



Top Stories

Fidel Castro not expected to live through 2007

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Queen Elizabeth II unveils New Zealand Memorial in London

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, New Zealand's Head of State, unveiled the New Zealand Memorial at Hyde Park Corner, in London today.

Featured story

Massive hurricane spotted on Saturn

NASA's Cassini Spacecraft has captured images of a massive hurricane on the planet Saturn.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Elton John says that religion should be banned because it lacks compassion and promotes hatred of homosexuals.
- Rebels claim to have captured a second town in the Central African Republic during a two-week long offensive.
- Iranian nuclear program: Israel threatens to launch air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities "as a last resort", and the Iranian foreign ministry responds that it would

Wikipedia Current Events

"retaliate with a crushing blow" should Israel act.

- Heavy fighting broke out in central Somalia, officials said, a day after the transitional government rejected a peace initiative with the country's Islamic movement.
- An international treaty, the 2003 Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War, comes into force aiming to limit the impact of cluster bombs and other unexploded devices on civilian populations after a conflict ends.
- A suicide bomber kills at least 35 people and injures about 50 more at a police recruiting center in Baghdad.
- The former Soviet autonomous oblast of South Ossetia holds a referendum on independence from Georgia, heightening tension in the Caucasus.
- The first round of the 2006 local elections for local mayors and local city councils takes place in Poland.

Fidel Castro not expected to live through 2007

Fidel Castro's health is slowly deteriorating. He is not expected to live to the end of 2007, and would only be 81 years old by then.

The Cuban dictator was originally expected to recover and return to power by December 2006, but his health has continued to decline. "It's a subject on which I don't

want to speculate," said Felipe Perez Roque, a the forein minister of Cuba.

It is believed that Castro suffers from cancer of the stomach, pancreas, and/or colon., but it is still unknown what his exact condition is.

Official state photos taken in October reveal him to be much more weakened and thinner.

The dictator has only been guaranteed 18 more months to live with chemotherapy. If he isn't receiving it, his life will likely be reduced to only lasting three to eight months longer.

If he is receiving chemotherapy, his facial hair seems to be unaffected by the treatment.

Despite these expectancies, "We are optimistic," Roque stated a week ago. He also noted Fidel was steadily recovering from the intestinal surgery he recently received.

International attention is expected to be drawn in December, when Castro's 80th birthday celebration is planned, but there is no guarantee that the Cuban leader will be able enough to attend. A celebration on August 13 has already been postponed.

Palestinian FM: no peace with Israel

Palestinian Foreign Affairs Minister Mahmoud al-Zahar said today that Hamas is against peace with

Israel, will not give up the right of return of Palestinian refugees and will not recognize Israel even if a Palestinian state is create in the pre-1967 borders.

Al-Zahar also threatened Israel with response to the artillery shelling by the IDF at Beit Hanoun, where 19 Palestinians were killed due to machinery fault at one of the artillery stations.

The FM also noted that Hamas will receive most seats in the Palestinian parliament, thus changing PA's policy to its liking. He also revealed that Hamas turned down PA's Prime Minister Mahmoud Abass's offer to release kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit under Egyptian custody prior to Israel's assurance of release up to a thousand Palestinian prisoners.

UK to step up anti-terror efforts

New measures to counter the growing terror threat in UK are expected in the Queen's Speech.

Sir Ian Blair, Metropolitan police chief, in a speech in Berlin, highlighted the scale of disaffection among the Muslim community, pointing to reports that between 40,000 and 120,000 Muslims believed that the London bombings, when four British suicide bombers killed 52 civilians, were justified. He believed that this disaffection was related to the very negative way in which many in the Muslim community perceived the country's foreign policy. This view had been expressed last month by Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett and by the Head of MI5, Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, earlier in the week.

Sir Ian outlined where he thought

new legislation was needed. Despite the fact that the measure had caused the Government to be defeated in the last session of Parliament, he wanted the extension of the 28 days suspects can be held without charge to be reconsidered. He wanted the law restricting the reporting of court proceedings relaxed to let people, particularly in the communities from which those on trial come, to see justice being done. As things stand, once they have charged a suspect, the police have no right to continue questioning; this should be changed, he said. He also wanted phone tap evidence to be allowed in court and flag burning to be made illegal. Home Secretary John Reid will have an opportunity of introducing new legislation in the Queen's Speech.

Following Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller's statement that MI5 has the task of keeping track of 1,600 suspects engaged in 30 known terrorist plots with a staff of 2,800, and that disaffection is increasing as never before, it is expected that more resources will be provided to support her department's work. Patrick Mercer, the shadow homeland security minister said that both the intelligence and security services needed a substantial increase in resources. Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown has said that his first priority as Prime Minister would be to head anti-terrorism measures personally. In his present post he has responsibility for the allocation of resources to government departments.

The opinion poll findings quoted by Dame Eliza are questioned by the 1990 Trust (a charitable trust supported by the Rowntree Trust, Comic Relief, CRE and others). Introducing an internet survey

conducted between the 8th and 27th September 2006, Karen Chouhan of the 1990 Trust said "This (referring to Dame Manningham-Buller's speech) is nothing short of irresponsible politicking and journalism which is designed to create a moral panic to pave the way for renewed legislative assaults on civil liberties and can only serve to fuel fears and hostility towards Muslim communities in the UK". The specific criticism of the use being made of the ICM/Sunday Telegraph Poll, that has been widely reported, is that "some sections of the media have conflated Muslim respondents answering positively to the question of whether they have sympathy 'with the feeling and motives of those who carried out the attacks' (20% of those polled in the same ICM/Telegraph survey of February 2006 answered affirmatively) with the violence itself. To understand the motive behind an action cannot be equated with violence itself, and the media have a responsibility to create a clear demarcation".

Parliament resumes its work next week when the Queen's Speech will indicate what new anti-terrorist and anti-racist legislation the Government intends to propose.

Queen Elizabeth II unveils New Zealand Memorial in London

The New Zealand Head of State, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of New Zealand, unveiled the New Zealand Memorial at Hyde Park Corner today in London.

Her Majesty told the audience that New Zealanders had written themselves into a special place in the history books.

"Many of them for deeds of

exceptional bravery and sacrifice."

"But most of them for simply giving their all in duty, in courage and in dogged determination to fight for peace and freedom from tyranny."

The striking memorial named 'The Southern Stand', commemorates the "strong and enduring" relationship between New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and serve as a focus of remembrance of the shared sacrifice during the two World Wars and other military engagements from the South African War to the present day.

The dedication of the New Zealand Memorial at Hyde Park Corner featured cultural performances, a fly past of aircraft and famous New Zealanders from the world of sport and music.

The monarch, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, and dignitaries from both countries, war veterans and more than 1,500 New Zealanders living and working in Britain.

Among the New Zealand celebrities that attended are former national rugby captain Sean Fitzpatrick, ex-international cricketer Chris Cairns and pop singer Daniel Bedingfield who was born in the country.

Singer-songwriter Dave Dobbyn and soprano Hayley Westenra performed during the ceremony.

The \$3 million memorial was funded by the New Zealand Government and consists of 16 cross-shaped vertical bronze 'standards' set out in formation across the north east corner of Hyde Park Corner in central London.

Each standard weighs up to 700kg

and through text, patterns and small sculptures commemorates the shared sacrifice of British and New Zealand ex-servicemen, while also celebrating the wider social, cultural and economic ties of the two countries.

The event began with a Royal Guard of Honour formed by the largest contingent of New Zealand forces to be seen in the UK since Her Majesty's Coronation in 1953. Over 250 Army, Navy and Air Force personnel left for London on Sunday 5 November, the contingent comprises of a Royal Guard, Cataflaque Party, Maori Cultural Group and tri-Service Band.

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said she hoped it could be a part of London that New Zealanders could always call home.

"It's genesis lay in the desire to commemorate the shared sacrifice of New Zealanders in times of war, alongside the people of Britain," Helen Clark said.

"New Zealand's relationship with Britain dated back to the 18th century, and Captain James Cook's exploration of New Zealand," she said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the link between the two nations was not just historic. "The bonds of friendship between our two countries, remain as strong as ever. Our peoples are close, they come and go between our two countries as much as ever, we invest in each others' economies, we share culture and sport - where friends become rivals."

Designed by architect John Hardwick-Smith and sculptor Paul Dibble the memorial consists of 16

cross-shaped vertical bronze 'standards' set out in formation on a grassy slope. Each standard is adorned with text, patterns and small sculptures. "Through the words and images, any New Zealander visiting the memorial will recognise home, and British people may learn something of the relationship between our two countries," explains Paul Dibble.

"We set the memorial in a position where the main pedestrian route runs through the memorial so that visitors will walk amongst the sculptures, encouraging people to stop and explore. Through the words and images, any New Zealander visiting the memorial will recognise home, and British people may learn something of the relationship between our two countries."

The memorial is located at Hyde Park Corner, diagonally opposite the Australian War Memorial which was completed in 2003.

In October 2004, 12 designs teams were selected from the 68 who submitted expressions of interest. These teams submitted designs for the memorial, and an expert panel, appointed by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, selected the final design. The memorial design is a collaboration between Dibble Art Co and Athfield Architects, led by sculptor Paul Dibble and architect John Hardwick-Smith, with Jon Rennie as the team's London representative.

New Zealand students given credits for simple tasks

Students in hundreds of schools around New Zealand are given NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) credits for simple, everyday tasks, an investigation by The New Zealand

Herald on Sunday shows.

The simple standards include: applying for a benefit, keeping healthy, talking to a friend, which includes listening, wrapping a gift, dress yourself appropriately, wash clothes, work in a group, understand the idea of friendship, either ask about or order groceries over the phone or in person. One of the standards include coming to school on time and behaving good for 20 days, it appears on the students records as: "Work and Study Skills: Demonstrate Care and Timeliness as an Employee".

Bill English, Member of Parliament for National and the education spokesman for National, said: "The easy credits demotivated students. Take someone who's struggling with maths and works hard to get four or five credits - and then they see their mate getting three credits for holding a conversation... That's something that children learn when they're 2, 3, 4... It hardly seems credit material."

All those standards are available to any student who goes to a school which is accredited to assess the standard internally. The standards are not made up by the school but are real standards written by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

The NZQA said, on Friday, that the standards would be marked down as "special supported learning" but recently they went back on that and said that now the credits are "mainstream and not differentiated on NCEA records."

The chief executive of NZQA, Bali Haque, said: "Level one was absolutely basic and the delivery of unit standards was a developing process. There's no doubt that you

will find anomalies. The intention here is to recognise the learning that people have done, and give them credit for it."

Mr Haque admits that this system "is not perfect" but is adamant that schools will not exploit the imperfect system as to boost pass rates, unlike in 2004 when Cambridge High School used legitimate standards to boost pass rates. The school used one standard that was titled "Interpersonal Communications: Participate in a team or group to complete routine tasks," and all the student had to do was pick up rubbish in a group. This standard is still available.

The dean of education at the University of Auckland, John Langley, said: "The other standards are meaningless. I turned 51 last week and I still can't gift wrap a parcel - and actually, it doesn't matter. The authority needed to look at what the NCEA standards were and how they were applied."

"It is better to offer people those sorts of simple, unsophisticated qualifications than not to - as long as people understand the purpose," Mr Haque said.

The secondary principals' association head, Graham Young, said: "The NCEA system put pressure on schools to accumulate credits - and the easiest way to do that was to encourage students into internally assessed unit standards. There are some very low-level unit standards which are extraordinarily easy to pass... For people with above-average or average abilities to be using those unit standards is absolute nonsense."

Spokesman, Gilbert Peterson, for

the employers and manufacturers association, said: "The titles of particular standards meant nothing to employers faced with a big grab bag of assessments. It's going to cause bewilderment and confusion, quite frankly. Getting credits for doing the washing or talking to your mate is just amazing. Any businessperson reading this would be quite appalled. We're absolutely sure of that." However Mr Haque said that he was confident employers would recognise the standards as basic, and that they were not misleading.

Mets; Citigroup agree to 20 year sponsorship deal

The New York Mets baseball team has agreed to a 20 year sponsorship deal with financial house Citigroup for the team's new ballpark, now called CitiField. The deal, which includes stadium naming rights, is worth more than \$20 million annually, according to a baseball official.

This tops the approximately ten million annually the NFL's Houston Texans receive from Reliant Energy to call their home Reliant Stadium.

The agreement between the Mets and the financial services company includes options for both the team and Citigroup that could extend the deal to up to 35 years. Other commercial arrangements are part of the contract, the official said.

Construction on the ballpark, next to the current stadium in Queens, New York, began last summer and is scheduled to be ready for the 2009 season. The Mets have played at Shea Stadium since 1964, the team's third year in the league. The ballpark is named for William A. Shea, a lawyer who helped bring National League baseball back to New York.

The announcement will be made Monday at a special ceremony that will be attended by New York Govener, [[w:George Pataki|George Pataki] and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Citigroup is one of the world's largest full-service banks, with two hundred million customers in more than 100 countries.

IEA warns: bleak future for the World without more energy investment

The International Energy Authority (IEA) issued a warning that the World faces an insecure, dirty and expensive future unless the rate of investment in energy supplies is increased substantially.

In real terms, investment in oil and gas production has not increased significantly in the last five years, but demand has continued to rise. This has been despite oil and gas prices of between four and five times the 2002 levels. If no action is taken, demand will increase by over 50% between 2006 and 2030.

Coal is now cheaper than gas and nuclear is cheaper than both, in some cases even ignoring carbon tax effects. The continued rise in energy prices should make investment on the supply side more attractive.

These are among the findings of the "World Energy Outlook – 2006" report by IEA published this week in London.

Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday November 7, 2006, IEA Executive Director Claude Mandil said "WEO 2006 identifies under-investment in new energy supply as a real risk". He said "We don't see how we can avoid [nuclear power] if we want a sustainable

long-term future".

To secure the supply/demand position, IEA calls for investment in energy-supply infrastructure of over \$20 trillion in real terms over 2005-2030 to ensure that the World moves into a "Cleaner, Cleverer and More Competitive Energy Future"

Today in History

- 1002 - King Ethelred II ordered the massacre of all Danes in England.
- 1954 - Great Britain defeated France at the Parc des Princes in Paris to win the first Rugby League World Cup.
- 1970 - The Bhola tropical cyclone hit the densely populated Ganges Delta in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), killing an estimated 500,000 people.
- 1982 - The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Constitution Gardens in Washington, D.C. was dedicated.
- 1985 - The volcano Nevado del Ruiz erupted, causing a volcanic mudslide that buried Armero, Colombia and killed approximately 23,000 people.

Quote of the Day

The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding.
~ Louis Brandeis

Word of the Day

upstage; v

1. To draw attention away from.
2. To force an actor to face away from the audience by staying upstage.

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(toll-free in the U.S.)
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