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Obama succeeds Bush as 44th president of the United States



Image Credit: US Navy

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Royal Bank of Scotland shares plummet



Image Credit: Thunderwing GFDL

The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) has lost around 70% of its share price in a matter of hours, after news reports

indicated a GBP 28 billion loss for 2008, and the UK government pledged to increase its stake in the company to 70%.

Conficker computer worm infections soar

New reports indicate that the proliferation of the Conficker computer virus (also known as Kido or Downadup) has nearly quadrupled in the last four days.

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The virus has gone from just over 2 million Microsoft Windows computers infected to 8.9 million, according to estimates by anti-virus company F-Secure. Though Microsoft issued a patch with a severity rating of "critical" in mid-October 2008, just days after Conficker was first discovered, many business computers still have not applied the patch.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Barack Obama (pictured) is inaugurated as the forty-fourth President of the United States.
- Israel and Hamas declare a ceasefire in their armed conflict in Gaza.
- Seven French soldiers are killed and one is reported missing following a helicopter crash off the Gabonese coast.
- Computer worm Conficker infects nearly 9 million Microsoft Windows-based personal computers.
- US Airways Flight 1549, an Airbus A320, makes an emergency water landing in the Hudson River shortly after taking off from LaGuardia Airport in New York City.
- China surpasses Germany to become the world's third-largest economy, based on revised 2007 GDP figures.
- The ferry MV Teratai Prima capsizes and sinks off the coast of Sulawesi, Indonesia, killing more than 200 people.

US Senator Ted Kennedy collapses during inaugural luncheon

According to reports, two United States Senators, Ted Kennedy and Robert Byrd, suffered medical problems during a luncheon with new U.S. President Barack Obama.

According to reports, Kennedy collapsed as a result of a seizure and was taken away by paramedics in a wheelchair. In May, Kennedy was diagnosed with brain cancer, which required an operation. Kennedy is at Washington Hospital in Washington, D.C. where his family says he is awake and talking. At the time of his collapse, he was reported to be sitting with John Kerry, another Massachusetts Senator, 2004 presidential candidate, and close friend of Kennedy.

President Obama commented on the situation during the luncheon: "And so I would be lying to you if I did not say that right now a part of me is with him, and I think that's true for all of us. This is a joyous time. But it's also a sobering time. And my prayers are with him and his family and Vicki [Kennedy's wife]."

U.S. Senator Byrd was also taken out of the luncheon after he had reported that he had trouble eating. Byrd, 91 is the oldest member of the U.S. Senate and the longest-serving Senator in the history of the body. Reports indicate that Byrd is doing well.

Obama succeeds Bush as 44th president of the United States

Today, the official ceremony ushering in Barack H. Obama II as the new president of the United States took place at the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.. A 21-gun salute, as well as the playing of four ruffles and flourishes and "Hail to the Chief", marked the moment he assumed power from his predecessor, George W. Bush.

Bush's second term as President of the United States, which began on January 20, 2005, expired with the swearing-in of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, at noon EST (UTC-5), under the provisions of the Twentieth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Bush performed his final official act this morning, welcoming Barack Obama and Michelle to the White House for coffee before the swearing-in, shortly before 10am EST, and then accompanied them there by motorcade to attend the ceremony. Last week, Bush had made his farewells to the nation in a televised address, saying that the inauguration turns a page in race relations. "Obama's story — his black father was from Kenya, his white mother from Kansas — represents "the enduring promise of our land," said Bush.

Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday called on Obama to seek "understanding, co-operation and peace" among nations. "I offer cordial good wishes, together with the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you unflinching wisdom and strength in the exercise of your high responsibilities," the Pontiff said.

The National Mall gates at the inaugural ceremony opened early,

with official introductions beginning around 11:30am EST. On the west front lawn of the U.S. Capitol, Senator Dianne Feinstein provided the call to order and welcoming remarks, shortly after followed by invocation by the Rev. Rick Warren and a musical performance by Aretha Franklin.

Vice President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr., a Democrat, who was elected Vice President in the 2008 presidential election, took his oath of office, succeeding Dick Cheney. Biden took his oath at 11:57am EST from Associate Justice John Paul Stevens.

Supreme Court Chief Justice John Glover Roberts, Jr. then administered the oath of office to Obama, under Article II, Section 1, Clause 8. "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. So help me God," Obama swore, using the 1861 President Lincoln Inaugural Bible.

First Lady Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama and daughters Malia Ann and Sasha, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi were among the record-setting crowd of over 2 million people, including more than a million people that filled the National Mall. Vice President Dick Cheney arrived in a wheelchair, having pulled a muscle in his back while moving, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said.

Obama has decided to follow tradition and use his full name, including his middle name Hussein, regardless of its past and present use by detractors as an effort to slander his image. The advanced

scheduled program stated that the inaugural address was to be delivered by "the President of the United States, The Honorable Barack H. Obama."

The President delivered his inaugural address in front of Capitol Hill with the theme "A New Birth of Freedom," commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, said Feinstein.

Obama focused on the restoration of public confidence and personal "responsibility," reassuring recession-weary Americans they can rebound from hard times. He conveyed to the world his desire to fix a battered U.S. image overseas. He asked the nation to reject the "culture of anything goes" and to restore a national value system that honors responsibility and accountability. Elizabeth Alexander recited a poem, followed by the benediction by Rev. Joseph E. Lowery. The National Anthem was thereafter played by The United States Navy Band "Sea Chanters."

Over 200 million viewers worldwide had watched inauguration videos and live streams provided online by a number of news organizations and online video broadcasting companies over the internet. The event was also available live to select iPhone users.

Following his speech, President Obama escorted former President George W. Bush at 12:53pm EST as they left for a departure ceremony. Bush drove off, ending his 8 years as president, with Obama waving goodbye from the courtyard of the US Capitol.

At 2:35pm EST in the Capitol's Statuary Hall, at the inaugural

luncheon attended by Obama, it is reported that Ted Kennedy had a stroke. Paramedics arrived and took the senator to a hospital.

A parade extended for over two hours in the afternoon. It included 15,000 people, 240 horses, dozens of marching bands, two drum and bugle corps, and one mariachi band from Espanola, New Mexico.

Just after 4pm EST, Obama and his wife joined the celebrating crowds on Pennsylvania Avenue. After a short time waving to the masses, they returned to the Presidential Limousine, a 2009 Cadillac, which transported them to the White House. The First Limo has replaced President Bush's Cadillac DTS Presidential Limousine that rolled out in 2004.

Mr and Mrs Obama plan to attend a total of ten official inaugural balls, including the Neighbourhood Ball, the Obama Home States (Illinois and Hawaii) Ball, the Biden Home States (Pennsylvania and Delaware) Ball and the Youth Ball. American R&B singer-songwriter Beyonce has been planned to perform the first dance song. The Obamas will return to the White House, their new home, following the last ball.

Irish businessman found dead, suicide suspected

Irish property businessman Patrick Rocca has been found dead in his home. Police reports indicate that suicide is the probable cause. He was 42.

Rocca was discovered dead yesterday morning, with one shot to the head. The Irish Times has confirmed that there appears to be no suspicious circumstances surrounding this shot, and that the firearm involved has been confiscated.

Rocca was believed to have assets worth €500 million. He had worked in business for around 25 years, since he joined his family business, Rocca Tiles. His first property deal involved the purchase of two Gatwick office blocks in 2005.

Parajet Skycar expedition takes off from London to Timbuktu

Two explorers have set off from Knightsbridge, London Wednesday morning (0900 GMT) in a propeller-powered dune buggy heading for the Sahara. Giles Cardozo, age 29, from Dorset, with chief pilot and expedition leader Neil Laughton, age 45, an ex-SAS officer, will fly and drive the amazing two-seater vehicle more than 6,000-km (3,750-miles) to fabled Timbuktu on February 20.

"I just can't wait to see their faces when we fly in and start playing football with them. I don't think they will be able to believe somebody in a flying car has just visited them," 'extreme golfer' Mr Laughton said before the departure. Timbuktu (Timbuctoo; Koyra Chiini: Tumbutu; French: Tombouctou) is an isolated city in Tombouctou Region, in the West African nation of Mali. They will traverse Europe and Africa about 42 days to arrive at the city in Mali, West Africa before returning home via Senegal.

The home-made 450-kilogram Skycar has been designed by Cardozo in just 18 months. It is the world's first road legal bio fuelled flying car. It is a four cylinders modified Rage Motorsport off-road racing buggy which was approved by the government last month. It runs on bioethanol and is powered by a modified 140bhp

Yamaha R1 superbike engine with a lightweight automatic continuously variable transmission from a snowmobile.

The team invested about £250,000 (\$380,000) to make the 1000cc engine Skycar desert-proof. In its maiden voyage, the flying car will be escorted by up to 13 people convoy including an eight-wheel truck, two Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4s and several motorbikes. It has left London's Sheraton Park Tower hotel, heading through the capital to Dunsfold airfield in Surrey.

The team had initially planned to take the air route across the English Channel, but the 35km flight was vetoed by aviation authorities. Skycar is required by law to obtain a license from Britain's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), including a permit from the British Microlight Aircraft Association (BMAA). Skycar spokeswoman, Charlie Bell, however clarified that the team was "in liaison with the CAA and they are looking to finalize the permit," adding that it is in order for the rest of the trip.

The Skycar will thereafter fly over the high-altitude Pyrenees near Andorra, and would cross over the 14-km (nine-mile) Strait of Gibraltar. The prepared journey also includes the route through Mauritania, Atlas Mountains in Morocco and into Mali. It will further cross the harsh environment of Sahara's remote "Rub' al Khali (empty quarter)," for up to two weeks amid real fears of terrorist attacks.

The expedition will not have an easy task, especially since the Skycar will be tested to the limits amid punishing operating environments and weather

conditions. "Clearly the reliability of the car is crucial," said Mr Laughton. "We're going to have to cope with wind chill temperatures as low as -30 deg C and blistering heat of up to 50 deg C. But it's been fully tested at a secret location and it 100 per cent works," he added.

The Parajet Skycar is a prototype flying car. It was developed by British paramotor manufacturer Parajet. The flying car utilizes a paramotor and a parafoil attached to a modified dune buggy to achieve sustained level flight. Should the engine fail, the vehicle can glide back to the ground. Should the canopy rip, an emergency reserve parachute would be deployed. It requires three minutes to convert it from a car to an aircraft. The prototype runs on biodiesel and is fully road-legal.

In 2004 British engineer Giles Cardozo, a paramotor manufacturer, has invented a fan-powered flying car to prove the Skycar is real and works. "I started making a paramotor on wheels that you sit on and take off and it suddenly occurred to me, 'Why not just have a car that does everything?'" Cardozo said. His Wiltshire-based company Parajet built the paramotor that the adventurer Bear Grylls did fly near Everest in 2008. In 1998, Grylls, aged 23, became the youngest British to ascend Mount Everest. In May 2007, Grylls and Cardozo departed from Pheriche, about 32 kilometres south of Mount Everest.

Cardozo has claimed he may finally have made it. "I've been dreaming about making flying cars since I was a boy, thinking about all the ways it could be done and seeing how all the other people in the world have done it wrong. No

one's ever made one that really does work that you can go out and buy. But here's the ultimate solution: it's cheap, it's safe, it works, all the technology's already there. So I pushed ahead and thought, 'We've got to do it,'" he said.

If the Skycar becomes successful, Cardozo's company plans a limited production with a selling price of £35,000 to £40,000 for a standard model and £60,000 for a high-performance sports version. "It will be a serious aircraft but also a proper road machine, with acceleration to match your average sports car," says Cardozo. "I'm not going to sell millions of them but even if we sell 20 we'll be laughing," he added.

The explorers, with the aid of sponsors, supporters and benefactor Sir Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes, 3rd Baronet OBE (known as 'Ranulph (Ran) Fiennes'), have aimed to raise more than £100,000 for some charities including an African orphanage.

Today in History

1189 - Philip II of France and Richard I of England begin to assemble troops to wage the Third Crusade.

1789 - The first American novel, The Power of Sympathy or the Triumph of Nature Founded in Truth, is printed in Boston, Massachusetts.

1887 - Brisbane receives a daily rainfall of 465 millimetres (18.3 inches), a record for any Australian capital city.

1976 - Commercial service of Concorde begins with London-Bahrain and Paris-Rio routes.

2008 - Black Monday in worldwide stock markets. FTSE 100 had its biggest ever one-day points fall, European stocks closed with their

worst result since 9/11, and Asian stocks drop as much as 15%.

Quote of the Day

Was a revelation to be made known to us, it must be accommodated to our external senses, and also to our reason, so that we could come at the perception and understanding of it, the same as we do to that of things in general. We must perceive by our senses, before we can reflect with the mind. ~ Ethan Allen

Word of the Day

conniption n
(informal) A fit of anger or panic; conniption fit.
A fit of laughing; convulsion.

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