



Top Stories

Senator Obama announces presidential candidacy

Junior Illinois Senator Barack Obama officially announces his presidential campaign, in Springfield, Illinois.

Teacher arrested for using drugs in front of 4th grade class

Joan M. Donatelli, 59, a substitute teacher was arrested after 2 students, a 10 year old and a 9 year-old girl in her 4th grade class, witnessed her using cocaine at her desk.

Featured story

Alarm sounded over US honey bee die-off

Honey-bee decline has accelerated in North America beyond the steady attrition of the past 25 years according to scientists and farmers, triggering concerns over its effect on plant pollination, including that of agricultural crops.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Queen wins the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award for Best Film of 2006 with Helen Mirren winning the award as Best Actress. Forest Whitaker wins the Best Actor award for his role in the The Last King of Scotland which won the Best British Film Award.
- Portuguese Prime Minister José Sócrates says abortion will be legalized in Portugal despite the

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turnout for a referendum being too low to be legally binding.

- An explosion at a ceremony in Kismayo kills at least four people and injures 24 others, including senior military officers and regional leaders. General Abdi Mahdi, the recently appointed Somali military chief, is among the injured.

- Mortar attacks in two areas of Mogadishu kill at least five people and injure several others, a day after a PRMLTM said it increase attacks.

- Two people die in protests in Priština, Kosovo over a United Nations plan for the future of the Serbian province.

- The U.S. military accuses the government of Iran of supplying sophisticated roadside bombs to insurgents in Iraq.

- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has dismissed calls by Western countries for Iran to suspend its nuclear program.

- Voters in Turkmenistan vote in the first presidential elections in the nation's history to select a successor to former President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov. Interim leader Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov widely expected to be elected.

- Rakhat Aliyev, son-in-law of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and First Vice Foreign Minister, is demoted to ambassador to Austria for the second time amid accusations he

Wikipedia Current Events

stole money from Nurbank bank and alleged involvement in the kidnapping and murdering of two Nurbank officials.

- A top aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has been suspended from her job for six months while a corruption inquiry is conducted, officials say.

- The National Court of Spain finds five out of six Algerian men guilty of membership in a terrorist organization and document forgery for terrorist purposes, sentencing each of them to 13 years imprisonment. All six were acquitted of conspiracy to carry out a terrorist attack and possession of explosives. Their lawyers says they will appeal.

- A fire in a detention center for illegal immigrants in Yeosu, South Korea kills nine foreign nationals and injures 17.

Russia! magazine, an English-language publication about Russia, is released in the US

A 132-page glossy magazine Russia! is set to hit the US bookstores. Despite all the attention Russia gets in the world media and despite a resurgence of interest towards Russia in the US, there was no English-language publication about this country. "Russia!" intends to fill this gap. However, the approach the publishers chose is somewhat unorthodox. On the magazine's website publishers state that most of the names one would expect to find in the publication, such as

Maria Sharapova, Leo Tolstoy or Vladimir Putin, are not mentioned in the magazine. The reason for that is, according to the magazine, that "there are much more interesting things about Russia."

In the inaugural issue of Russia! readers can find stories on hidden treasures of Ivan the Terrible, photos of young women chopping wood, discussions of the free speech and homosexuality and photographic journey to Russia's far east.

The magazine is published quarterly by Press Release Group, a New York-based marketing and communications company.

India sends first all-woman peace keeping force to Liberia

An Indian all-female United Nations peacekeeping unit has arrived in Liberia, the first such team to be sent on a foreign mission.

More than a hundred female officers and about 20 men engaged in logistics work flew into Liberia on January 30, where they will receive additional training before starting their mission to strengthen the rule of law and maintain peace in the country. U.N. officials hope an all-female unit can inspire and help Liberian women.

Last year, Liberia elected Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as the first female head of state in Africa after two civil wars in the 1990s devastated the country, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. The country now has to rebuild its basic infrastructure and economy as well as come to terms with the violence of the civil wars.

Commanding officer of the unit, Seema Dhundia told reporters that the attention her unit has received makes her "a bit apprehensive

because now we have to exert more to prove our worth, to prove ourselves,"

Eighty-two female U.N. police officers currently serve in Liberia, as part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

The UNMIL Police Commissioner Mohammed Alhassan hoped that the all-female contingent will serve "as an incentive and an attraction to encourage young Liberian women to join the Liberian National Police".

The team has served before in troubled areas in central India and Kashmir. Dhundia herself has been a peace-keeper for 19 years and says her team are well trained and experienced and will be able to handle the situation.

A U.N. spokesman viewed the role of the all-female unit to not be particularly different from that of the Jordanian, Nepalese and Nigerian units that have been working in the country. The armed unit is to specialize in controlling difficult crowd situations.

"We hope that the presence of this all-female contingent will serve as an incentive and an attraction to encourage young Liberian women to join the Liberian National Police," said UNMIL Police Commissioner Mohammed Alhassan. The U.N. has set up a special education programme to help women join the police force.

Hopes have been high that the presence of the all-female contingent will encourage victims of rape - which is rampant in the country - to report the crime and that it will make more women interested in becoming police officers and peacekeepers.

U.N. peace-keepers have also been accused of sexual exploitation in the past, and Joanna Foster, the gender adviser to the UN Mission told BBC News that missions employing more women had reported fewer such problems.

Explosive fire at Phi Phi Island damages several buildings

At some time before 11 AM, local time, a fire started in Bar Apache on the popular Phi Phi Island in Thailand. By eleven it had spread to neighbouring shops and restaurants along the main road.

Since there is no fire brigade on Phi Phi, locals and tourist formed a bucket chain to help put out the fire. An eye witness, Simon Vestling, says there were over 300 people helping out with putting out the fire and tearing down buildings.

To stop the fire from spreading to other nearby buildings, which are closely grouped together, they were forced to pull some of them down using nothing but man power. This managed to stop the fire from spreading to the rest of the island, but 10 buildings were still burnt down, mostly small shops and bars.

Boats were brought over from local Krabi Island in case an evacuation was needed, but that was not the case. The cost of the damage is estimated to be Bt2million.

Two Swedes sustained minor injuries from the smoke, but were treated with oxygen at a nearby dive center. No other injuries have been reported at this time.

Virginia public smoking ban snuffed again by House sub-committee

The Virginia legislature's House General Laws committee, a subcommittee of the House of Delegates, tabled a Senate-passed

bill banning public smoking by not voting on it Thursday last week. By tabling the bill, the proposed legislation banning smoking in restaurants, bars and public establishments cannot move to the lower house of the General Assembly for a vote.

The move by the 6-member subcommittee leaves the House of Delegates two-weeks in the current legislative session to work out a compromise between the tabled SB 1161 Senate bill, and compromise proposals, that could form new indoor smoking laws in the state.

The dichotomy that exists between Virginia's rural areas and its northern sections plays a part in the legislative proposal by delgate H. Morgan Griffith that would require public places that allow smoking to post signs at the entrance that say something as simple as, "Smoking allowed here".

Smaller mom-and-pop businesses could be affected negatively by a state-wide ban sponsored by public health groups that advocate for a smoke free environment. "Think about your small bars, your local bars -- places where everyone has been going for 20 years and everybody in the place smokes," said co-owner of Henrico County's Sharky's Bar & Billiards in January.

"The subcommittee's intent was to give SB 1161's sponsor, Sen. Brandon Bell, R-Roanoke County, time to work out a compromise with Del. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, who sponsored a different smoking bill approved by the subcommittee last month," according to Mason Adams of Roanoke.com.

The Virginia Senate voted 23-16 on Monday last week to pass the smoking ban legislation, garnering two additional votes in favor of the

measure than in the previous year.

Canadian government threatens to ignore law respecting Kyoto Protocol

Members of Stephen Harper's Conservative government said Friday that the government of Canada may ignore an upcoming House of Commons bill to respect the Kyoto accord. The Liberal-sponsored Bill C-288 requires the government to table a plan within 60 days explaining how they would meet climate change commitments.

The final vote on the bill is expected on Wednesday. Earlier votes passed with the support of all three opposition parties. Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon says the government does not feel bound by the terms of the bill, adding that the government will "act [...] instead of adopting an empty piece of legislation

Officials within the Canadian and United States Governments have previously criticised the Kyoto Accord for exempting the People's Republic of China and India, two of the largest world carbon emitters.

Rona Ambrose, Canada's Environment Minister, earlier voiced Canada's interest in participating in U.S. sponsored Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate. "We've been looking at the Asia-Pacific Partnership for a number of months now because the key principles around [it] are very much in line with where our government wants to go," Ambrose told reporters in 2006.

Liberals say ignoring the bill would be a "coup d'etat" and would trigger a constitutional crisis.

Pablo Rodriguez, Liberal MP from Montreal and sponsor of the bill, says that if the bill becomes law,

the government will have to respect the Kyoto Accord or call an election. However the legislation is not being considered a confidence matter, and therefore would not bring down the government on the vote itself.

Experts are saying the government has a democratic obligation to follow laws. Ned Franks, a professor at Queen's University believes the government would need to produce a plan and have money value attached to it.

Stewart Elgie, a professor at the University of Ottawa, confirmed that if passed and no action is taken, the government would be breaking the law and could be taken to court.

Cheap, safe drug shows potential to kill cancer cells

Recent tests have shown that an inexpensive drug may be able to kill cancer cells in humans. Dichloroacetate, a drug generally used to treat rare metabolic disorders, has shown the potential to assist in the treatment of brain, lung, and breast cancers, researchers at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada say.

Dr. Evangelos Michelakis of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada found that that DCA causes tumor regressions in animals with human cancers. Testing showed that DCA attacked cancer cells but did not attack healthy cells.

The researchers and the Alberta Cancer Board and Capital Health do not advise the use of DCA to treat cancer yet, as clinical trials for the drugs use to treat cancer have not been performed yet.

Unlike healthy cells, cancerous cells do not convert food molecules into energy in the mitochondria. Instead, they rely on a process

known as glycolysis, which takes place in the main body of the cell, while the mitochondria are "shut down", researchers believe possibly due to the lack of oxygen supply to cells in the middle of a tumor.

This means that another key function of the mitochondria - to activate an abnormal cell's self-destruct mechanism, Apoptosis - is also blocked.

When Dichloroacetate (DCA) enters a cancer cell, it restarts the mitochondria which in turn activate apoptosis, and the cancerous cell destroys itself.

DCA is known to be relatively safe, although pain, numbness and gait disturbances may occur. The drug is also expected to be cheaper to manufacture than other drugs since there is no patent for it.

Microsoft patent to make ads disable computer

On December 29th 2005, Microsoft applied for a patent that allows the operating system to require users to pay attention to ads shown on their computers. According to the patent, a user will be asked to identify her / himself to a webcam or provide some data regarding the advertisement to be entered. The technology that is part of this patent is meant to give Microsoft the right to repossess one's computer if one does not pay attention to advertisements.

According to the patent, the technology will be used so that the "delivery of paid advertising to a user may involve asking a question about an advertisement or requiring data about the advertisement to be entered. In one embodiment, a human presence indicator, such as stylized letters, may be displayed during or after the presentation of an

advertisement to be copied by a user to indicate presence during the advertisement. When the challenge relating to ad viewing is correctly answered, a value associated with viewing the ad may be credited to a user account, either locally or at a clearinghouse or other repository. [...] When the allowable number of incorrect answers has been exceeded, several response are possible, from noting a user's record but taking no action, to a follow up communication with the user, to disabling or even repossessing the computer"

The stated aim of the technology is so that telephone companies, internet service providers, or leasing companies, can provide computer systems etc. to users either free or at reduced charge and recoup the cost of the system through sale of advertising.

Today in History

1689 - The Convention Parliament was convened to determine if James II, the last Roman Catholic king of England, had vacated the throne when he fled to France in 1688.

1733 - Georgia Day: James Oglethorpe founded the city of Savannah along with the Province of Georgia, a penal colony for the resettlement of people in debtor's prison in the United Kingdom.

1818 - Led by General Bernardo O'Higgins, Chile formally proclaimed its independence from Spain.

1912 - Xinhai Revolution: Puyi, the last Emperor of China, abdicated under a deal brokered by Yuan Shikai, ending the Manchu Qing Dynasty.

2001 - NEAR Shoemaker touched down on Eros, becoming the first spacecraft to land on an asteroid.
February 12 is Darwin Day.

Quote of the Day

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.

The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

~ Abraham Lincoln

Word of the Day

lunge; v

- To make a sudden forward movement.

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