



Top Stories

Kidnappers of BBC reporter Alan Johnston deny that he will be released

In a video broadcast on al-Jazeera and made by the Army of Islam, a militant group which claims responsibility for kidnapping BBC News reporter Alan Johnston, has denied that a deal has been reached with Hamas that would secure his release.

31 children rescued as UK police shut down global paedophile ring

Police in the UK have shut down a global internet paedophile ring in a ten month operation that involved 700 suspects in 35 different countries. 31 children have been rescued.

Featured story

Cockpit voice recorder retrieved from wreck of Kenya Airways Flight 507

A search team in Cameroon has found the cockpit voice recorder from the May 5 wreckage of Kenya Airways Flight 507.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Special Court for Sierra Leone issues the first ever guilty verdicts by an international court related to the military use of children.
- The government of the emirate of Dubai announces that it has purchased the RMS Queen Elizabeth 2 from Cunard Line for

Wikipedia Current Events

\$100 million USD. They intend to turn her into a floating hotel at the Palm Jumeirah when she leaves service in late 2008.

- Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, dissolves parliament, triggering a legislative election for August 18, 2007.
- Ehud Barak, the new Minister for Defence, states that Israel will admit "humanitarian cases" of Palestinians fleeing the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.
- The Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, announces plans to buy three Spanish designed warships and two large Spanish landing ships for the Royal Australian Navy at a cost of \$A11 billion.
- The Sri Lankan military claims to have killed 30 members of the Tamil Tigers in overnight clashes in the east of the country.
- Industrial action in Nigeria over increases in fuel duty and a doubling of sales tax is stepped up to become a general strike.

Texas crowd kills passenger in car after child gets hit

A man who was trying to protect the driver of a vehicle that had hit and injured a child pedestrian was killed by an angry crowd yesterday in Austin, Texas, United States

The man was identified today by Austin police as David Rivas Morales, age 40. The crowd had begun to attack the driver of the

vehicle when Morales, who was a passenger, exited the car to assist the driver and the assailants then turned on Morales. Police indicated the driver, who had escaped the scene of the crime, was cooperating with the investigation.

The area was crowded at the time with some 2,000 to 3,000 people who were participating in the annual Juneteenth celebration, which commemorates the day the emancipation of slaves was announced in Texas.

It was not immediately known whether any of the attackers had been part of the celebration.

North Korea invites International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors

North Korea has invited the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to send inspectors to Pyongyang for the purpose of discussing the shut-down of the country's nuclear reactor.

The announcement comes on the heels of news that US\$25 million had been released to North Korea from a Macau bank. The IAEA inspectors are part of a deal worked out in the six-party talks.

"I talked to IAEA today and I know there is going to be contact ... with DPRK representatives as early as today, so they may be able to tell us pretty soon when they will be able to get to Pyongyang," said Christopher R. Hill, assistant U.S. secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Nine firefighters killed in South Carolina blaze

Nine firefighters were killed on Monday while battling a massive fire at a furniture warehouse in Charleston, South Carolina.

Firefighters were called to the scene of a massive blaze at the Sofa Super Store in Charleston, S.C. at around 6:30 p.m. EST. At around 7 p.m., nine firefighters were sent inside the inferno to rescue people who were trapped inside the building. They rescued two before the ceiling collapsed on top of them. All nine firefighters who were inside the warehouse died. They are:

- Capt. William Hutchinson, 48
- Capt. Mike Benke, 49
- Capt. Louis Mulkey, 34
- FF Mark Kelsey, 40
- FF Bradford Baity, 37
- FF Michael French, 27
- FF James "Earl" Drayton, 56
- FF Brandon Thompson, 27
- FF Melven Champaign, 46

The disaster recalls Worcester Cold Storage Warehouse fire that killed six firefighters on Dec. 3, 1999, in Worcester, Massachusetts. The chief of the Worcester Fire Department flew down to South Carolina for the memorial service.

Study links foie gras consumption with Alzheimer's, arthritis, diabetes, other diseases

A study published on June 18 in the American Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has found a link between the consumption of foie gras and other meat products and a number of diseases, including Alzheimer's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes mellitus type 2, tuberculosis, and amyloidosis. The link exists in genetically susceptible individuals.

The study was lead by Alan Solomon, M.D., a professor and researcher at the University of Tennessee Graduate School of Medicine and the director of the Human Immunology and Cancer / Alzheimer's Disease and Amyloid-Related Disorders Research Program. Amyloidoses are a group of disease states caused by the deposition in vital organs of proteins in the form of fibrils, causing a range of symptoms such as swelling and kidney damage. The deposition of amyloid beta in the brain is central in the origin of the disease process of Alzheimer's disease. Foie gras is made from the livers of ducks or geese that have been force-fed.

According to Solomon, "we posit that this and perhaps other forms of amyloidosis may be transmissible, akin to the infectious nature of prion-related illnesses [such as mad cow disease]." "In addition to foie gras, meat derived from sheep and seemingly healthy cattle may represent other dietary sources of [the fibrils]." "People with a family history of Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis or other amyloid-associated diseases should avoid consuming foie gras and other foods that may be contaminated with fibrils."

Dubai purchases RMS Queen Elizabeth 2 for \$100 million

Dubai has announced the purchase of the British ocean liner RMS Queen Elizabeth 2 from Cunard Line for US\$100 million, for conversion into a luxury floating hotel, starting in 2009. It is part of Dubai's ongoing plans to develop its tourism industry, and it intends one day to rival such destinations as Las Vegas.

In a statement, Dubai World Chairman Sultan Ahmed bin

Sulayem said that "Dubai is a maritime nation and we understand the rich heritage of QE2. She is coming to a home where she will be cherished."

Bruce Vancil, Regional Vice President of the West Coast Steamship Historical Society of America, expressed surprise and disappointment at the move. "We were kind of hoping she could find more nostalgic waters to call home," he said. However, Forbes.com is reporting that the ship would likely have been scrapped had the deal not gone ahead. Vancil does say that he continues to hope that the vessel's new owners will respect the historic nature of the ship.

The ship's new home will be the Palm Jumeirah, an artificial island created by the Dubai government where she will be permanently berthed, according to Istithmar, the investment section of Dubai World, a state-owned development company. Istithmar also announced plans for a refurbishment to recreate the QE2's original interior from her first year of service in 1969, and an on-board museum dedicated to the ship's history.

Dubai World will take delivery of the ship from Cunard in November 2008. She is 963 feet (293 metres) long and weighs 70,000 tonnes. She has a combined passenger and crew capacity of 2,794. She is famous as Cunard's longest-serving flagship and for being launched by her namesake Queen Elizabeth II.

North Korea receives transfer of \$25 million

US\$25 million of North Korean funds previously frozen in a Macau bank has been transferred to Pyongyang, the North Korean

capital. The money was released late last week, and transferred from Macau to the Federal Reserve in New York City, and from there to a Russian bank and then into an account controlled by the North Korean government.

Pressure is mounting from the international community on the Pyongyang government to shut down its Yongbyong nuclear reactor. North Korea has been refusing to move forward due to the freezing of these funds in 2005.

Security camera records 'unexplainable' object

A security camera at the First Judicial District courthouse in Santa Fe, New Mexico has captured an unidentified star shaped object that appears to spin, on camera. The object was recorded on Friday and some say it is a ghost, a reflection, or a piece of cottonwood fluff.

Alfred Arana, a Sheriff Deputy for Santa Fe County first discovered the object after he began to watch the surveillance recordings from the day before. He then requested Sgt. Vanessa Pacheco watch the recording to see what she thought. The object appeared at the time stamp of just before 7:30 a.m. (pacific time) on Friday morning.

"Generally, most people who've seen (the video) believe it is some type of spirit or ghost. It's something unexplainable, (but) I don't believe in ghosts so I don't think that's what it is," said Sgt. Pacheco.

Public defender Earl Rhoads who works at the courthouse says that the object is totally explainable and that it is likely a piece of fluff from the cottonwood trees that stand close to the camera.

"I'm not willing to say it's proof of paranormal activity. I think it's totally explainable. I'm open to other possibilities, but my best guess at this point is that it's a small floating object near the camera lens, probably a fluff of cotton from the cottonwoods nearby or an insect or something like that," said Rhoads.

In the video, the object moves from the back door of the courthouse (in the upper right corner of the screen) and floats, while rotating, shining and looks to be in the shape of a star, toward the bottom right corner of the screen past a police car then out of view.

Blow out sales prices likely on mattresses as new U.S. fire-resistant standards take effect

If you are in the market for new bedding, and not too concerned with the new United States guidelines for mattress fire resistance, now might be a good time to buy. Mattresses sold in the U.S. must meet new federal guidelines for flammability starting on July 1.

"The peak heat release rate is limited to 200 kW during a 30 minute test. The total heat release is limited to 15 MJ within the first 10 minutes." —Consumer Product Safety Commission

The flammability of mattress sets sold in the U.S. is subject to a new mandatory federal regulation requirement passed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) on February 16 last year. The requirement, costing mattress manufacturers an estimated \$100 million to meet, is scheduled to take effect on July 1. The commission anticipates that the new standards will save 270

lives and 1,330 injuries per year from mattress fires.

"We've passed a new open flame regulation and the whole idea behind the regulation is to make sure that if a mattress catches on fire that the fire burns slowly enough that people have enough time to get out of the house and get away," said Hal Stratton, chairman of the CPSC

Radio and TV advertising spots are reacting to the new regulation by discounting prices on mattresses that fail to meet the new guidelines. Sales made in the mattress industry, like the automobile industry, are highly negotiable on price. The new regulation does not appear to have much "teeth" for mattresses already in the distribution pipeline, but it is a new law that is a bargaining position for potential buyers.

Suspect in Laos plot detained in Thailand; suspects plead not guilty in California

A suspect whom police believe to be connected with the alleged plot by Hmong Americans to overthrow the government of Laos has been captured and detained in Thailand, police said yesterday.

The man was identified as Sha Wang Lee, 53. He was arrested on Monday while trying to cross the border into Laos in northern Thailand's Nan Province. Police said he was carrying an expired United States passport that showed his hometown as Fresno, California. He also had a military-training certificate signed by Vang Pao.

Royal Thai Police Captain Siththinan Sithkamjorn told the Associated Press that the man was taken to the U.S. embassy in Bangkok.

Kathleen Boyle, an embassy spokeswoman, said she could not comment on the case because of privacy concerns.

Sittihinan said the man would be detained in Thailand for overstaying his visa if he was not deported to the U.S.

Also on Monday, Vang Pao and nine others accused in the plot pleaded not guilty to conspiracy charges in U.S. district court in Sacramento, California. They are charged with violating the Neutrality Act, which makes it a crime to conspire to overthrow a foreign government that is on friendly terms with the United States, as well as conspiracy to kill, kidnap and maim, and conspiracy to export munitions without a license. They could face life in prison if convicted.

Vang Pao, 77, is a former general in the Royal Lao Army who led U.S.-backed Hmong forces against the communists in the Laotian Civil War, or "Secret War" that paralleled the Vietnam War. After the war, Vang Pao immigrated to the U.S.

Among the suspects is Harrison Jack, 60, a former California National Guard colonel and U.S. Army Ranger who ran covert operations during the Vietnam War. The others charged are all Hmong-American men, many of them prominent members of Hmong community in California's Central Valley. They were Lo Cha Thao, 34; Youa True Vang, 60; Hue Vang, 39; Chong Yang Thao, 53; Seng Vue, 68; Chue Lo, 59; and Nhia Kao Vang, 48. An 11th suspect, Dang Vang, 48, was arrested last week and had already pleaded not guilty.

U.S. authorities arrested Vang Pao

and nine others in a sting operation set up by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), in which the defendants met at a Thai restaurant in Sacramento with a man they believed was an arms dealer but was in fact an undercover ATF agent.

After leaving the restaurant, they examined a truckload of weapons that contained AK-47s, M-16 rifles, C-4 explosives, anti-tank rockets, rocket-propelled grenades and Claymore mines, according to the federal indictment.

Their plan was, authorities say, to ship the weapons to Thailand, where they would then be smuggled into Laos and used to blow up government buildings in the Laotian capital, Vientiane.

The court has refused to grant bail to any of the defendants, saying those pose too great a danger and flight risk.

About 1,000 Hmong people rallied on the Sacramento district courthouse steps, calling for the release of Vang Pao. Waving American flags, signs and posters of Vang Pao, among their chants was "Free Vang Pao! Freedom Now!"

Another rally by around 1,500 Hmong people was held on the steps the state capital in Sacramento, where demonstrators demanded that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger speak about the case.

"We want Arnold to come out and say something!" protest leader Vanmong Xiong of Sacramento was quoted as saying by the Sacramento Bee. "Arnold has the power to talk to President Bush, and Bush should dismiss it [the

case]!"

According to Xiong, about 8,500 Hmong refugees from the Secret War are still in Laos, on the run in the mountain jungles, fleeing from the persecution of the communist government that has ruled the country since 1975.

"Who paid for this?" he thundered. "The taxpayers of the U.S.! We pay Laos to murder our men, women and children in the jungle!"

Laotian Ambassador to the United States Phiane Philakone, was interviewed by the Sacramento Bee, saying there are no human rights violations against the Hmong in Laos, and he invited reporters to go see for themselves.

Wisconsin, home to many Hmong war refugees, is highlighted on a map of the United States.

Simply referred to as The General by admirers in the Hmong community, Vang Pao is viewed as a folk hero by Hmong-Americans of his generation.

In Wisconsin, home to many Hmong war refugees, an elementary school was to be named after Vang Pao. On Monday in Madison, Wisconsin, the school board voted 7-0 to remove Vang Pao's name from the school, which is under construction.

Board members apologized to the Hmong community, but said the move was needed to defuse dissension in the community, and that the time was not right to name a school after Vang Pao.

"We have to make sure that there's not a lot of controversy surrounding a school that children will attend," board president Arlene Silveira was quoted as

saying by WISC-TV.

The board had approved the name unanimously earlier this year, but the name had sparked controversy even before Vang Pao's arrest, with opponents cited allegations of Vang Pao's involvement in drug trafficking and war crimes during the Secret War.

Now there is uncertainty about what to name the new school.

"I think it is painful, but there's hope that the school board members are thinking about changing its policy and with that discussion we hope that the intention is to work with us again," Hmong community leader Koua Vang, executive director of United Refugee Services, was quoted as saying by WISC-TV.

Cocaine found in frozen mango puree shipped to Montréal, Canada

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) announced Tuesday that they had seized approximately 160 kilograms of cocaine discovered in buckets of frozen mango puree imported from Mexico.

Investigations led the police to a shipping container destined for the Port of Montréal, in the Canadian province of Québec. A CBSA officer at the Container Examination Centre in Montréal identified the suspect container. The drug was found in brick-shaped plastic wrapping of about 4 kilograms in weight each. There were 1,200 buckets of frozen mango puree in the shipment, not all with cocaine inside.

RCMP Sgt. André Potvin told reporters that the value of the shipment was significant and was

the largest maritime port drug haul in the force's history. At CA\$20 per half-gram, "that's in the vicinity of \$38 million," said Potvin.

The investigation by the RCMP Drug Section, CBSA Intelligence officers, the Marine Security Enforcement Team and the Port of Montréal Security Group, determined that an import company, named Quality Mexport, was allegedly a front for the drug-smuggling operation.

Five Mexicans, holding visitor status in Canada, were arrested in the matter. They are:

- Juan Manuel Huerta Canela, 31;
- Jose Gerardo Bernal Vasquez, 52;
- Jose Luis Navarro Ochoa, 33;
- Jesus Manuel Villa Quiroz, 32; and
- Alfonso Strag Estrada, age 50.

The suspects have been charged with importing and possession of drugs for the purpose of trafficking. The charges are allegations at this point in time.

Aid group reports 110 North Koreans killed in explosion

A South Korean aid agency reports that 110 North Korean villagers died in an explosion while trying to scavenge fuel from a cracked pipeline 10 days ago.

The incident occurred in North Pyongan Province on June 9 when one of the villagers lit a match near a cracked segment of the pipeline, setting off fuel vapours.

"Informed sources told us that about 110 people were killed in the blast," Noh Oh-jae, an official for the group Good Friends, said.

The National Intelligence Service in South Korea says it cannot confirm the reports.

Today in History

1813 - Peninsular War: In the Battle of Vitoria, the Marquess of Wellington's combined British, Portuguese, and Spanish allied army defeated the French near Vitoria, Spain.

1864 - New Zealand land wars: The Tauranga Campaign ended.

1985 - Greenland officially adopted its own flag, adding support to its independence movement from Denmark.

2000 - The controversial amendment to the United Kingdom Local Government Act of 1988 known as Section 28, stating that a local authority cannot intentionally promote homosexuality, was repealed in Scotland with a 99 to 17 vote.

2004 - SpaceShipOne completed the first privately funded human spaceflight.

June 21 is Solstice and Xiazhi (18:06 UTC, 2007); Midsummer in northern Europe (2007).

Quote of the Day

If there's not love present, it's much, much harder to function. When there's love present, it's easier to deal with life.

~ Brian Wilson

Word of the Day

glyph; n

1. A figure carved in relief or incised, especially one representing a sound, word, or idea.
2. A single formed character or symbol, usually representing a letter in a font.

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