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Top Stories

Wikinews investigates Wikipedia vandalism by United States Senate staff members



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Iran demands that IAEA end surveillance of its nuclear program



Shortly after ending its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the government of Iran has now ordered the IAEA to discontinue surveillance of their developing nuclear program.

Wikipedia Current Events

- As the Danish embassy in Tehran is attacked by hundreds of protesters, four people are killed in Afghanistan as protests against European Muhammed cartoons sweep across the country.
- Under the vigilant eyes of thousands of UN peacekeepers, the people of Haiti jammed polling stations in the country's first election since the ousting of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.
- An Israeli air strike on a car killed two Palestinian militants in Gaza City.
- Prime Minister of Denmark Anders Fogh Rasmussen says violent Muslim protests over cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad are a worldwide crisis spinning out of the control of governments.
- Mounir el Motassadeq, a member of the Hamburg cell led by Mohammed Atta, is ordered an early release by the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany. The Berlin court rules there is an absence of proof in the government's case that Motassadeq was informed about the September 11 terrorist plot.

Featured story

Gates pledges \$600 million for Global Plan to Stop Tuberculosis



Drive to stop TB's spread gets large donation from software billionaire Bill

Gates, and hopes to reverse occurrences of the treatable disease.

Iran demands that IAEA end surveillance of its nuclear program

Shortly after ending its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the government of Iran has now

ordered the IAEA to discontinue surveillance of their developing nuclear program. Tehran has also asked the agency to remove any and all signage from their nuclear sites by the end of next week.

The demands come in response to the Saturday resolution by the IAEA to report Iran to the United Nations Security Council, which was made without waiting for the director of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, chairman of the IAEA, to finish preparing a report on Iran's civilian (and allegedly military) nuclear programs for the regular IAEA meeting scheduled for March 6. ElBaradei had given Iran until March to answer IAEA questions. By a vote of 27 to 3 (with five abstentions), and without the information in ElBaradei's report planned for March 2006, the IAEA recommended that the matter of the Iranian nuclear program be brought before the Security Council.

The recommendation claims that there are serious concerns about Iranian nuclear aims, and the agency is not confident in claims that their program is intended solely for civilian or other non-military use. Although the meeting was taken without waiting for ElBaradei's March report, the recommendation requests ElBaradei to make his report anyway, including a list of "steps Iran needs to take to dispel suspicions about its nuclear ambitions" by March 6.

The IAEA's resolution calls for Iran to reinstate a freeze on its nuclear programs, consider ending construction of a plutonium-producing heavy water reactor, and to continue allowing the IAEA's purposes and actions in Iran. However, the council will not implement any further action until ElBaradei makes his full report on March 6.

ElBaradei also reported to the IAEA Monday that Iran would also demand a reduction in the amount of facilities inspections from the agency, and that they would discontinue their agreement to the so-called "Additional Protocol" of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regarding IAEA weapons inspectors if the agency reported Iran to the Security Council. This protocol entitles the IAEA to hold unannounced inspections of facilities, increased surveillance capability, and placing IAEA seals on nuclear equipment.

Other diplomatic ventures are being planned. On February 16, Iranian officials will meet with the Russian government in Moscow to discuss the possibility of Russia enriching uranium for export to Iran in exchange for a halting of its nuclear enrichment program. And Wang Guangya, China's ambassador to the UN, said Monday that "Even with the adoption of this IAEA resolution, it is the belief of most of the members there that a diplomatic solution is the way out within the framework of the IAEA."

9/11 conspirator Moussaoui ejected from court

Zacarias Moussaoui, the only member of the U.S. September 11, 2001 attacks to be brought to trial, was removed four times from a Monday court session in Alexandria, Virginia where jury

selection is underway for the penalty phase of the trial over his guilty pleas to conspiracy. Moussaoui disrupted the proceeding with verbal outbursts directed at the judge.

Appearing before the U.S. District Judge Leonie M. Brinkema at the Albert V. Bryan United States Courthouse, the citizen of France Moussaoui began calmly by saying with a heavy French accent that, "I want to be heard by this court before the proceedings start."

Judge Brinkema warned Moussaoui that it was not the proper time for him to speak. But Moussaoui, 37, who was unrestrained by shackles and wearing a green jump suit labeled with the word "PRISONER" across the back, said "These lawyers are not my lawyers," referring to the defense team led by federal public defender Gerald Zerkin. "Everybody here know that these people do not represent me."

The unsolicited comments prompted the judge to dismiss him. Moussaoui offered no resistance as he was led away by marshals, but shouted over his shoulder to the judge, "I don't want them to represent. I'm al-Qaida; they are American. They are my enemies." He said of the proceeding, "This trial is a circus."

A jury pool of 18 members, six of whom will serve as alternates, will be selected from the group of 500 potential jurors who appeared Monday. Four court sessions were convened that day to begin sorting through the candidates, and Judge Brinkema allowed Moussaoui to return for each of the three remaining sessions. She instructed potential jurors, "If any of you feel that that outburst or the way he conducted himself might affect the

way in which you would go about judging this case, you need to clearly put that statement on the jury questionnaire."

These instructions were repeated to each group of potential jurors after Moussaoui conducted similar outbursts during the remaining sessions.

Moussaoui, in a surprise, pleaded guilty in April to six conspiracy charges of terrorism, leading to yesterday's start of the jury selection to decide whether he will spend the rest of his life behind bars, or be executed for his involvement in the 9/11 attacks.

Moussaoui was arrested on immigration charges three weeks prior to the attacks. The prosecution contends that he could have prevented the attacks by alerting authorities to the Al-Qaeda plans while he was jailed in Minnesota after his arrest.

Wikinews investigates Wikipedia vandalism by United States Senate staff members

Senate staffers, using IP addresses assigned to their Senators, have been editing Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia that allows any of its users to edit its content. In some cases, they have removed negative facts about their Senator from the articles.

Using the public history of edits on Wikipedia, Wikinews reporters collected every Senate IP which had ever edited on Wikipedia, as of Feb. 3 and examined where the IPs came from, what they edited, and of what those edits consisted. IP, or Internet Protocol, addresses are unique numbers electronic devices use to communicate with each other on an individual basis.

The investigation showed the vast majority of edits to Wikipedia from Senate IPs were beneficial, helpful edits. Examples include the creation of the article on Click Back America, which organizes students to promote microfinance in the developing world, and Washington's Tomb, which was originally designed to hold the body of first U.S. President George Washington within the White House Capitol building, and significantly expanding the article on closed sessions of the United States Senate in November. Dozens of small corrections to grammar, spelling, or small facts—many of them related to the Senate—show Senate Wikipedia users have sharp eyes for details and help improve Wikipedia's accuracy.

Senators' staff have sometimes had to fight to correct inaccuracies. An edit to Jay Rockefeller's article by his staff removed information which may have been biased or untrue. The staff member who edited said, "Apologies, I was new to using Wikipedia, and I didn't fully realize the workings of the website," after other users continuously reinserted the information. The staffer removed the suspect paragraphs twelve times until another Wikipedia user finally removed the information. This was followed by the founder of Wikipedia, Jimbo Wales, getting involved four days later after the page had continually shifted between versions.

A few edits were found to be egregious in their efforts to remove negative facts regarding Senators. Some of the most overt attempts to "spin" Wikipedia articles originated from IP addresses reserved for the Senators those articles referred to.

Each of the Senator's offices were contacted prior to the publication of this article, but none had responded by publication time.

Joe Biden

Staffers in the offices of Senator Joe Biden, who, according to his changed Wikipedia biography, "announced in mid-June 2005 that he will seek the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2008 if he believes his message and vision for the country resonate with Americans," removed a paragraph about a 1996 plagiarism scandal, as well as changing the section regarding a possible 2008 candidacy to read very positively. A second staffer toned down and removed information about other plagiarism issues as well. The same addresses from Biden's office edited the article on the Hamas, which has recently won a majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council, and is listed as a terrorist organization by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Israel, and the United States, to give its first two paragraphs a slightly biased stance by removing information about its social welfare programs.

Dianne Feinstein

The California block of Senate IP addresses made several edits to the Dianne Feinstein article, removing reference to her membership in the Trilateral Commission and to her net worth, with husband Richard C. Blum, but also adding an extensive list of awards.

Even more problematic than the edits to the article about Dianne Feinstein, however, were those made to the article about her husband. References to a 1992 fine for failing to disclose Mr. Blum had guaranteed her campaign

loans were removed, along with citations, and a paragraph regarding a conflict of interest debate from 1997 when Mr. Blum had invested millions of dollars in Chinese businesses when Ms. Feinstein was campaigning in the Senate to lift trade sanctions against the country. Mr. Blum later announced he would donate all profits gotten from his Chinese investments to charity.

Tom Harkin

The staffers of Senator Tom Harkin removed a paragraph relating to Harkin's having falsely claimed to have flown combat missions over North Vietnam, and his subsequent recantation after inquiries by the Wall Street Journal and Barry Goldwater. Another paragraph removed related to a supposed pro-Israeli stance.

Conrad Burns

References, citations, and description of Conrad Burns's use of the word 'ragheads' and legislation that would reduce native american tribal sovereignty that Burns co-sponsored were removed from Wikipedia's article, replaced by a paragraph titled "A Voice for the Farmer". The citations supported the discussion of Senator Burns's legislative record regarding tribal sovereignty.

Norm Coleman

The staffers of Norm Coleman made edits in which they changed a description of Coleman as a liberal Democrat in college to an "activist Democrat," and then to "an active college student." They removed references to Coleman's voting record during his first year of Congress lining up with President Bush 98% of the time, which sourced Congressional Quarterly, and a reference to Coleman being persuaded by Karl

Rove to run for senator instead of governor in 2002.

"When you put 'edia' in there, it makes it sound as if this is a benign, objective piece of information," said Erich Mische, Senator Coleman's Chief of Staff, to the Associated Press. Mr. Mische admitted the Senator's office had made the edits, and he would take responsibility for removal of the sentence about the voting record. "That probably should have stayed in there."

"It appears to be a major rewrite of the article to make it more favorable. If they're trying to edit in such a way to change the public record, that's a problem," Jimbo Wales said to the Associated Press about the incident.

According to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, "Coleman's decision to run for senator, rather than governor, was sealed during a walk with President Bush in the White House's Rose Garden," rather than Karl Rove. Rove had actually persuaded the former senate majority leader of Minnesota and current governor, Tim Pawlenty, not to challenge Norm Coleman in the Senate elections. Still, other portions of the edit removed references to Karl Rove entirely, and their citations, while accentuating the positive side of several issues, including changing "a budget bill that cut funding from a number of programs" to "a deficit-reduction bill."

Other negative edits

Miscellaneous edits from other places include those to the articles of Tom Coburn and Harry Reid. The edits to Reid's were made three times, while the Coburn vandalism was made two times, after it had been restored to a prior version.

IP address mapping
The U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms owns the IP block 156.33.0.0 to 156.33.255.255. Requests to learn the mapping of these thousands of IPs were not responded to at press time. However, the lower 100 blocks of addresses appear to be mapped to the 100 Senators based on their state's alphabetical listing. This was partially confirmed using e-mail responses from the offices of Senators; where the originating computer was connected to the network directly and was not a part of block 222 (a section which seems to be reserved for servers), the IP addresses matched the prediction pattern.

When examining the edit behavior of IPs it also tended to match the predicted pattern. IPs which were assigned to Florida had edits to Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez and other Florida-related pages primarily, while those assigned to California had edited Dianne Feinstein. Edits coming from the U.S. House of Representatives were less traceable because they came through a proxy server---meaning they all showed up under one IP address.

Mother seals fight gallantly for their pups

Pictou Island had 2,000 to 3,000 seals on it when struck by a "severe" storm that buried the tiny Canadian island in snow and created rough ocean effects Wednesday and Thursday.

Jane MacDonald, an island resident, said that she woke up Thursday morning to see "wall to wall seals" and their puppies "decimated" by the storm.

MacDonald commented, "The seal puppies were literally swept away

into the water because their mothers couldn't get them to higher ground. A wave would hit and the pup went under. The mother pushed it up with her nose, and then another wave would hit."

"After the sixth or seventh wave, the pup didn't come up," MacDonald said. "The more you watched, the worse it got. The mothers struggled so hard to save their babies and it just couldn't be done, I'd never seen anything like that."

Hamshari newspaper plans cartoon response

The Iranian newspaper Hamshari daily has stated that it will publish anti-Semitic cartoons in response to the Danish "Mohammad cartoons". The Tehran-city-council owned newspaper says that the anti-Semitic cartoons will lampoon the Holocaust, following denials by the Iranian government that the Holocaust even happened. The newspaper has launched an international competition to find the most suitable caricatures about the Holocaust.

Farid Mortazavi, the paper's graphics editor, said to the Guardian newspaper that "The western papers printed these sacrilegious cartoons on the pretext of freedom of expression, so let's see if they mean what they say and also print these Holocaust cartoons."

Mr Mortazavi said that the February 8 edition of the paper would invite cartoonists to enter the competition, with gold coins as prizes for the 12 winning artists -- the same number of cartoons that appeared in the conservative Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten lighting the touchpaper for fury which has swept around the

Islamic world. According to the article alongside the original "Mohammad cartoons" in the Jyllands-Posten newspaper in late September 2005, the cartoons were intended to show that: The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always equally attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is less important in this context. [...] we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship will end. That is why Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him. [...]

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has criticised the argument of freedom of speech employed by European newspapers to justify publication of the cartoons.

If your newspapers are free why do not they publish anything about the innocence of the Palestinians and protest against the crimes committed by the Zionists? the Mehr news agency quoted him as saying.

Anti-Semitic cartoons will be chosen rather than anti-secular or anti-Christian cartoons for the response to the Danish newspaper despite the fact that Denmark has only a small Jewish population of between 6000 and 7000.

New South Wales set to adopt harsher anti-cannabis laws

New South Wales Premier Morris Iemma has proposed

strengthening the states anti-cannabis laws. The government is undertaking a complete rewrite of such laws in response to concerns voiced by health professionals about the link between the drug and mental health issues. The proposed legislation will also increase gaol sentences for those convicted of growing cannabis hydroponically.

"There is growing evidence of a link between long-term cannabis use and the incidence of severe mental health problems," said Mr Iemma.

Under the plan the current cannabis cautioning system, introduced in 2000, is to be reviewed. Cannabis users would be required to attend counselling to "understand the link between cannabis use and mental illness" to avoid being charged for their first offence. At present those issued with their second cautioning notice are required to call a counselling service.

Cannabis use and mental health Dr John Currie from Drug and Alcohol Services at Sydney's Westmead hospital supports the government's position, telling ABC "there is growing evidence that the long term use of cannabis can cause mental illness, whether you're predisposed to it or not".

"Equally as worrying for us is that just ordinary people who don't have a mental health problem can still get trouble when they do have long term use of cannabis" said Dr Currie.

Opposition

"I think many people, not just me, see this as more motivated by concern about the March 2007 elections than any public health measure....If governments were

really serious about cannabis and in favour of draconian responses for a drug which after all, doesn't cause any deaths, then what would they do about a drug that causes 19,000 deaths in Australia a year - namely tobacco?" asked Doctor Alex Wodak, of the Australia Drug Law Reform Association in an interview with Australian Broadcasting Company.

The NSW laws contrast with calls from the Australian Democrats in South Australia for a relaxation of anti-cannabis laws. State leader Sandra Kanck said, "politicians and media commentators are getting on the bandwagon, saying we need to recriminalise the personal use of marijuana. That would make around 476,000 South Australians - 40 per cent of the population - retrospective criminals. About 75,000 people in the state would break the law each week if marijuana was criminalised. We need to recognise that drugs are used, and have appropriate policies to deal with that. Prohibition didn't work in America in the 1920s and it won't work now".

Hydroponic cultivation Those found hydroponically growing cannabis will be hit particularly hard by the new laws. Mr Iemma justified this by referring to expert advice on the effects of this type of cannabis on users. "Regular cannabis use can exacerbate mental illnesses and associated criminal activity. Experts tell us that potent, hydroponically grown cannabis is a particular problem," he said.

Under the new laws hydroponic cannabis houses will be subjected to the same search and warrant powers as those which are used for the manufacture of

amphetamines and heroin.

The penalties

Current penalties do not distinguish between hydroponic cultivation and other forms of cultivation. The new set of penalties proposed by Mr Iemma include:

\$220,000 fine and/or 10 years gaol for growing 5-49 hydroponic plants (same as present)

\$385,000 fine and/or 15 years gaol for growing 50-199 hydroponic plants (currently this is given to those found growing 250-999 plants)

\$550,000 fine and/or 20 years gaol for growing 200 hydroponic plants or more (currently given for growing in excess of 1000 plants)

Two years gaol for theft of electricity to power hydroponic growing houses

12 months gaol for those found with any form of cannabis on their premises (for a first offence)

Five years gaol for those found with any form of cannabis on their premises (for a second offence)

Creation of child endangerment offences for parents who allow their children inside drug houses.

Anti-Cannabis laws in other Australian jurisdictions

South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory already distinguish between cannabis which is grown hydroponically or using artificial light and conventional cannabis for possession offences.

South Australia also goes one step further by having separate penalties for cannabis possession in public and in private.

Northern Territory has some of the toughest anti-drug laws in Australia when contrasted with other states. A person can receive a 25 year gaol sentence for having

more than 20 plants in their possession.

Relaxation of anti-cannabis laws in other Western countries
The NSW government's decision to introduce tougher penalties for cannabis cultivation and possession comes at a time when other Western countries are weakening their laws in this regard.

A number of states in the United States are dealing with cannabis possession by issuing a fine and confiscating the drug rather than clogging the court system with cannabis possession offenders. Eleven states now allow people with a recommendation from a doctor to possess and/or cultivate quantities of cannabis for personal use without risk of prosecution, but a federal law still interdicts any possession.

In Canada, while cannabis possession and cultivation is still illegal except for medical purposes, but authorities broadly tolerate the personal use of cannabis.

In The Netherlands there is a similar situation to that in Canada where cannabis possession and cultivation are still illegal but a policy of non-enforcement exists. The Netherlands regulates the sale of cannabis through Coffee shops, despite it being technically illegal under their drug statutes.

Legislation has been proposed to correct this irregularity (the "back door problem", where coffeeshops have regulated operation, but not regulated supply), allowing regulated growing as well.

In the United Kingdom cannabis has been reclassified as a Class C drug, making it less likely for an individual to be arrested for

possession. There is political pressure in the UK to either schedule strong cannabis separately or reverse the rescheduling altogether, citing the alleged dangers.

BHP Mine remains closed during death probe

BHP Billiton Ltd says its underground Leinster nickel mine in Western Australia, where a contractor was killed in an explosion last week, will stay shut until the outcomes of a government investigation are released.

A BHP spokesman in Perth refused to estimate how long company and government officials will take to investigate the incident. "These investigations can go on for quite some time and the mine will remain closed for that same length of time, said Brian Watt. "But it's difficult to speculate"

Watt declined to comment on how much damage the underground explosion caused to the mine, or how much time would be needed to bring the operation back on line once a decision to resume is made.

BHP Billiton have confirmed the death at the Leinster Nickel Operation, north of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia - 950kms north east of Perth. BHP said the incident occurred late in the afternoon of Friday 3 February.

Mark Quinn, 32, from Broken Hill in far western New South Wales and an employee of MacMahon's, was fatally injured. He was working approximately 900 meters underground when an explosion occurred. BHP said in a media release that there were no other persons injured as a result of the incident.

The cause of the explosion is not yet known. Operations at Leinster have been stopped and employees at site are being briefed and counseled.

BHP Billiton is the world's third largest nickel producer, with the Leinster mine producing up to 45,000 metric tons of nickel concentrates a year.

Following speculations that Leinster's closure may lead to a nickel shortage, a spokesperson told Reuters that BHP Billiton had sufficient nickel concentrate stockpiled to last until the mine reopens.

The Western Australian government has described the fatality rate in the mining industry as "deplorable and atrocious".

John Bowler, Western Australia's Employment Protection Minister says he will consider implementing changes to improve the safety record of the mining industry. Mr Quinn's death is the third underground fatality and the fourth mining death this financial year.

The new Minister, John Bowler, says he will consider implementing any changes needed to improve safety in the industry.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Scotland is to follow England into implementing the controversial UK National DNA Database of those arrested, but not found guilty.
- Japan urges North Korea to return to six talks on its nuclear program and halt missile development, but a Japanese official said Pyongyang insists that the USA drop sanctions first.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Georges Sada, who served as second-in-command of the Iraqi Air Force under Saddam Hussein, says Hussein moved weapons of mass destruction into Syria before the US-led invasion by loading them into civilian aircraft in which the passenger seats were removed. The revelation is made in the newly published book, *Saddam's Secrets*.
- Muslim cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri is convicted on 11 of 15 charges of solicitation and incitement to murder, and incitement to racial hatred after a lengthy trial at London's Central Criminal Court and is sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.
- The number of people attempting to view illegal child pornography on the web has risen since 2004, according to British Telecommunications (BT). They use a system to block sites carrying the images of children, which has been getting some 35,000 hits a day for the past four months.
- Terror law watchdog questions the effectiveness of id cards.

Today in History

- 1587 - Queen Mary I of Scotland was executed at Fotheringhay Castle on suspicion of having been involved in the Babington Plot to murder her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I of England.
- 1849 - The Roman Republic was proclaimed.
- 1904 - The Russo-Japanese War began with a surprise torpedo attack by the Japanese on Russian ships near present-day Lüshunkou, China.
- 1971 - Trading began in NASDAQ, the world's first electronic stock exchange.
- 1979 - Colonel Denis Sassou-

Nguesso was chosen as the new President of the People's Republic of the Congo.

February 08 is Prešeren Day in Slovenia

Quote of the Day

"There are, indeed, two forms of discontent: one laborious, the other indolent and complaining. We respect the man of laborious desire, but let us not suppose that his restlessness is peace, or his ambition meekness. It is because of the special connection of meekness with contentment that it is promised that the meek shall inherit the earth." Neither covetous men, nor the Grave, can inherit anything; they can but consume. Only contentment can possess." ~ John Ruskin

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