



Top Stories

U.S. Justice Department says FBI misused Patriot Act

The United States Justice Department has concluded an inquest into the FBI's use of the Patriot Act saying that the FBI had been, in some cases, misusing the Patriot Act, sometimes illegally.

DUP and Sinn Féin make gains in Northern Ireland Assembly election

Results are coming in for the Northern Ireland Assembly election held on Wednesday 7 March. The election is a crucial step in restoring devolved government to Northern Ireland.

Featured story

EU adopts renewable energy measures

EU leaders agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by the year 2020 and to boost the use of renewable energy and biofuels.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Ugandan judges end a week long strike after President Yoweri Museveni expressed regret over an incident where security men seized Opposition supporters from the High Court of Uganda.

- The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit strikes down a District of Columbia law banning residents from keeping handguns at home on Second Amendment grounds.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Nepalese Government reaches an agreement with Maoist rebels in which the rebels will be represented in the Cabinet and will return property seized to the relevant owners.

- Results from the Northern Ireland Assembly election show the DUP and Sinn Féin making gains, and ensuring that in order for direct rule to cease both parties must agree to cooperate in a powersharing Executive.

- Cuba-United States relations: The United States Coast Guard stages an exercise in Florida in preparation for a possible mass exodus from Cuba in the event of the death of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. During the drill 40 Cuban exiles reach the United States.

- Kelvin Thomson, the Shadow Attorney-General, in Australia resigns after it is discovered that he provided a reference to fugitive accused drug trafficker Tony Mokbel when Mokbel applied for a liquor licence in 2000.

Wall dividing island of Cyprus torn down but divisions still stand

On Thursday March 8, 2007 the government of the Greek half of Cyprus used heavy machinery to allow it's military to tear down the five-meter high concrete wall on the Green Line that divides the island. The wall has stood in the Cyprus capital of Nicosia for more than 40 years. It has been a constant reminder of the political situation of the Mediterranean

island (given independence from Britain in 1960) that has suffered divisions since communal violence in 1963 that was only prevented by establishing a United Nations Peacekeeping Force there in 1964. These divisions only deepened when Cyprus was invaded by Turkey's military in mid-July 1974 after right-wing Greek Cypriots (backed by the military junta ruling Greece at the time) attempted a coup with the intent of joining the island to Greece. The result was a split between the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot south and the Turkish Cypriot north (only recognized by Turkey). The division at Nicosia has become a curiosity to tourists who look over it to see the buffer zone between the two factions (a no man's land with abandoned homes and businesses where no civilians are allowed). The destruction of the wall also brought out curious Cypriots.

Much international pressure had been brought to bear on both sides, and thawing of the relationship between the opposing Cypriots began in 2003 when the Turkish side eased restrictions on travel. Still in 2004 before joining the EU, Greek Cypriots rejected the UN reunification plan that called for federation. Then in December 2005 when the Turkish Cypriots created a footbridge for Turkey's soldiers on the other side, the action drew protests from the Greek Cypriots voicing their security concerns. In January 2007 the Turkish Cypriots began dismantling the footbridge as a gesture of good faith.

At first both Cypriot governments expressed hope of reunification when asked about the demolition. Tassos Papadopoulos, the president in the Greek south stated "Tonight we have demolished the checkpoint on our side." He went on to call for the Turkish Cypriots to act, saying civilians will not be able to cross "if the troops are not withdrawn". Rasit Perteve, chief adviser to Mehmet Ali Talat, the leader of Turkish Cyprus said: "This is extremely symbolic... The dynamism created by this move will lead to the opening of the crossing." Still when the government of Turkey dismissed the move as merely a result of international pressure that did not signify anything, and refused to dismiss its troops in the area (it maintains 40,000 soldiers on the island), sheets of aluminum were put up as a barricade on the Greek Cypriot side early on the morning of March 9, 2007.

Rocketeers find possible impact crater in Nevada

Imagine coming back from a camping trip in the desert. Then a few months later you notice in your photos from the trip that you camped inside a giant impact crater so big that no one documented it before. Could it happen?

During several trips to the Black Rock Desert, mostly while supporting the Stratofax Aerospace Tracking Team for suborbital space rocket launch efforts, Ian Klufft KO6YQ noticed some oddities in rock formations. He had a little experience with volcanoes, and some rocks in the area looked unusual. There seemed to be some lava here and there - but where was the volcano? He observed that even a large caldera should have mostly volcanic rocks. He then noticed some curved geographic structures in satellite imagery

which made him curious if it might be an impact crater.

A TV documentary about meteor impacts mentioned some characteristics of impact craters. He went to the Internet to learn more. He noticed some of his own pictures of the area had cone shaped structures which might be "shatter cones" due to an impact shock wave that passed through the rocks. Discussion with others produced suggestions and volunteers who joined the effort. More circular features in satellite photographs were found. Igneous dikes through white layers of rock had been described and were visible in many photos.

The possible impact crater is 30 miles (48 km) wide east-to-west and 40 miles (64 km) north-to-south centered around 40.984045 N, 118.916016 W. That is in northwestern Nevada halfway between Reno and the Oregon border. The apparent ancient geological structure is so old that much of it is eroded away. The forces that eroded the Black Rock Desert itself, whether glacier or stream, have apparently cut through the crater rims and floor to do it.

Following an expedition to the area in late January, more possible shatter cones were observed in one of the rock samples collected. These are only formed by the shock wave of an impact event or nuclear explosion. The nearest nuclear test was underground at Sand Springs Range in central Nevada. Atmospheric tests at the Nevada Test Site were at the southern, and opposite, end of the state. So that points toward an impact if confirmed. But professional geologists will want to have the final word on confirming them.

In addition to shatter cones, rock samples were thought to contain shocked quartz because the criss-cross fractures looked like examples in online documents. But this group of volunteers doesn't have equipment for proper photography of shocked quartz. If found, that would be another way to prove the impact origin of the rocks.

Columnar jointed columns hundreds of feet tall appear on some bluffs in locations that appeared consistent with part of a slowly cooling crater floor. But that alone only helps as part of a bigger picture, because volcanoes can have lava cool in columnar joints as well.

They also found local geological studies which described oddities which could be explained by an impact event. Layers of rocks in the mining district called Sulphur left geologists with a mystery about the cause of chemical alterations since 1980. The group compared it with information in online geological texts like "Traces of Catastrophe" by Dr Bevan M French of the Smithsonian Institution. Layers of impact ejecta seemed to explain the rock layers better than the previous theory about acid uniformly cooking the rocks across the region, and only in one layer of rocks. A separate 1980 study 40 miles away identified an immense air-fall tuff layer in the Soldier Meadows area as having been deposited in a single unit, yet couldn't locate the volcano which produced this enormous volume. Fault diagrams published online by a mining operation at Sulphur on the edge of the circular structure from the satellite photo also look like curved terraced faults in the wall of a crater.

The mining geologists who wrote

papers from 1980 to 2002 had not mentioned the possibility of a crater. But they were each gathering single puzzling pieces of information. A larger image seemed to be forming when putting the pieces together. The group hopes the information will be helpful to geologists who do further work in the region.

The theory hasn't been put to any test by professionals yet. Some responses point out that the elliptical region reported as the possible impact crater could also be the volcanic caldera that the 1980 study was looking for. If so, such a large volcanic caldera would still be a significant discovery for the region.

This will remain officially a mystery for a while until the professional geologists get to study it. There is a lot of information available online for those who are interested.

U.S. Justice Department says FBI misused Patriot Act

The United States Justice Department has concluded an inquest into the FBI's use of the Patriot Act saying that the FBI had been, in some cases, misusing the Patriot Act, sometimes illegally.

Such misuses include ordering the handover of personal information without just cause and looked at telephone records of Americans during the period of a non-emergency, Inspector General Glenn A. Fine's 130 page report said.

The FBI sent National Security Letters or "NSLs" to Americans asking for personal information, without getting a warrant or court order, but the FBI failed to report at least 22% of letters that were sent out.

As many as 56,000 requests per year for personal information on people have been made since 2001 when the Patriot Act was signed.

"We believe the improper or illegal uses we found involve serious misuses of national security letter authorities," said the inquest.

Robert Mueller the director of the FBI, says that he is responsible for not taking better measures to prevent the violations.

"I am to be held accountable. The inspector general went and did the audit that I should have put in place many years ago. While we've already taken some steps to address these shortcomings. I am ordering additional corrective measures to be taken immediately," said Mueller who also stated that he has no plans to hand in his resignation.

Mueller also said that 90% of the letters sent out were used in an attempt to track down terrorists who were located in different countries around the world.

EU adopts renewable energy measures

European Union leaders on the second day of their summit have agreed on measures to decrease emission of greenhouse gasses and to start using more biological fuels. The governments of the 27 countries in Brussels endorsed 3 main binding targets: to reduce greenhouse gas emission levels by the year 2020 by 20% compared to the level of 1990 renewable energy should make up 20% of energy consumption by 2020 a 10% share for biofuels in the total consumption of fuels in E.U. transport.

This way, the E.U. wants to

contribute in reaching the strategic goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The individual targets for countries will need to be established based on national starting points and potentials, according to the plan. The plans don't mention an enforcement mechanism yet.

In the summit's conclusions, the E.U. underlines its ambitions as a leading force in international climate protection. German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the targets "ambitious and credible".

Europe is prepared to even increase the objectives if other developed countries follow suit, and it invites other countries to come forward with their plans for the environment beyond 2012, when the Kyoto protocol ends. In June, Merkel plans to discuss the measures with the other members on the Group of Eight summit.

The proposal takes into account the sovereignty of individual countries to determine exactly which energy sources they use. More specifically, each member state should decide if they wish to use nuclear power or not. Some countries oppose the use of nuclear energy as an alternative to fossil fuels, and Germany is even in the process of dismantling its nuclear energy production. France on the other hand produces 70% of its electricity in nuclear power plants. [13% of France's total energy consumption is nuclear.] The report also stresses the importance of nuclear safety in the discussion over nuclear energy.

The summit also asked the European Commission to come up with proposals to reduce energy consumption in lighting and offices by 2008 and 2009. The idea is to replace conventional light bulbs

with more energy-efficient alternatives such as the energy saving light bulb.

Another energy-related topic in the conclusions is an agreement on increased security of energy supply. Through member state solidarity and a more interconnected and integrated market, eastern European countries hope to secure their energy supplies in case Russia would cut the supply.

During their two-days summit, the E.U. also discussed economic growth, employment, better regulations and international relations issues.

Ties announced in UEFA Champions League

Both the quarterfinal and semifinal draws were announced for the UEFA Champions League. The round of sixteen saw the current cup holders, Barcelona, eliminated along with Serie A holders Internazionale, Scottish Premiership holders Celtic, and Ligue 1 holders Lyon. The only current champion of any league still in the competition is Chelsea, who scraped by Portuguese holders Porto. Of the three English sides remaining, none will face each other in the quarterfinals, and upon winning their quarterfinals draw, Manchester United is still guaranteed a placement against a non-English club.

NHL: Penguins lose to Devils at home

The Pittsburgh Penguins, after three shootout victories from Sidney Crosby, were finally dealt a loss, Thursday night. The Penguins had a hard time against the Devils as, once again, the Devils brought their best and the Penguins simply fell short. In the first period, the Penguins took a 1-0 lead off an Evgeni Malkin Power Play goal, with

Mark Recchi and Sidney Crosby assisting. It wasn't until the second period that the Devils really turned up the heat, scoring two unanswered goals by Andy Greene on the power play, his first in the NHL, and Sergei Brylin's goal, with Patrik Elias, Brian Rafalski, John Oduya and Scott Gomez assisting. In the final period, the Penguins rallied back to tie the game after Sergei Gonchar scored a goal on the power play, with Jordan Staal picking up the assist. But Marc-Andre Fleury let another puck past, and the Devils took the lead. Late in the third, on a great individual play, Evgeni Malkin picked off the puck in the Devils zone and set up Michel Ouellet for a beautiful goal to tie the game once again and send it in to overtime. After a stalemate in the overtime period, Patrik Elias (the only shooter to score) would win the game for Devils in a hard fought game. The Penguins managed to pick up a point against the Atlantic Division leading Devils. Both teams will have Friday off before the Penguins battle the Rangers and the Devils face the Sabres on Saturday.

IBM and Cisco in attempt to create a universal platform for communications software development

IBM and Cisco have announced the development of a new platform, based on Eclipse and OSGi (Open Services Gateway initiative), which should unite all communication and collaboration software developers under a single platform.

Before the UC2 (Unified Communication and Collaboration) the unified communication has suffered because of a lack of a platform to be used by all software developers, rather than a series of them and, moreover, provided by different vendors. According to Adam Gartenberg from IBM Lotus

Software Group this was the main cause for this partial stagnation.

However, the UC2 is meant to ease the work of software developers. Gartenberg stated that this platform is very flexible and will certainly draw much attention from programmers. They will be able to create different plug-ins and small applications to remotely control other, major application.

The companies have also unveiled a series of their other joint projects. These project will be based on a set of application programming interface from Lotus (SameTime) and Cisco.

The add-ons planned are integration of a series of additional functions and features into the SameTime software from Lotus. Thus, in a few months, the SameTime users will benefit from such functions as click-to-call and voicemail. This will enable easier instant messaging inside the Cisco's Unified IP phones' system.

The fact that the platform will be based on Eclipse will make the numerous developers create many communications services, mainly for remote users to benefit from a series of new functions of ERP and CRM applications.

Nortel Networks - a partner of Microsoft since last year and Cisco's rival in the area - didn't have much success in the communication services field.

As for Microsoft, the experts are waiting for the reaction of the Bill Gates' company on the ideas and offers made by IBM and Cisco for enterprise communications and collaboration solutions.

NFL: Chicago deals Jones to New York

The Chicago Bears confirmed Tuesday that they had traded running back Thomas Jones along with one of their second round picks (which was 63rd overall) in the 2007 draft to the New York Jets. In exchange they will receive the Jet's second round pick, which is 37th overall in the upcoming NFL Draft and originally belonged to the Washington Redskins.

Jones rushed for 1,210 yards last season with the Bears and 301 yards in the playoffs including 112 yards on 15 carries in Super Bowl XLI against the Colts. Jones (who will be 29 next season) who originally signed with the Bears for a four year \$10 million deal as a free agent prior to 2004. His contract was set to expire after 2007. After his 1,335 yard 2005 season (which included nine touchdowns) Jones expressed his unhappiness with his contract by boycotting the Bears' offseason voluntary workouts. Shortly after the Superbowl, Jones expressed his desire for a change to Bears general manager Jerry Angelo. At a scouting combine two weeks ago he hinted a trade might be in the works, saying of Jones "He's expressed some things to me personally. We'll work on some things. I told him I would listen, and I did." Had Jones stayed with the Bears in 2007 he would have made \$2.75 million. The contract with the Jets (arranged by his agent Drew Rosenhaus) is for four years and is worth \$20 million with a \$12 million guaranteed signing bonus. Having passed his physical for the Jets, Jones is set to receive \$13.1 million in the deal's first two years.

Reflecting on the trade Jones said "It wasn't really a situation where I wanted to be traded. It was a

situation where I wanted to have an opportunity to do what I am capable of doing and that's going somewhere and providing leadership like I did in Chicago." He looked forward to playing with the Jets "I had a great time in Chicago, and it was a great experience playing there and making it to the Super Bowl last year with those guys. But I'm very, very excited to be here in New York. It's a great city. We had a chance to play the Jets this year, and the energy and the excitement that we felt up here at the Meadowlands and just being in New York in general was something that was special." Jones also addressed concerns about his age, saying "I'll be 29 years old this year, but I haven't had a lot of carries for a 29-year-old back and I'm a workout warrior. I love working out, I love taking care of my body and I'm very in tune with my body and how I feel. The way I feel right now, I could play for a long, long time."

Last season the Jets ranked 30th in rushing in the NFL, and the trade gives the Jets the starting running back they have lacked since Curtis Martin's knee injury over a year ago (Martin did not play last season and is expected to retire). Jets general manager Mike Tannenbaum was happy about the trade, stating "We did a lot of research on Thomas as a person, and we think he's a good fit on and off the field. He's a tough, outdoor, northeast runner, and he provides leadership." Jones will be sharing running duties with Leon Washington, and Cedric Houston (the Jets released their two other running backs Derrick Blaylock and Kevan Barlow). Last year Houston totaled up 374 rushing yards while Washington led the team with 650.

Jones spoke of his admiration of his new teammate, saying "Leon

Washington is a great back. I watched him last year, and he made some great plays for the Jets, helped them get to the playoffs. I have a lot of respect for him and all the other running backs out there. I'm one of the guys on the team that just wants to provide leadership and make plays and help us win." When asked if he expected to get most of the rushing duty Jones said "The best players play, and that's a great situation to be in. It gives you an opportunity to go out there and compete. Competition makes everybody better." The addition of Jones will give the Jets the option of using Washington and Houston as situational runners, which many believe will be increase their effectiveness. The Jets' general manager Tannenbaum stressed that the coaching staff would determine such questions, but said of Brown "I think he's a complete back, in terms of, he can be on the field for all three downs. How he's used and in what role will ultimately be determined by [Head Coach] Eric [Mangini] and Coach Schottenheimer, but he's a guy who can come in here and add to the productivity of the team."

In place of Jones, the Bears are expected to start Cedric Benson. Benson was the fourth overall pick in the first round of the 2005 draft and is playing for the Bears under a \$35 million contract. Benson rushed for 647 yards last season, averaging 4.1 yards per carry. Benson was injured in the Super Bowl after 2 carries for a 1 yard loss. Both Jones and Benson served the Bears as tailbacks, and (barring injury) were substituted for one another every couple of series. Bears general manager Angelo said of Benson "It's his time. It's that simple. It's his time. We feel strongly that he is ready." Angelo dismissed questions surrounding

Benson's hardiness (a sprained knee in 2005 kept him out of six games, and last season he suffered a shoulder injury at training camp and a sprained knee in the Superbowl). Angelo pointed out "He's been hurt, [but] he never was hurt in college. He had a lot of carries and four 1,000-yard seasons."

While many in Chicago view Jones' relationship with his teammates, and Benson in particular as icy, he had only complimentary things to say when discussing the trade and its effects. He told reporters "Cedric Benson has a lot of talent. He's a talented guy. When you move into the featured role, there are a lot more responsibilities. Coach Tim Spencer is a great running backs coach and I had a great relationship with him, not only as a coach but as a friend. He has so much advice for me to make me a better football player and I'm sure he'll pass that same advice to Cedric."

The Bears have declared their intent to have special-teams standout Adrian Peterson serve as a complementary player to Benson. While Peterson only had 10 carries last season, in 2005 he led the Bears with 76 carries at an average of 5.1 yards. General manager Angelo stated "We feel good about Cedric and Adrian. We still feel we have two quality running backs. That was a part of why we did what we did. We'll continue to look for a running back because we want to carry three running backs on the roster."

The Bears top draft positions are now 31st overall in the first round, and their new acquisition of 37th overall in the second round. The Jets top draft positions are both in the second round, the 59th overall and the newly acquired 63rd

overall.

The Jets also announced they signed 13-year veteran Bobby Hamilton to defensive back and Kenyon Coleman (six year veteran from Dallas) to defensive end. The Bears announced the 49ers' offensive assistant Pep Hamilton would succeed Wade Wilson (who went to Dallas) as quarterback coach, and Charles London (formerly Duke's assistant running back coach) would take over Mike Bajakian's offensive quality-control coach position since he left to become offensive coordinator at Central Michigan.

First Norfolk Island murderer in a century found guilty

The first murderer in 150 years on Australia's Norfolk Island, Glenn McNeill, has been found guilty of killing restaurant owner Janelle Patton in 2002 on Easter Sunday.

A 29-year-old New Zealand chef, Glenn McNeill was found guilty of murdering Australian Janelle Patton after the jury of 11 deliberated for two days, then delivered their guilty verdict, which either had to be unanimous, or no charges as manslaughter was not an option.

In the five week Supreme Court trial, evidence was given that said that 29-year-old Ms Patton had been abducted, then bashed, then stabbed, and then hacked to death. She sustained 64 different injuries in the prolonged attack. It was also said that the attack had sexual motives.

Outside the court room, around 11 residents of Norfolk Island cheered as it was announced that Mr McNeill had been found guilty. The forewoman of five-woman, seven-man jury, said, "We find the accused guilty of murder," which didn't result in any change by Mr

McNeill.

When first being interviewed by New Zealand police in Nelson for two hours, Mr McNeill admitted to the murder by running Ms. Patton over and stabbing her under the influence of cannabis. He then later retracted that in an unsigned court statement, stating mental health problems. "I did not murder Janelle Patton."

Her body was found wrapped partially in plastic wrap at a picnic/nature reserve, with her underpants pulled down.

Her underpants being pulled down was used in Mr McNeill's defence saying that the attack was done by a woman, and the underwear was to try and throw the police off the correct path.

Mr McNeill will be sentenced at a later date.

An appeal is being considered, with Mr McNeill's lawyer stating significant grounds.

IAEA suspends nuclear aid for Iran

Governors of the UN nuclear agency IAEA approved cuts in technical aid to Iran in accordance with UN sanctions. The move reflected UN Security Council Resolution 17-37 passed last December that bans the transfer of technology or expertise that might aid in producing nuclear fuel.

The 35-nation board, which is often split over issues on Iran, came to a consensus in ratifying the recommendation of the IAEA's Secretariat to suspend 22 of 55 technical aid programs involving Iran. These consist of four national programs in Iran and 18 regional or trans-regional programs that involve the country. The board did

not suspend 33 other programs (11 national and 22 regional) all of which focus on medical and agricultural radio-pharmaceuticals and isotopes.

The United States and France who fund much of the IAEA's special aid programs had originally demanded more sweeping reductions.

Ali Akbar Velayati, international affairs advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that the IAEA's decision was "politically-motivated".

Ali-Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, said his nation will not stop uranium enrichment activities and that suspended programs are not part of Iran's nuclear enrichment program and the sanctions will have no effect on it.

He stated "The enrichment program has been indigenous and independent, nobody, even the IAEA, have co-operated or worked with us. Therefore these projects will continue as planned under the supervision of the IAEA."

Soltanieh declared that the action had been dictated by the U.N. Security Council, and that this was an illegal act undermining the IAEA's professional independence.

IAEA board members joined in supporting IAEA's Director General Mohamed ElBaradei call for a "double suspension" where both enrichment and sanctions would stop concurrently.

Only North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq have been stripped of nuclear aid because of fear of weapons development.

Today in History

241 BC - Rome defeated Carthage

in the Battle of the Aegates Islands, ending the First Punic War.

1831 - The French Foreign Legion was established by King Louis-Philippe to support his war in Algeria.

1861 - Toucouleur forces led by El Hadj Umar Tall seized Ségou and conquered the Bambara Empire in present day Mali.

1906 - More than a thousand coal miners were killed in the Courrières mine disaster in Northern France.

1952 - Forbidden by law to seek reelection, former President Fulgencio Batista staged a coup d'état to resume control in Cuba.

March 10 is Arba'een in Shi'a Islam (2007)

Quote of the Day

Nobody reads a mystery to get to the middle. They read it to get to the end. If it's a letdown, they won't buy anymore. The first page sells that book. The last page sells your next book.

~ Mickey Spillane

Word of the Day

portmanteau; n

1. A large travelling case usually made of leather, and opening into two equal sections.
2. (linguistics) A word formed which combines the meanings of two words by combining the words themselves.

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