



Top Stories

Swan found dead in Fife, Scotland confirmed to be H5, Avian Flu

Initial tests done on a dead swan found in Fife, Scotland have come back positive for H5, Avian Flu. However; this case has not yet been identified as the deadly H5N1 strain and officials say that there is no need to be concerned.

Thaksin departure doesn't signal end to Thai political crisis

Despite promising to step down before the new parliament convenes, caretaker Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is still embroiled in controversy. Opposition parties have stated they will not run in the by-elections on April 23.

Wikipedia Current Events

- For the second time in less than a week, a number of tornados strike Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana.
- The Da Vinci Code author Dan Brown and his publisher, Random House, win the copyright infringement lawsuit that claimed that Brown stole the idea for his novel from The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail.
- David de Kretser succeeds John Landy to become the 27th Governor of the Australian state of Victoria.

Blair, Ahern unveil plan for Northern Ireland devolution

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Toiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern have unveiled their plan to restore a power-sharing executive government in Northern Ireland by a deadline on November 24.

members will be suspended and the Irish government would be given greater influence in Northern Ireland.

The Assembly has been suspended since October 2002 following the allegation of a republican spy-ring.

Blair and Ahern acknowledged the difficulty of implementation of the plan which has been hampered by recent murder this week of Denis Donaldson, a former British spy in Sinn Fein.

Blair said on the plan "We have today set out a framework beginning with the recall of the assembly on the 15th of May and running up to November of this year for that ultimate decision to be made, At that point we close the chapter... or we close the book." His verdict on the plan was "If the parties really can't find a way forward, we have to call a halt and find a different way forward."

Ahern said, "It is time to talk and to agree, people are entitled to firm assurances that if there is deadlock that it will not be allowed to continue indefinitely." His verdict on the plan was "I don't look at the end date of this. In fact, I look at this as a start of a process. I do not want on 24 November to be thinking about another plan."

Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party said "The DUP will not be forced, rushed or bullied into accepting any level of IRA criminality."

Featured story

Photo Essay: Cherry Blossoms Bloom in DC



The Japanese Cherry Blossoms have again bloomed around the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C., marking the beginning of spring for city residents and thousands of visitors. The accompanying annual National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the March 27, 1912 gift of 3,000 Japanese cherry trees to the city from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The plan calls for the Northern Ireland Assembly's members to be recalled on May 15 and given six weeks to form an executive. If no results comes within six weeks, then the members are given another 12 weeks to attempt to form an executive. After that, if no result is achieved by November 24, then the salaries of all

Currently there is no evidence that Sinn Fein/IRA will be any further advanced in giving up criminality in November." Paisley also denounced the involvement of the Irish government, saying "This part of the UK is not really a part of the UK but is a part of the UK where a foreign government has more say over Northern Ireland than the people of Northern Ireland."

Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Fein, said that the statement contained "negatives and positives" and that "We welcome that the assembly has been brought together... we have concerns about the timeframe, about other aspects of the statement, but we think that's a good forward step. We would like to think that unionism generally would see it as a positive opportunity. I appeal to Unionism to seize this opportunity. It is about a shared future for all the people on this island. It appears that they (the two governments) are saying to the DUP 'if you don't come on board we are going to go ahead without you'."

The leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Sir Reg Empey's response was "We urgently need to have an input into, and make changes to, direct rule decisions on education, water rates and the Review of Public Administration to name but three. This is our job." Empey was also critical of the DUP's statement saying "We have been told by the Democratic Unionist Party that the Belfast agreement was binned, consigned to the dustbin of history. Looking and listening to today's press conference it didn't look binned to me. It's actually back centre stage."

SDLP's Mark Durkan said, "All we have today is an 11 paragraph announcement that tells us less

rather than more. That's why the SDLP will need to see the legislation that follows it. It may be better - or indeed worse." He further added "A shadow assembly was agreed between the DUP and Sinn Fein in 2004 in the so called comprehensive agreement. We are still living with the damage caused by that bad deal."

President of the United States George W. Bush issued a statement stating "Today is an opportunity for all in Northern Ireland to take control of their future and bring the political process to a successful completion this year." And that "We remain steadfast in our support of the peace process and the efforts of the British and Irish governments to achieve a lasting peace under the principles of the Good Friday Agreement."

Ship sinks off Djibouti, killing 69

A ship sank off the coast of Djibouti yesterday about 1 p.m. Eastern African Time (1000 UTC), killing 69 people. At least 20 more are reported missing. Reports say that 36 people are currently receiving medical care, and seven are in serious condition.

The ship was bound for the religious festival of Djamaad, in Tadjoura. Built to hold roughly 80 people, it was reported to have been carrying at least 200 people as well as construction materials at the time it sank. Though the cause of the accident has yet to be determined, Ismael Tani, advisor to the Djiboutian President Umar Guelleh, said that the overload probably caused the disaster. Eyewitness Omar Souleiki, however, blamed it on a small wave. Search operations by

the Djiboutian, French, and American naval vessels have been called off for the night.

Libby says Bush authorized NIE leaks

According to papers filed in U.S. Federal Court by Patrick J. Fitzgerald on Wednesday, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's former Chief of Staff, has told investigators that he was authorized by President Bush to divulge to reporters information from the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Saddam Hussein's efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

Libby's testimony to the federal grand jury included the statement that he had received "approval from the President through the Vice President" to release portions of the NIE. According to court documents, he also stated that this type of authorization was "unique in his recollection".



Dick Cheney

It was Libby's understanding that Bush's allowing the information to be released in effect declassified the information. Although legal experts disagree on this authority, Libby stated that it was a White House lawyer who so counseled him.

This information has come to light due to Fitzgerald's efforts to collect

information regarding the "outing" of former CIA operative Valerie Plame. Fitzgerald has broad authority to conduct investigations, as the special prosecutor in the case. Although Libby's statements released yesterday may seem inflammatory, it is unknown what effect they will have on either Vice President Cheney or President Bush.

3. Health insurers will provide partially to fully subsidized coverage for low-income residents.

At least one other state (Hawaii) requires employers to provide employee health insurance, but no other state holds individuals accountable for coverage.

Massachusetts lawmakers enact plan for universal health coverage

Legislators in the Massachusetts General Court, their name for the state legislature, approved legislation on Tuesday, April 4, that would make it the first state in the United States to require all residents to have health insurance and impose penalties for non-compliance. Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, a Republican who is expected to run for U.S. President in 2008, is expected to sign the bill.

The bill passed the lower house, the Massachusetts House of Representatives by a vote of 155-2, and unanimously by the state senate. The Democratic Party holds supermajorities in both houses of the legislature.

Among the bill's provisions are these:

1. Businesses that employ more than 10 people are required to provide health insurance for all staff or face fines of \$295 per year per uninsured worker.
2. Individuals will be required to enroll in a health plan by July 1, 2007, or face tax penalties.

Today in History

1742: Messiah, an oratorio by George Frideric Handel, premiered in Dublin.

1767: Ayutthaya kingdom fell to Burmese invaders.

1904: France and the United Kingdom signed the Entente Cordiale.

1904: Longacre Square in Midtown Manhattan was renamed Times Square.

1953: Jomo Kenyatta was convicted of being a Mau Mau leader.

April 8 is Hanamatsuri in Japan

Quote of the Day

"Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love. This is the eternal rule."

~ Gautama Buddha

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+1-866-653-4265
 (toll-free in the U.S.)
 +1-202-742-5918
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