



Top Stories

UN aid convoys face increasing attacks in Darfur



A dramatic escalation in attacks by armed bandits is affecting the World Food Programme's ability to operate in the region, where it feeds more than two million people.

Two missing after severe thunderstorm in St. Paul, Minnesota

At least two storm sewer workers in St. Paul, Minnesota went missing when a severe thunderstorm hit the city on Thursday causing a 150 foot deep storm sewer to flood. At least 9 other workers made it out of the sewer.

Featured story

Man charged following bomb threats which closed 14 Tesco supermarkets in UK



Hertfordshire police have charged a man with four offences after 14 Tesco supermarkets in the United Kingdom were closed after the company received threats.

Wikipedia Current Events

•The United States Congress

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passes a bill containing measures recommended by the 9/11 Commission.

•The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation dispatches a team to investigate the shooting of four mountain gorillas in the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

•Yakub Memon, one of the masterminds behind the 1993 Bombay bombings, is sentenced to death in India.

•The European Commission accuses Intel Corporation of anti-competitive practices against Advanced Micro Devices.

•A Serbian gunman kills at least nine people in the village of Jabukovac in eastern Serbia near the Bulgarian border.

•The Israeli Defense Force suspends a company for shooting an unarmed man in West Bank city of Hebron.

•Two news helicopters collide while covering a car chase in Phoenix, Arizona, leaving at least four dead.

•Former French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin is charged with "complicity in slanderous denunciations" and "complicity in using forgeries" for allegedly trying to discredit current President Nicolas Sarkozy.

•Jailed policeman Eugene de Kock claims in an interview from prison that former South African

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President Frederik Willem de Klerk had hands "soaked in blood" and had ordered political killings and other crimes during the anti-apartheid conflict.

Claire Danes appears on MuchMusic to promote film

Actress Claire Danes appeared Wednesday in Toronto on the television series MuchOnDemand, to promote her new film, Stardust.

Danes appears in the fantasy epic Stardust opposite Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert DeNiro, and Sienna Miller. The film is based on Neil Gaiman's novel of the same name. Danes plays a striking girl named Yvaine, who is a fallen star. Pfeiffer, DeNiro, and Charlie Cox are all pursuing her.

Best known as Angela Chase in the 1994 television series My So-Called Life and Juliet in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet. She began stepping back into the spotlight a few years ago, with lead roles in The Hours, Stage Beauty, Shopgirl, and The Family Stone.

This September, Danes will hit Broadway for the first time, as Eliza Doolittle in a revival of Pygmalion, also known as My Fair Lady. She will soon be seen in another film, The Flock, opposite Richard Gere.

MuchOnDemand is a long-running program MuchMusic, Canada's

primary music channel. The program airs every weekday at 5 pm ET, as an hour-long per broadcast viewer interactive television program.

Two news helicopters crash in Phoenix, Arizona

Four people are dead after two news helicopters have crashed in Phoenix, Arizona, in the United States. The helicopters were covering a high-speed chase within the city, when, at some point, the two choppers inadvertently crashed into each other. Wikinews has learned that the two helicopters belong to independent TV station KTVK, and ABC affiliate KNXV, respectively.

There is still no word on an exact cause of the collision, however, the FAA is reviewing tapes to see if the helicopter pilots were communicating with air traffic controllers at the time.

Eye-witness, Mary Lewis, said: "I looked up and I see this 'boom,' and I see one of the helicopters coming down, and I said 'Oh my God'."

Tour de France: Sandy Casar wins stage 18

Sandy Casar of France has won stage 18 of the 2007 Tour de France in a time of 5h 13' 31". Axel Merckx came in second.

Sandy Casar, Alex Merckx, Laurent Lefevre, and Michael Boogerd took control of the stage with a break-away that gave them a 10-minute lead on the peleton.

Alberto Contador of Spain, who finished with the peleton keeps the yellow jersey. This 211 km long stage, with a few small climbs near the start, and was considered by many as the last chance for any surprises.

Cadel Evans of Australia, who is second overall, shaved off 3 seconds of the advantage that Contador holds over him, by finishing in a smaller group that finished just ahead of the peleton.

"I hope I don't lose because of three seconds," said Contador. "This yellow jersey is very important. It's important that I have it tonight. I'm not a time-trial specialist but I'll do all I can not to lose one minute, 50 seconds."

Tomorrow's stage is the second time trial stage, with long straight stretches, some beautiful sections of unbending road, some slight inclines and again favours the soloists. It is 55.5 km long and runs from Cognac to Angoulême. Sunday, will be the grand finale, as the race enters Paris to complete the eight laps of the traditional circuit around the Champs-Élysées.

Meanwhile, former yellow jersey leader, Michael Rasmussen, insists that he did not lie about his whereabouts. "I feel I've won the Tour de France... but victory has been stolen from me." He also said that he will not retire, but continue his career.

Blast kills three at Mojave Spaceport, California

Three people were killed and another three seriously injured in a blast at Mojave Spaceport, located in California, United States. The blast occurred on Thursday at 2:34 p.m. PDT (UTC-7) while Scaled Composites was conducting cold flow test of a rocket engine.

According to Tony Diffenbaugh of the Kern County Fire Department, two of the victims died immediately in the blast, while the third succumbed to his injuries at

the hospital.

"Our units arrived on the scene at a remote test site in the northeast portion of the airport. What they found was six victims of an apparent explosion with various traumatic and burn injuries," Diffenbaugh said.

Burt Rutan, founder of Scaled Composites, said a press conference: "We just don't know" why the explosion occurred, nitrous oxide usually is "not considered a hazardous material."

Scaled Composites is in a partnership with Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic to build SpaceShipTwo, which hopes to become the first commercially available passenger spaceflight for space tourism.

The accident comes just days after Northrop Grumman announced it would increase its stake in Scaled Composites to 100%.

Two missing after severe thunderstorm in St. Paul, Minnesota

At least two storm sewer workers in St. Paul, Minnesota went missing when a severe thunderstorm hit the city on Thursday causing a 150 foot deep storm sewer to flood. At least seven other workers made it out of of the sewer.

"Nine went down and seven came out," said the fire chief of St. Paul, Mark Mueller.

The workers were part of Lametti and Sons, a private agency employed to repair the city's storm drains. At approximately 3:00 p.m. (central time), they were ordered to evacuate the drains. The flooding began as the last of the men were climbing to the surface,

but when the seventh man turned around, the other two were gone.

A search was conducted, but nothing was found and another search will take place on Friday when authorities will begin to search areas of the Mississippi River.

The names of the men are not known.

UN aid convoys face increasing attacks in Darfur

The United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) raised concerns about a dramatic escalation in attacks on food aid convoys by armed bandits in the Darfur region of Sudan. WFP says the attacks constrain its ability to feed the more than two million people in the area receiving aid.

Negotiations over a UN Security Council resolution authorising a joint UN-African Union security force for the region continue but full deployment could take upto a year.

"In the last two weeks, nine food convoys have been attacked by gunmen across Darfur," said Kenro Oshidari, WFP Sudan Representative. "WFP staff and contractors are being stopped at gunpoint, dragged out of their vehicles and robbed with alarming frequency," he said.

"These abhorrent attacks, which target the very people who are trying to help the most vulnerable in Darfur, must be brought under control," he added.

A WFP official told Wikinews that the attacks and robberies have occurred in all regions of Darfur, and that the blame can't be ascribed to a particular group. "Frequently the bandits are

wearing uniforms but often in one group of bandits there may be more than one uniform. Thus, we are not pointing fingers at any one group." said Emilia Casella, WFP Spokesperson for Sudan. "We are calling on all parties to respect the neutrality of humanitarian convoys and their drivers, who are delivering food to civilians who are victims of the conflict."

"On July 20, a convoy traveling on the Tawilla-Kaura road in North Darfur was stopped by 16 armed men. The drivers were forced out of their vehicles and the robbers demanded 5 Sudanese pounds from each (roughly equivalent to US\$2.50). Those who could not pay were beaten. Similar incidents have happened on the same road in the past two weeks." —Emilia Casella, WFP Spokesperson for Sudan

According to WFP, in 2007 so far, 18 WFP convoys have been attacked - "shot at, looted, drivers robbed and/or injured". Four vehicles were stopped and the drivers and passengers robbed. Six vehicles were stolen, where the gunmen drove away with the WFP staff members still inside, though they were later released. "There were no major physical injuries, but naturally such experiences are very traumatic," said Casella. "These incidents have occurred in all three of the Darfurs, in areas controlled by various groups or the government."

In the week of July 15-21, there were five incidents in South Darfur, during which a total of seven trucks were looted of approximately 10.5 tonnes of food assistance.

The Darfur operation is the WFP's largest humanitarian mission, with about 790 staff working to feed

more than two million people every month.

The WFP indicated that it has been difficult to hire and retain the commercial trucking companies used to move food and supplies throughout the region due to the risks involved in the service. WFP Public Affairs Officer in Washington D.C. Jennifer Parmelee told Wikinews that "hiring reliable transport in other insecure environments, [such as] Afghanistan and Somalia, is extremely challenging."

Air service is employed for remote locations and where delivery by road has become too dangerous.

Parmelee told Wikinews that the "increasing insecurity will almost certainly further constrain [WFP's] ability to operate in Darfur - it already has." WFP Spokesperson for Sudan, Emilia Casella, indicated that "humanitarian access is likely to be increasingly difficult due to insecurity." However, the situation has not prevented all aid delivery. "Despite insecurity and access problems, WFP food assistance reached about 2.6 million people in Darfur last month," said Casella.

A UN resolution on the deployment of a hybrid African Union (AU) and UN force of 26,000 troops is working its way through the UN. Britain and France presented revisions to the draft, which dropped a threat of "further measures" against Sudan for obstructing peace efforts, though Sudan's ambassador, Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem, has objected to the revisions.

A deadline of December 31 exists to transfer authority in Sudan's Darfur region from the AU to the proposed AU-UN force. Full

deployment of all 26,000 troops would take up to one year.

The draft resolution would allow the use of force to protect the mission's personnel and humanitarian workers and would "protect civilians under threat of physical violence".

Jennifer Parmelee of the WFP suggests that the deployment of the hybrid force under such a mandate would be a positive development in the aid agency's ability to carry out their humanitarian assistance. "Sure an expanded AU/UN peacekeeping force would help." said Parmelee. "As it is, AU is stretched very very thin, and...is unable to accompany most of our convoys."

According to WFP, there are approximately 12,000 humanitarian workers in Darfur, which is a drop in numbers even though the need for aid workers has increased.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions drops the charge of supporting a terrorist organization against Mohamed Haneef. Australian Federal Police admits all their main evidence against Haneef was wrong.
- Five thousand Zimbabweans have been arrested in the last month for violating price controls.
- New Zealand Environment Minister David Benson-Pope resigns from the Cabinet.
- Steve Bracks resigns as the Premier of Victoria. John Thwaites, the Deputy Premier, announces his resignation later in the day.

Today in History

- 1794 – French Revolution: Reign of Terror leader Maximilien Robespierre was guillotined one day after the National Convention ordered his arrest.
- 1809 – Peninsular War: Sir Arthur Wellesley's Anglo-Spanish army earned a pyrrhic victory at the Battle of Talavera against a much larger French force under Joseph Bonaparte.
- 1914 – Austria-Hungary declared war after rejecting Serbia's conditional acceptance of only part of the July Ultimatum following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, starting World War I.
- 1976 – The Tangshan earthquake, measuring between 7.5 and 8.2 on the Richter magnitude scale, flattened Tangshan, China, killing about 242,419 people and injuring 164,851 others.
- 1990 – Alberto Fujimori, the first person of Japanese descent elected as an executive head of state of a Latin American nation, took office as President of Peru.
- 1996 – The remains of the prehistoric Kennewick Man were

discovered on a bank of the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington, USA.

July 28 is Independence Day in Peru (1821). Birthday of Ali in Iran (2007).

Quote of the Day

We must plan for freedom, and not only for security, if for no other reason than only freedom can make security more secure.
~ Karl Popper

Word of the Day

leitmotif; n

1. (music) A melodic theme associated with a particular character, place, thing or idea in an opera.
2. A recurring theme.

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- A general strike goes into its third day in Swaziland; strikers demand democratic elections and an end to absolute monarchy.
- Mohammad Ashfaq, a government appointed imam, is chased out of the Red Mosque in Pakistan by 200 students. A suicide bomb near the mosque kills at least 13 and injures another 50.
- The death toll from floods and landslides on the Sulawesi island of Indonesia rises to 107.
- The President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono meets with the Prime Minister of Australia John Howard to discuss security issues and the possibility of a bilateral free trade agreement.

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