



WIKINEWS

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Top Stories

Helen Thomas probes White House on torture; online community sends flowers

On Wednesday, long-time White House correspondent Helen Thomas questioned the White House Press Secretary repeatedly about US President Bush's recent confirmation that he had approved CIA interrogation policies that included waterboarding. Thomas's questions became front-page news on the website reddit this morning, and users have collected over \$3,000 for the purchase of flowers and other gifts to send to her in appreciation.

UK City Councillor suspended from party after expressing controversial views

A British City Councillor from the Liberal Democrat Party has been suspended from his party and may lose his position as a school governor after making controversial comments on, among other things, the subjects of drugs and prostitution.

Series of earthquakes strikes Reno, Nevada area

A large series of earthquakes has hit the northern area of U.S. state Nevada recently, particularly in and around the Reno metropolitan area. Nevada is the third most earthquake-active state in the United States, and the Reno area regularly sees seismological activity. However, recent events, particularly

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yesterday's series of tremors, have become alarmingly frequent for locals.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Wikinews holds a follow-up interview with Max Riekse, Constitution Party candidate for the 2008 U.S. presidential election

In March, Wikinews interviewed Max Riekse, candidate for the Constitution Party's nomination for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. With the Constitution Party's national convention underway this weekend, we spoke with him one last time before he either wins his party's nomination or loses.

Wikipedia Current Events

The death toll from a fire in a mattress factory in the Hay Hassani district of Casablanca rises to 55.

- The 26 members of the Spanish FV Playa de Bakio are released by Somali pirates.
- The sole provider of public transport in Toronto, Canada, the Toronto Transit Commission, is shut down by a strike.
- The Turkish Armed Forces attack Kurdistan Workers Party positions in northern Iraq.

Iraqis begin second round of negotiations in Finland

Representatives of Iraq's main ethnic groups have begun a second round of negotiations in

Finland to study successful negotiations in South Africa and Northern Ireland. The initial talks, in September last year, ended with the Helsinki I Agreement, which presented a series of recommendations aimed at bringing peace to Iraq.

The talks have been arranged largely by the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 by then Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari. CMI has previously arranged a successful arrangement between Indonesia and rebels in the province of Aceh, ending 30 years of fighting with talks in which Ahtisaari was chairman. He is taking no role in the Iraqi negotiations.

"Senior leaders from all the major ethnic groups are represented," said a CMI spokesman. 36 Iraqis are attending the seminar, entitled "Divided Societies", as well as South African and Northern Irish representatives. The Iraqis include prominent Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds although the names of the participants, as well as the exact location and length of the event, have been kept secret. This mirrors last time, where the site, an isolated inn in the Southeast, was only revealed after the talks had ended. All previous African and Irish representatives have also returned, as well as several others.

Amongst those sent to explain their historic peace negotiations is Martin McGuinness, former Irish Republican Army commander,

deputy leader of Sinn Fein and Northern Ireland's power-sharing government's senior Catholic. That government has been in place just under a year. Junior Irish government minister Jeffrey Donaldson, a Protestant lawmaker, is also present. Both participated in last year's discussions.

Last year's four-day event's Helsinki I Agreement contained deals to aim for power sharing and to stop using violence to settle political disputes. CMI spokesman Quintin Oliver said that "All the participants are engaged in intense discussions with a considerable and detailed review of the Helsinki I Agreement and principles in light of the changed circumstances (being discussed in the second round)," and that the new talks began on Friday and will probably continue at least until Sunday.

As well as CMI, organisation for both sets of talks was handled by the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies at the University of Massachusetts and the Institute for Global Leaders at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

55 people die in Casablanca mattress factory fire

55 people were killed today after a mattress factory in Casablanca, Morocco was swept by fire. The fire initiated on the ground floor this morning and quickly engulfed the entire building.

12 others were injured - seriously, according to the Irish Times - including one police officer. 100 firefighters were dispatched to the five-storey factory after the blaze broke out at 10 am local time. Earlier reports had indicated 25 deaths and eight people injured. MAP, the state news agency, is quoted by the Irish Times as saying the building was four

storeys high, citing in turn city officials.

The disaster occurred at the Rosamor Ameublements factory, which is located in the Hay Hassani area of the nation's economic centre. Of the 150 people the facility employed, around 60 were inside at the time.

An official statement by city authorities shows that preliminary investigation indicates onsite chemicals were responsible for the fire's rapid spread, but no actual cause has yet been determined. A full inquiry has been launched to investigate the accident fully.

Strike shuts down Toronto's transit system

Public transit service in Toronto was suddenly shut down for Saturday when Toronto Transit Commission workers rejected a draft labour contract on Friday.

The transit operator's major union, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 113, reneged on an earlier promise to give 48 hours notice before taking strike action. This about-face prompted Toronto Mayor David Miller to condemn the union's actions as "unacceptable" and "irresponsible".

Meanwhile, the Ontario provincial government is preparing a back-to-work law this weekend. If this is passed on Sunday, Toronto's transit service would likely resume for the Monday morning rush hour.

Toronto transit advocate Steve Munro reacted to the strike situation noting communication problems from the Local 113 union. He further commented that "Local 113 has blown its relationship with the most pro-labour Commission and Council they could hope to have across the

bargaining table. From here on, who can trust their signature on a contract?"

Shuttle Discovery moved to VAB ahead of May launch

Today at 11:07 GMT (07:07 local time), US Space Shuttle Discovery departed its hangar at the Kennedy Space Center Orbiter Processing Facility (OPF), and was towed into the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB), arriving at 12:05 GMT (08:05 local time). Its next scheduled launch, STS-124, is currently targeted for the end of May.

This procedure, known as a rollover, occurs around five to six weeks ahead of launch, and is followed by stacking, or attachment of Discovery to an External Tank and a pair of Solid Rocket Boosters, which are waiting in the VAB. Once this has been completed, electrical tests will be conducted on the Shuttle, and then it will be rolled out to Launch Complex 39A in a week's time.

Discovery's next mission, STS-124, will carry seven astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS), and deliver the main component of the Japanese Experiment Module. The crew who are scheduled to fly aboard Discovery are Mission Commander Mark E. Kelly, Pilot Kenneth Ham, Mission Specialists Karen L. Nyberg, Ronald J. Garan, Michael E. Fossum and Akihiko Hoshide, and Expedition 17 ISS crewmember Gregory Chamitoff.

Tunisia, South Korea partner to monitor air quality

Tunisia and South Korea sealed a deal to improve air quality monitoring in Tunisia last week (17 April), with a view to creating an air quality improvement strategy for the country.

The Tunisian National Agency of Environment Protection (ANPE) and the Korean International Cooperation Agency will implement and oversee the project.

The cost of the three-year project is estimated at US\$2.5 billion, which will be funded by South Korea.

The main aim of the project is to create a monitoring station that will include devices for measuring pollutants in the air such as dust and soot, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide.

Monitoring equipment for other volatile organic compounds, such as ozone gas, will also be set up, with a series of 15 monitoring stations. A mobile laboratory will also be available to monitor air quality in emergencies.

All stations will be linked to a central data system at the ANPE headquarters, and will be used to establish a data bank on air quality and pollution for use as a reference point to create a national charter on air quality, and to forecast medium- and long-term air quality.

At the signing ceremony, the Tunisian environment and sustainable development minister, Nadhir Hamada, praised Korea's role in the project and expressed his wish to expand bilateral partnership to cover other areas, such as e-waste and water quality.

The Korean ambassador to Tunisia, Son Se-joo, said that the project also includes the organisation of workshops and training sessions in Korea for Tunisian technicians to learn how to operate and maintain the monitoring equipment.

Abdelfettah Boucebia, director of cooperation and exchange for ANPE, told SciDev.Net, a science news website, that Korean experts will also provide technical support in the setting up and maintenance of the planned stations.

Earlier this year, the ANPE agreed a similar deal with the French Agency of Development.

2008 PeoPo Citizen Journalism Forum to prospect the vision of citizen journalism in Taiwan

"2008 PeoPo Citizen Journalism Forum", organized by Public Television Service, PeoPo Citizen Journalism Portal, and Department of Radio, TV, & Film of Shih Hsin University, held yesterday in the auditorium with participation from several bloggers, social workers, elites from mass media industry in Taiwan to prospect the status of citizen journalism in Taiwan.

Continued with some topics from 2007 PeoPo Citizen Journalist Summit Party, 2007 Citizen Journalism Unconference during the Wikimania 2007, and first-ever "30-seconds question challenge by citizens" in the first official debate of 2008 Taiwan Presidential Election, topics in this forum mainly focused on participation and progression of citizen journalists, elites in this forum also did a simple SWOT analysis on the development of citizen journalism in Taiwan.

In the opening topic of "Questions from the citizens in the official debate of '2008 Taiwan Presidential Election': General Overview", Feng-chia Chuang, Deputy Editor-in-chief of Central News Agency, described several kernel issues on sectors like background, political approaches of questioners, topics and views of

questions suspected by media in Taiwan.

"Whether the first-ever citizens' questioning [in the official debate of 2008 Taiwan Presidential Election] is success or failure, I hope the Taiwan Broadcasting Service can gain several valuable experiences from this event and do necessity overviews. If a similar event is held in the future, I hope the system of filter on questions can be more fair to prevent suspicions."

In the next 3 topics related to citizen journalism on "community development", "citizen journalism in Taiwan", and "burgeoning and rising next media", lecturers described some examples from local citizen journalists' participation on several key social incidents like "2000 Pachang Creek Incident (in Chinese: 八掌溪事件)", "Planning Argument of Losheng Sanatorium (in Chinese: 樂生療養院爭議)", and "Homelessness in Taiwan".

Therefore, "A-shaw" Hsun-hsiao Chen, Deputy Professor of Fu Jen Catholic University, analyzed the past and the presence of the information technology and transformations of mass media in Taiwan. And Po-ru Chen, Executive Officer of Chia-yi Community University analyzed differences on social phenomena, lifestyles, and culture between Northern and Southern Taiwan, and difference between urban and rural areas in a rapid-changing era of citizen journalism.

In a general view of "2008 PeoPo Citizen Journalism Forum", the citizen journalism in Taiwan especially in some townships and communities in Central and Southern divisions, showcased significant cultures differ from

Northern Taiwan. Multiple and mature convergences in the rising Web 2.0 era was grown up after participation by citizen journalists in Taiwan. Executives in this forums initiated the communities can continue good interactions to help the citizen journalism grown up in Taiwan.

Stage collapse at Christian rock concert

Over 40 people were injured, three of them seriously, after the auditorium floor collapsed at a church in Abbotsford, BC, Canada.

Around 9:20 pm PDT Friday night an approximately 900 square foot section of the stage and floor collapsed at a Starfield concert attended by as many as 1200 people at Central Heights Church. Reports from the concert goers indicate that sound and lighting scaffolds collapsed onto the front section of the stage and mosh pit, though it is not yet clear whether this was the cause of or the result of the floor collapsing into the basement 10 - 15 feet below.

Abbotsford Police Constable Casey Vinet stated that all available city police, fire and ambulance units responded to the scene, along with units from neighboring jurisdictions.

Game modified to match New Zealand, police investigate

A New Zealand teenager's conversion of the popular Grand Theft Auto (GTA) video game is gaining popularity and the New Zealand Police are unhappy at their portrayal. Stacy O'Callaghan talked to Wikinews' Gabriel Pollard about his mod.

The police cars and the police officers have been given a makeover to resemble the New Zealand versions. The planes were

branded Air New Zealand, and ambulances were converted to match the local Wellington scheme, among various other changes.

The Beehive, Te Papa and the Sky Tower are looking to be added to the game also. O'Callaghan says, "We actually have the models for these buildings but haven't figured out how to import them into the game.

"Theres plenty more to come, but thats our progress so far."

Despite media reports stating the Police were investigating whether or not the mod breached the law prohibiting the unauthorised use of police insignia, O'Callaghan has not heard from the Police at all. He says that if the Police did contact him with their concerns then he might consider taking the download offline. "If people want to start getting all legal and stuff, then I will just remove it.

"I don't want to offend anyone, I don't hate NZ Police, I think they are actually one of the best Police forces in the world."

The 17-year-old has said that his total conversion mod for the San Andreas version of GTA is "fairly popular". "The mod has been fairly popular considering NZ's population, and considering NZ'ers aren't exactly game mod fanatics," O'Callaghan says. He says the latest version of the mod he uploaded has so far had 466 downloads.

He has made the mod publicly available for any gamer who wants to play the New Zealand-branded version of the game and enjoy the game as much as he now does. O'Callaghan says he doesn't want to make money off the game

change.

The original plan was for the GTA modification to only transform the police cars into New Zealand branded cars but was later extended when O'Callaghan was contacted by other developers. He says, "I originally started with just the police cars back in November last year and left it at that, and then after uploading it people came to me saying they wanted to help out with it and so about a couple of months ago we started making this total conversion."

O'Callaghan says in the future he would like to join the New Zealand Police and work in computer forensics, failing that he'd like to go into the IT industry.

Economic Growth in UK slowing

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) has reported that the level of quarter on quarter growth in the UK economy is continuing to slow. The year on year growth is slightly below the forecasted level.

Despite the decrease in the output in many sectors, the ONS reported that "output of the service industries is estimated to have increased by 0.6 per cent. "

Today in History

1296 – In the first battle of the First War of Scottish Independence, the English defeated the Scots near Dunbar, Scotland.

1565 – Conquistador Miguel López de Legazpi and 500 armed soldiers arrived at Cebu and established the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines.

1865 – An explosion destroyed the steamboat Sultana on the Mississippi River, killing 1,700 passengers.

1909 – Abdul Hamid II, the last

Sultan of the Ottoman Empire to rule with absolute power, was overthrown by Mehmed V.
 1967 – The Expo 67 World's Fair opened in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, with over 50 million visitors and 62 nations participating.
 1992 – Betty Boothroyd became the first female Speaker of the British House of Commons.
 1993 – Members of the Zambia national football team were killed in a plane crash off Libreville, Gabon en route to Dakar, Senegal to play a 1994 FIFA World Cup qualifying match against the Senegal national team.
 April 27 is Easter in Eastern Christianity (2008); Independence Day in Togo and Sierra Leone; Freedom Day in South Africa

Quote of the Day

The ultimate result of shielding men from the effects of folly, is to fill the world with fools.
 ~ Herbert Spencer

Word of the Day

variegated adj

1. Streaked, spotted, or otherwise marked with a variety of color.

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