



Top Stories

Highway bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota, collapses

As many as four to nine people have been reported killed and twenty missing, after the bridge over the Mississippi River on highway Interstate 35W collapsed. At least 50 cars and a school bus with children on board were on the bridge when it fell.

Al-Qaeda terror ad warns of 'big surprise'

An advertisement for al-Qaeda, posted on the internet by the As-Sahab propaganda campaign for al-Qaeda, has warned of a "big surprise" by the terrorist group.

Featured story

Russia claims North Pole by planting flag on seabed

A Russian expedition claims to have successfully planted a titanium flag of Russia on the seabed below the North Pole.

Fred Thompson's 'exploratory' causes confusion on USA election rules

The day after Fred Thompson's "exploratory committee" announced that it raised just over \$3 million dollars, the type of fundraising is causing "confusion" over Federal Election Commission (FEC) rules for the "exploratory" status.

CQ Politics reports, "Friends of Fred Thompson also is registered with the Internal Revenue Service

as a "527" political organization, so named because it is regulated under Section 527 of the tax code." Once Thompson decides to become a candidate, he must then meet FEC disclosure requirements. CQ Politics noted, "two issues — whether Thompson has raised more money than could be expected to be used for exploratory activities, and whether his months of 'testing the waters' have been a 'protracted period of time' as outlined by federal law as qualifying someone as a candidate — Thompson could have trouble." According to Paul Ryan, FEC program director for the Campaign Legal Center, "Reasonable minds could disagree."

The Washington Post noted, "Campaign finance experts said yesterday that if Thompson were to wait until Sept. 6 to launch a campaign, he would be legally permitted to delay filing a finance report with the Federal Election Commission until Jan. 31." Nonetheless, "Thompson campaign officials stressed his commitment to disclosure."

In addition to the personnel changes previously reported, today a top fundraising consultant, Kim Kaegi, resigned from the Thompson campaign. According to the AP, "Kaegi called it a 'stretch' to speculate that her departure was related to lower-than-expected totals."

Argentine President harshly criticizes US border fence
The Argentine President, Nestor

Kirchner, criticized the United States' border fence plan. He was reading his speech about the Argentine economic recovery, when he startlingly stopped and called the US border fence along the frontier between Mexico and the United States an "insult."

"In name of the Argentine Nation and addressing this honorable Congress I want to make clear the repudiation of the Argentine people and of who is speaking to you and of those who accompany me toward the despicable fence that is being built in the frontier between the Mexican sister nation and the Republic... or the Nation of the United States," said the President to 40 deputies and senators, who got up from their seats and heavily applauded him.

"It's not just an insult to our sister nation of Mexico, but to all the nations of Latin America and all the nations of the world," he added later. Furthermore, he asked President Bush to consider "sincerely" the issue. "We plead that in the meantime, those building the fence of shame please reconsider."

Both George W. Bush and the US Congress have passed a law for the building of 700-mile fence along the border between USA and Mexico in order to impede illegal immigration.

Sunnis withdraw from Iraqi government
The Sunni half of the Iraqi government, also known as the

Sunni Accordance Front, is withdrawing from the Iraqi government. Reports are also saying that Iraqi's Deputy Prime Minister, Salam al-Zubai, will resign after more than 70 people were killed in suicide bombings in Baghdad.

According to reports, the Front is withdrawing from the government because Iraq's Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, has not responded to at least a dozen demands made by the Front. They include having more of a "say" in the security and protection of Iraq, and call for the release of prisoners who are not being charged with crimes.

"The government is continuing with its arrogance, refusing to change its stand and has slammed shut the door to any meaningful reforms necessary for saving Iraq. We had hoped that the government would respond to these demands or at least acknowledge the failure of its policies, which led Iraq to a level of misery it had not seen in modern history. But its stand did not surprise us at all," said one of the leaders of the front, Rafea al-Issawi, to reporters during a press conference.

The Iraqi government released a statement denying the Front's claims, stating "our goal has been always the continuation of the active political participation and that everybody shoulders his [Maliki] responsibility in running the country and making the decisions. We will maintain contacts with all blocs, including the Accordance Front."

The Front is made up of 44 members, all of whom held a seat in the parliament of Iraq which totaled 275.

Two strong earthquakes rock Vanuatu

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) at least two earthquakes with a magnitude 7.2 and 5.1 have rocked the island of Vanuatu.

The first 7.2 quake was recorded at 4:08 a.m., Thursday morning local time (UTC+11), 55 kilometers (35 miles) east, southeast of Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu with a depth of 144.8 k.m. (90.0 miles). The second 5.1 quake was recorded at 47 k.m. (29 miles) east, northeast of Santo (Luganville), Vanuatu with a depth of 149.3 k.m. (92.8 miles) and it struck nearly one hour later at 5:07 a.m.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has issued a tsunami bulletin for the first quake saying that "based on all available data a destructive Pacific-wide tsunami not expected," but that small waves could be expected locally near the quake's epicenter.

So far there are no reports of injuries, deaths or damage, but the USGS reports that damage could be "moderate to heavy."

"No reports of damage or casualties have been received at this time; however, this earthquake may have caused damage due to its location and size," said a statement by the USGS on its website.

Bratz picture filmed at high school in rough area of Los Angeles, while in session

Described in press materials as a "low budget" production, the crew of Bratz: The Movie turned to a busy LA high school to film the picture's main scenes.

Shot in 30 days, during February and March 2007, the film had to work around the roughly 3,500 students at Santee Educational Complex in South Los Angeles, California. Most productions, like High School Musical and Degrassi: The Next Generation, do principal photography shoots during the summer. Since the Bratz film had a summer release, and the Santee school goes year-round, such a pattern was impossible.

Director Sean McNamara "was adamant about using this school", named in the film as "Carry Nation High", said production designer Rusty Smith. "We knew it was going to be complicated, and it was, but we pulled it off. I'm sure it was a big distraction for us to be there and it's really a compliment to the principal and the students' cooperation because we couldn't have done it without them."

One of the stars, Chelsea Staub, agreed. "I was amazed at how orderly and respectful the students at Santee High were during our invasion." She admits that she "would have had issues walking by our heavenly omelet station every morning," if she were a Santee student.

Such good behavior could be deemed extra surprising considering the school, which opened in 2005, is located in an area known for its amount of gangs. Some students walk through 50 different gang "territories" on the way to school, 18 of which have documented members enrolled as students. Students have brought AK-47s to class, and jumped police officers for their guns. A two day melee at the school, whose principal is a former cop, resulted in 34 arrests and 10 hospitalizations, mostly for pepper-spray-related injuries. Half

of the instructors, as of March 2006, were in their first year of teaching.

The school board superintendent and Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa rode the bus to the first day the bus was routed through the neighbourhood; a photographer for the Los Angeles Times caught a 10th grader tagging a window. The first gun shots rang out the second day the school was open.

Bratz: The Movie is a story based on an internationally successful line of dolls. Three "best friends forever" are forced by the queen bee of the high school to separate into various existing cliques. Growing lonely, they rebel by choosing to be true to themselves.

"Filming at a real high school was interesting because you could see real cliques and compare them to the simulated cliques in the movie," commented Logan Browning, one of the movie's stars, herself a senior in high school.

Staub, who plays the antagonist Meredith, also felt the real-life location was beneficial to the movie. "All the sounds and background images helped make it real for me. The shifting echoes of students on the bleachers and school bells that released the chaos of kids changing classes made me feel like I was truly a part of the high school experience as opposed to doing a scene on a soundstage."

"The presence of that school and the way it's laid out, almost like a prison, became a major character in the film," said production designer Rusty Smith. (Interestingly, Meredith's mantra in the movie is "take no

prisoners".) The school, devoid of color, easily contrasted against the vibrant and unique bedrooms of the Bratz girls. "We knew it was going to be complicated and it was but we pulled it off. I'm sure it was a big distraction for us to be there and it's really a compliment to the principal and the students' cooperation because we couldn't have done it without them."

A 16-foot high sculpture was added to the school courtyard, to help transform it into Carry Nation. The sculpture was of Nation, the most infamous and formidable member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in pre-prohibition America, wielding her hatchet in one hand and Bible in the other.

The production also filmed in the residential neighborhood of Studio City, and The Grove, a popular shopping centre at the heart of West Hollywood, both areas of Los Angeles.

The film opens in theaters across the United States and Canada on August 3, in the United Kingdom on August 17, in Spain on August 24, and Australia and New Zealand September 20.

Denmark withdraws troops from Iraq

On Tuesday, Denmark formally withdrew its forces from Iraq. Responsibilities were turned over to British in a ceremony. Defense minister Søren Gade was there, having secretly flown into Iraq for the event. During the ceremony, there was a rocket attack, causing everyone to hit the deck.

"I was told today by the British chief [commanding officer], General Jonathan Shaw, that there are also demonstrations against the attacks, and that the locals

have kidnapped some of those, who fire upon coalition forces," Søren Gade told Berlingske Tidende.

"The formal transfer takes place today (Tuesday) in Iraq," spokesperson for Army Operational Command, Kim Grynberger, told AFP. "A small ceremony will be held with a parade in Basra."

The 460 members of the army has already been reduced to 50 soldiers. Denmark's contribution to the Multinational force in Iraq will now consist of a small air force unit of four helicopters and 55 airmen that will work with the British.

On July 20, Denmark said that it had airlifted translators and other Iraqi employees with their families. In total it was about 200 people that by cooperating with MNF may be in danger of reprisals from insurgents.

"Out of concern for the interpreters and their families' security as well as the security of the Danish base in Iraq, the Defence Ministry has chosen to inform the public after the interpreters and others had left Iraq," the Danish Defence Ministry said in a statement.

"They had been working for us for about four years, and those who felt their security in Iraq was threatened have been granted visas to go to Denmark" where they can apply for asylum, the Danish ambassador to Iraq, Bo Eric Weber told Reuters.

Denmark announced in February that it would withdraw by August of this year.

Philippine population census to begin today

The Philippines National Statistics Office begins its twelfth population census today. Close to 40,000 enumerators will interview people in house-to-house visits to collect demographic data.

The Population Census (POPCEN) 2007 will gather information on age, sex, marital status, education, and other demographic characteristics and is scheduled to last till August 25.

All areas, ranging from exclusive subdivisions and condominiums to institutional populations such as those living in hospitals, sanitarium, penitentiary, military camps, convents, and seminaries will be covered, the NSO said in a press release.

The population count by province, city, municipality and barangay is scheduled to be released on February 28, 2008.

"The final count shall be considered official for all purposes upon proclamation by the President of the Philippines," the statement said.

NSO Administrator Carmelita N. Erica urged the public to cooperate with the operation, "please allow our authorized census enumerators to take a few minutes of your time for the interview which will last for about 15 to 30 minutes."

The last census was taken in 2000. The NSO estimates the country's population as of July 2005 as over 87 million.

News Corp. acquires Dow Jones & Co.

News Corporation has succeeded in purchasing the Dow Jones &

Company, the 125-year-old financial information firm and publisher of The Wall Street Journal in a three month long \$5 billion takeover bid. Rupert Murdoch is the chairman and chief executive officer of News Corporation.

The Bancroft family, which owns 64.2% of the Dow Jones' voting power met Tuesday and finalized the deal amid opposition from some key members who were fearful that Journal's reputation and content would be altered. Last week, the board of the Dow Jones approved the sale, a \$60-a-share bid which represents a 67% premium above Dow Jones's share price at the time of the offer. Yesterday, the News Corp. board gathered and gave the thumbs up for the acquisition, leaving only the Bancrofts to decide on the outcome.

Dow Jones, which also owns Barron's Magazine, has been owned by the Bancroft family since 1902.

Murdoch announced News Corporation's bid in May, and has maintained his company's position because of the lack of rivals. A Bancroft representative had approached other potential buyers, including billionaires Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, who both declined.

To address concerns that the Journal will be negatively altered, Murdoch plans to add four new pages of coverage, and has agreed to form a committee to decide on hiring or firing any editors.

News Corp. owns and operates dozens of large media companies, including the Fox News and British Sky Broadcasting television networks, newspapers The New

York Post, The Australian, and The Sun, magazines TV Guide and The Weekly Standard, as well as internet assets such as Myspace and Photobucket.

Today in History

216 BC – Second Punic War:

Carthaginian forces led by Hannibal defeated a numerically superior Roman army at the Battle of Cannae near the town of Cannae in Apulia in southeast Italy.

1870 – Tower Subway, the world's first underground railway, opened beneath the River Thames in London.

1903 – The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire carried out the Ilinden Uprising.

1934 – Gleichschaltung: Chancellor Adolf Hitler became Führer, making him both the head of state and the head of government of Nazi Germany.

1990 – Iraq invaded Kuwait, overrunning the Kuwaiti military within two days, and eventually sparking the outbreak of the Gulf War seven months later.

Quote of the Day

The moment always comes when, having collected one's ideas, certain images, an intuition of a certain kind of development — whether psychological or material — one must pass on to the actual realization. ~ Michelangelo Antonioni

Word of the Day

meretricious; adj

1. Of, or relating to prostitutes or prostitution.
2. (hence) Tastelessly gaudy, making a false show of being attractive.

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
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(outside the U.S.)
+44-871-218-6397
(U.K. / Europe)

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