. The fighting has caused at least 148 fatalities in Lebanon and 23 in Israel.

Harvard lawyer who advises IDF asked about "rules of engagement" in 2004

Michael Byers, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Global Politics and International Law at the University of British Columbia, has revealed in today's Toronto Star that when he was in Tel Aviv in 2004 a lawyer who advises the Israel Defence Force about rules of engagement brought up scenarios which are unfolding today. Byers reported in today's Toronto Star that the colonel felt that attacks upon southern Lebanon and civilian targets as well as Lebanese infrastructure would be justified under specific interpretations and in certain circumstances. She asked Byers for his opinion on these matters.

The lawyer Byers met with is a colonel with a Harvard doctorate. He met with her by invitation which came while he was a visiting professor at the University of Tel Aviv. After just a few minutes, the Harvard graduated colonel got to the point of their meeting:

"There have been a number of missile attacks along our northern border," she said. "We're going to respond with air strikes against some Hezbollah installations in southern Lebanon next week. What do you think?"

Byers said he was taken aback as governments rarely consult foreign academics about their military plans.

Byers responded; "Well, for starters, any act of self-defence has to be necessary and proportionate."

Byers advised the colonel; "Also, you must never target civilians, or facilities such as water-filtration or electrical plants relied upon by

civilians."

"Ah, here we disagree!" the colonel exclaimed. "Collateral damage is allowed in situations of military necessity. And dual-use facilities are legitimate targets."

"What constitutes military necessity depends on the relative capabilities of the opposing forces," Byers responded "And the dual-use argument is a slippery slope."

"Perhaps." the Israeli colonel smiled.

"There's a second reason you should do everything possible to protect civilians," Byers advised. "Israel has to work particularly hard to maintain the moral high ground. Your reputation has suffered because of your treatment of the Palestinians."

"We're completely justified in our treatment of the Palestinians," the colonel said.

"We can disagree on that," Byers said, "...but do me a favour, as someone who wants to sympathize with Israel. If you do launch air strikes, please limit yourself to Hezbollah facilities. Leave civilians ' and the Lebanese government ' alone."

Arab League, Group of Eight leaders discuss crisis in the Levant

The international nature of the crisis between Israel, Lebanon and Hezbollah was discussed in an emergency summit of the Arab League in Cairo, Egypt, Saturday, and by Group of Eight leaders in St Petersburg, Russia, Sunday.

The Arab League failed to reach an agreement on the issue while the Group of Eight released a joint

statement. The Arab League released three separate statements on Lebanon.

The meetings came after Hezbollah attacked Israel on July 12, killing six soldiers and kidnapping two. Israel retaliated by attacking Lebanon, which led to over 100 civilian deaths. Hezbollah subsequently fired 700 missiles across the border, causing civilian casualties in Israeli towns, including Haifa.

Arab League

On Saturday, the Arab League convened a one-day meeting on the crisis in the Levant in Cairo, together with member countries' foreign ministers, on the invitation of Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa.

The Council of Arab Foreign Ministers failed to reach an agreement on a joint statement about the conflict and instead released separate statements.

"We're facing the prospect of a total security collapse in the region," said the Secretary-General of the Arab League. Amr Moussa also said the peace process in the region was "dead."

"The peace process in the Middle East was killed. All mechanisms, including the Middle East Quartet (Russia, US, UN and EU) have canceled the peace process.'

During the discussions the Arab League promised Lebanon 'unconditional support.'

There was, however, disagreement over Hezbollah. Saudi Foreign Minister al-Faisal accused Hezbollah of 'inappropriate and irresponsible' behaviour and was supported in his view by delegates from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Iraq,

Palestine, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Syrian delegate Velid Muallim disagreed.

Group of Eight

Group of Eight leaders met in St Petersburg on Sunday and worked out a joint statement on the crisis in the Levant.

While they asked Israel to stop attacking Lebanon and "an early withdrawal" from Gaza they demanded Hezbollah release the taken Israeli soldiers and stop their attacks on Israel. "The extremists must immediately halt their attacks," said the leaders in the jointly-released statement but also Israel should release the recently arrested Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians.

The Group of Eight leaders also accepted Israel's right to defend against attacks - as long as they did so proportionally.

The joint statement was summarised with the four following points
 Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon should be returned, unharmed;
 The attacks into Israeli territory should stop;
 Israeli military operations must end and Israeli forces must make "an early withdrawal" from Gaza;
 The arrested Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians must be released.

Israel welcomed the statement.

"Israel concurs with the position of the international community, which places responsibility for the conflict on extremist elements," said Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

UK soldier killed near Basra

The Ministry of Defence has confirmed that a British soldier has died after a mission in the northern area of Basra in Iraq.

The soldier from the 1st Battalion Devonshire and Dorset Light Infantry was one of two servicemen who sustained gunshot wounds after coming under fire by suspected terrorists in the Garmat Ali tribal area on Saturday.

"It is with great regret that we can confirm one of the soldiers has subsequently died of these injuries," said a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence.

"We are in the process of informing next of kin. No further information on the identity of this soldier will be released until that process is complete.

"Our thoughts and sympathies are with the family at this difficult time. The other soldier's injuries are not life-threatening."

Defence Secretary Des Browne said the soldier's death was "terribly sad".

"I would like to offer my deepest condolences to their family and friends," he said. "I wish the soldier who was injured a speedy recovery and pay tribute to the bravery of both troops."

Two men suspected of being involved with serious crime and terrorism were detained as a result of the operation.

According to Major Charlie Burbridge, a British forces spokesman, the intelligence-led operation's objective had been achieved. "We have been pleased with the outcome of the operation - it went according to plan. But we

do mourn the loss of one of our soldiers."

So far, 114 British troops have died in Iraq.

Elsewhere in the country today, at least 19 Iraqi civilians were killed and 25 injured in a suicide bomb attack in a crowded cafe. The attack took place in the town of Tuz Khurmatu, which is 50 miles from Kirkuk.

Near-record heat in Minnesota brings wildfire to the Boundary Waters

A heat wave in the upper Midwest has people trying to stay cool, while the National Guard is activated by Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty to fight a new wildfire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Temperatures cracked 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius) in St. Paul, Minnesota, and reached a record-breaking 96 degrees Fahrenheit (35.5 Celsius) in Duluth, Minnesota.

Smoke was spotted Friday afternoon in the wilderness area about one mile southwest of Seagull Lake. This area of the 1 million acre wilderness was hit by a severe windstorm in 1999, which killed millions of trees, increasing concern about the future threat of wildfires.

Firefighters are not yet on the ground, as the fire is located in a remote area inaccessible by trails or lakes. Helicopters have been called in to begin suppression efforts immediately.

Jean Bergerson, spokesperson for the Minnesota Interagency Fire Center, described the blaze as "well over 1,000" acres in size. The cause of the fire is not yet

known.

Michael Schumacher wins 2006 French Grand Prix

Ferrari driver Michael Schumacher won the FIA Formula-1 French Grand Prix on the Circuit de Nevers Magny-Cours. Renault driver Fernando Alonso overreached his teammate Felipe Massa due to a different pit-stop strategy (2 instead of 3 for Ferrari's) and finished second. Massa was only third.

Toyota was not so successful as in qualifying session on Saturday with only one car finished (Ralf Schumacher), and McLaren-Mercedes driver Kimi Raikkonen finished fifth. A nice race for his new teammate Pedro de la Rosa replacing Juan-Pablo Montoya, who left the team to start a career in NASCAR in the US.

This victory became 150-th podium in the drivers' career of Michael Schumacher and eighth victory of the French Grand Prix. He regained two points back from Alonso in the drivers' championship.

Labour peer tells Blair to step down as Prime Minister

Lord Hattersley, the former deputy leader of the Labour party, has said Tony Blair should stand down as British Prime Minister in September.

He said the party would be damaged if Mr Blair remained in Downing Street after this year's Labour conference, which will be held in Manchester in two months' time.

"The Prime Minister ought not to announce he's going at party conference - he ought to go at party conference," he told GMTV's Sunday Programme. "The longer

he stays on, the more damaging it is for him as well as the party in my view."

The Labour peer said Mr Blair should highlight the successes his party has achieved since gaining power in 1997. "Then he should say the time has come to pass the torch on to somebody else and thank the party for what they've done. ... If we did that I think he'd go out on a high note in the party. I think that'll ripple out through the country."

Lord Hattersley, who was the former MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, added that Scottish chancellor Gordon Brown was the best heir to Mr Blair. "I think Gordon Brown increasingly becomes the ideal next leader of the Labour party," he said.

"I think what the Labour party needs to win the next election is a solemn, serious, if you like, son of the manse.

"Somebody with visibly and almost ostentatiously contemptuous of spin who wants simply to say it as it is," he added.

But Mr Blair, who is currently in St Petersburg for the G8 summit, said he would be Prime Minister when the gathering is held again next summer.

"I've made it clear all the way through that I'll carry on doing the job," he told BBC One's The Politics Show today.

Liberal Democrat party president Simon Hughes said: "Roy Hattersley's call for the prime minister to go this year just piles on the pressure.

"Every month that passes looks more and more like the end of the

Blair era. The chosen date for going is, of course, a personal decision and principally a Labour party concern.

"But good government for Britain and our reputation abroad requires a prime minister with a future not a past and a prime minister who commands authority in his party as well as the support of the British people."

Cash-for-honours

Lord Hattersley also said in the interview that recent cash-for-honours claims were "deeply damaging" to Labour.

The party's chief fundraiser and Middle East envoy, Lord Levy, was this week arrested and bailed by the Metropolitan Police over allegations he was nominated for a peerage after lending money to the party before the last election.

But Tony Blair has said there is nothing wrong with peerages being given to party backers.

"Nobody in the Labour party to my knowledge has sold honours or sold peerages," Mr Blair told The Politics Show.

"The fact that is sometimes excluded from the public's mind in relation to this debate is that there are places in the House of Lords that are reserved for party nominees for their party supporters."

Police are also investigating the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats to see if they have given peerages in return for money.

North Carolina to see minimum wage increase

North Carolina Governor Mike Easley signed into law a new

minimum wage for the U.S. state Thursday. The increase of \$1 will raise the rate to \$6.15. Easley said that the new law will make it easier for North Carolinians to deal with the rising cost of living. The new law will become effective on January 1 next year. This is the first raise to the North Carolina minimum wage in nearly nine years.

Last Sunday in Pennsylvania, Governor Ed Rendell signed into law a phased-in \$2 minimum wage increase. For businesses with 10 employees or more, the rate will increase by \$1 on January 1 next year, then increase by another dollar on July 1.

"Signing this bill into law gives me personal gratification," said Rendell to cheering crowd of minimum wage workers at the signing ceremony in Philadelphia. The last time Pennsylvania made a change to the federally mandated minimum was in 1988.

Recent state level legislative initiatives to raise the minimum wage have failed in 18 U.S. states, according to the National Restaurant Association.

Other U.S. states totaling 20 â Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin, plus the District of Columbia â have raised the minimum above the federal mandate.

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act, enacted in 1938, has been continuously amended by Congress over years with increases that make the federally mandated minimum wage what it

is today, \$5.15 per hour. The last time the federal government raised the rate was in 1997.

20 fleeing Lebanese villagers killed by Israeli missile

Twenty Lebanese civilians from the village of Marwaheen died when the van they were travelling in was hit by an Israeli missile Saturday.

According to medical sources, half of the deceased were children or teenagers who belonged to two families, the Abdallahs and the Ghanems. It was the deadliest single strike since Israel launched a military campaign in response to Hezbollah's alleged kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers.

The people who died were fleeing their village in accordance with an Israeli announcement. Around 100 civilians tried to seek refuge at a nearby base of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) seeking shelter, but went home after officials were unable to confirm the warning by Israel, UNIFIL spokesman Milos Strugar told Reuters.

Those trying to leave were killed in the missile strike. When U.N. peacekeepers retrieved the remains of one Lebanese child who died, they could see his two charred hands still holding the bread of a sandwich, which he had apparently been eating when the Israeli missile killed him, to his chest.

Relatives of the victims blamed U.N. forces for the deaths, pelting peacekeepers with stones when they arrived with the bodies after the missile strike. Mohammed Oqla, who was at the hospital, said, "If they had taken people in to begin with then they would never have died."

Israel fired on the vehicle as part of their widened offensive in Lebanon, responding to Hezbollah's attacks on Israel on Wednesday.

Israel apologizes

Israel has since apologized for the incident.

"Regarding civilian casualties in the area of Tyre, Lebanon, today Saturday 15/07/2006 17:43

The Israel Air Force targeted an area near the city of Tyre, in southern Lebanon, used as launching grounds for missiles fired by Hezbollah terror organization at Israel.

The IDF regrets civilian casualties while targeting the missile launching area.

Responsibility for endangering civilian population rests on the Hezbollah terror organization which operates and launches missiles at Israel from populated civilian areas.

In the last 72 hours the Hezbollah terror organization has launched hundreds of rockets indiscriminately at Israeli cities putting over a million Israeli citizens within the range of missile fire.

The IDF makes every effort to keep civilians out of harm's way as we continue to defend the citizens of the state of Israel."

Today in History

1815 - Napoleonic Wars: Napoleon surrendered to British forces at Rochefort, France, ending the Hundred Days.

1936 - Nationalist rebels in Spain attempt a coup d'etat against the Second Spanish Republic, commencing the Spanish Civil War.

1945 - Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Harry S. Truman met at the Potsdam Conference to decide how to administer post-World War II Germany.

1955 - Walt Disney's first theme park Disneyland opens in Anaheim, California.

1975 - History of East Timor: East Timor was annexed and became the 27th province of Indonesia.

1996 - Paris-bound TWA Flight 800 exploded off the coast of Long Island, New York, killing all 230 on board.

1998 - Biologists reported in the journal Science how they sequenced the genome of the bacterium that causes syphilis, *Treponema pallidum*.

July 17 is Constitution Day in South Korea (1948), Marine Day in Japan (2006)

Quote of the Day

Were I so tall to reach the pole,
Or grasp the ocean with my span,
I must be measured by my soul;
The mind's the standard of the
man.

~ Isaac Watts ~

Word of the Day

hermeneutics; n

1. The study or theory of the methodical interpretation of text, especially holy texts.

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