



Top Stories

Eighteen found dead in a bus in Iraq



The bodies of 18 men - bound, blindfolded and strangled - were found in a Sunni Arab district of

Baghdad. Sources say the men were apparent victims of the sectarian turmoil gripping Iraq since the February 22nd Mosque bombings.

Dana Reeve, 44, wife of Christopher Reeve, dies of lung cancer



Dana Reeve, chairwoman of the Christopher Reeve Foundation and founder of the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Resource Center, has died of lung cancer at the age of 44. Reeve, a non-smoker, announced in 2005 that she had the disease.

Featured story

Largest mass extinction in 65 million years: scientists



Environmental scientists say the planet is undergoing the "largest mass

extinction in 65 million years". Leading environmental scientist Professor Norman Myers says the Earth is experiencing its "Sixth Extinction." Scientists forecast that up to five million species will be lost this century.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The world's biggest expo on information technology, CeBIT, opens in Hanover, Germany.
- The United States House Appropriations Committee votes to block the Bush administration's plan for Dubai Ports World to take over operations at six major U.S. ports.
- The Government of Chad renews accusations of Sudanese support for attacks by the UFDC into eastern Chad, despite the recent signing of the Tripoli Accord and the succesful formation of the ministerial committee. Sudan has accused Chad of supporting ARFWS rebels in the past, and Chad is believed to have stepped up support in light of recent attacks.
- The Channel Island of Sark votes to maintain its feudal system of governance
- Iran threatens 'harm and pain' against the United States for its role in putting Iran before the United Nations Security Council.

- The European Union announces that it has lifted a worldwide ban on the export of British beef introduced in 1996 to prevent the spread of BSE (Mad Cow Disease).

Largest mass extinction in 65 million years underway, say scientists

Environmental scientists say they have concrete evidence that the planet is undergoing the "largest mass extinction in 65 million

years". Leading environmental scientist Professor Norman Myers says the Earth is experiencing its "Sixth Extinction."

Scientists forecast that up to five million species will be lost this century. "We are well into the opening phase of a mass extinction of species. There are about 10 million species on earth. If we carry on as we are, we could lose half of all those 10 million species," Myers said.

If we do not do more, Myers says, the planet will continue to lose around 50 species per day compared to the natural extinction rate of one species every five years. He projected this rate in the late 1980s to much criticism, but the figure is now widely accepted by scientists. "The whole thing is taking place in what you might call a flickering of an evolutionary eye," said Myers. "It's hard to keep up with unless we damp down on some of the causes of the evolution."

Hotspots

GLOBAL WARMING: Graph shows global mean surface temperatures 1856 to 2005

The Australia Museum's Frank Howarth says "There are over 30 extinction 'hotspots' across the globe. He says up to 80 per cent of crucial habitat has been wiped out. Biodiversity hotspots are areas that have more than 1500 endemic plant species and which have lost more than 70per cent of

original habitat." Hotspots feature, according to Myers, "exceptional concentrations of species that are found nowhere else in the world."

Evidence shows that insects, which account for more than half the described species on earth, are disappearing faster than birds. "Many areas of Australia's ecosystems depend on the work of insects... we put a lot of effort into looking at these hotspots, about what insects actually occur there, whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing, because they tell us a lot more about some of the high level effects," Howarth said.

Myers argues that we are destroying the Earth's biodiversity quickly enough to witness the beginning of a mass extinction of species—one of only six such events in the Earth's history. He says around 30 hotspots contain the last remaining habitats of at least half of Earth's land surface.

He says more parks and reserves are needed, and while warnings are desperate, he believes the situation can be turned around. "We would be the first generation in the whole of human history since we came out of our caves to tackle a mass extinction head on and cancel it... and if we do, I think people will cheer for us from thousands of years ahead." Myers projects that safeguarding the hotspots would cost one billion dollars per year.

Where are the frogs?

The Global Amphibian Assessment, an international convention of amphibian biologists, indicated in 2004 that over a third of the world's amphibian species are threatened, making them the most threatened group of animals on

the planet. More than 120 species have likely become extinct since the 1980s, and around two-thirds of the South American harlequin frog species vanished in the 1980s and 1990s. The decline of amphibians in protected habitats has puzzled conservation biologists for nearly 20 years.

Recent research suggests that climate change may be driving widespread frog extinctions. Results of a study published in the January 2006 Nature journal reveal how warming alters a fatal skin fungus affecting frogs. The article says hundreds of species around the world are teetering on the brink of extinction or have already become extinct.

"Disease is the bullet that's killing the frogs," said J. Alan Pounds, the study's lead scientist from the Tropical Science Center in Costa Rica. "But climate change is pulling the trigger. Global warming is wreaking havoc on amphibians, and soon will cause staggering losses of biodiversity," he said.

According to the study, rising temperatures favor the chytrid fungus, which seems to kill frogs mostly in cool highlands or during winter—implying that low temperatures make it more deadly. National Science Foundation program director Sam Scheiner said their study "demonstrates the complex nature of global climate change, including how climate affects the spread of disease, and why these must be integrated if we are to understand and reduce threats to species extinctions."

Scheiner says the message goes beyond amphibians: "global warming and the accompanying emergence of infectious diseases are a real and immediate threat to

biodiversity and a growing challenge for humankind."

"The Sixth Extinction"

OVERHUNTING: American bison skull heap. There were as few as 750 bison in 1890 due to overhunting.

Scientists are warning that by the end of this century, the planet could lose up to half its species, and that these extinctions will alter not only biological diversity but also the evolutionary processes itself. They state that human activities have brought our planet to the point of biotic crisis.

In 1993, Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson estimated that the planet is losing 30,000 species per year - around three species per hour. Some biologists have begun to feel that the biodiversity crisis dubbed the "Sixth Extinction" is even more severe, and more imminent, than Wilson had expected.

Professor Myers and colleague Andrew H. Knoll say that what we do now will define a course for evolution. In their 2001 American Institute of Biological Sciences report, Myers and Knoll forecast that the effects of a Sixth Extinction will leave gene pools so depleted that species may not bounce back. Species such as rodents and cockroaches that have adapted to human environments will dominate.

Niles Eldredge in his paper The Sixth Extinction says that with the high rate of extinction, there is little doubt left in the minds of professional biologists that the biosphere is currently facing a mounting, unprecedented loss of species.

Whilst previous mass extinctions

were due to natural environmental causes, research shows that wherever on Earth humans have migrated other species have become extinct. Human overpopulation especially in the past two centuries is said to be the underlying cause of the Sixth Extinction.

Buffalo NY magazine to publish Prophet Muhammad cartoons

The magazine Free Inquiry, issued in Buffalo, New York and published by the Center for Inquiry, is to publish some of the Islam's Prophet Muhammad cartoons originally published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten which caused waves of violence and protests among Muslim's worldwide.

Tom Flynn, editor of the magazine that some describe as science and reason-based said that he was only acting alongside several European papers that reprinted the cartoons "demonstrating a commitment to free expression and a free press." Commenting further, he stated, "No religious teaching, community, or institution should be held immune from criticism simply because of its religious nature."

Three articles will be published alongside the cartoons. One where editor Flynn will trace the controversy and explains the magazine's decision to publish them, a second by R. Joseph Hoffmann, director of the Council for Secular Humanism's Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion, who will write a commentary, and lastly a look at the history of the Prophet Muhammad.

Four of the original twelve cartoons are to be published. This includes the image of Mohammed

wearing a turban in the form of a bomb with the fuse lit, another claimed to show horns coming out of the Prophet's turban, Muhammad [or an Imam] greeting suicide bombers in heaven, and the last one showing a male face on a Muslim with Islam's star and crescent. Flynn said this last cartoon "is included as an example of how the collection's less sharply focused entries fell flat."

Arif Desai, Imam of the Islamic Society of Niagara Frontier in Amherst, New York said that the Muslim community felt "sorrow" for the decision by the magazine to publish the cartoons.

"We feel sorrow, we feel hurt and insulted as these are very disturbing, insulting cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

Obviously, we know and believe in freedom of speech, but along with freedom of speech comes responsibility," said Desai.

The cartoons will be published next week on March 15, 2006.

Gordon Parks, African American filmmaker, dies at 93

Renowned African American artist Gordon Parks, known for his photography, film direction, and autobiographical works, including the book and film "The Learning Tree," died Tuesday at his home in New York. He was 93.

Parks was a pioneering black artist with an impressive list of honors and accomplishments, including at least 40 honorary doctorate degrees. He was the first African-American staff photographer for Life magazine, where he worked from 1948 to 1972. President Reagan presented him with the National Medal of Arts in 1988. He published at least five semi- or wholly autobiographical books.

Gordon Roger Alexander Buchanan Parks was born November 30, 1912, in Fort Scott, Kan., the youngest of 15 children. He moved to St. Paul, Minn. after his mother's death, where he attended high school. He dropped out in order to find work during increasingly hard times, traveling extensively in the North and Northwest looking for jobs.

In 1938, he bought his first camera and experimented with both documentary and fashion photography. At age 30, he won a fellowship and traveled to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration and later for the Office of War Information.

During his time at the FSA, Parks composed photo-essays critical of the racial and social prejudices many faced. His work attracted attention both to himself and to the poverty and social injustices of the time.

After the beginning of the war, Parks moved to Harlem, where he found a job as a fashion photographer for Vogue and continued to take socially provocative photos of slum life in the city. It was these photos that convinced Life's photography editor to hire him.

In 1962, Parks wrote The Learning Tree, based on his Kansas childhood. The book was a success, and Parks later directed the film version, for which he also wrote the screenplay and the music. The Learning Tree was one of the first 25 films placed on the National Film Registry. Parks next directed Shaft and its successful sequel, Shaft's Big Score, and a blaxploitation comedy called Supercops.

Parks' other artistic achievements include a ballet, written about Martin Luther King, Jr., four other memoirs, a collection of poetry, several original musical compositions and at least one other fictional, non-autobiographical novel. Collections and exhibits of his photography have traveled extensively within and beyond the United States.

He is survived by his three ex-wives, Sally Alvis, Elizabeth Campbell, and Ms. Young; his daughter, Toni Parks Parson, and his son David, from his first marriage; and a daughter, Leslie Parks Harding, from his second marriage; five grandchildren; and five great grandchildren. A son, Gordon Parks Jr., died in 1979.

Eighteen found dead in a bus in Iraq

Eighteen men, ranging in ages from young to elderly, whose bodies were found bound and blindfolded in a minibus in Baghdad, were hanged. "The medical report shows that all of them were hanged," a source at Baghdad's Yarmuk hospital said. "We found a rope round the neck of one of the victims."

A security patrol discovered the minibus just before midnight on the road between the Amiriyah and Khadra districts. The victims, all men, had been handcuffed, blindfolded and either hanged or shot to death, police Lt. Maitham Abdul-Razzaq said.

Police say they have no clues to the victims' identities. The bodies were found near the Amriya district of western Baghdad - one of the city's most dangerous sections, Abdul-Razzaq said.

Official figures suggest an increase

in such killings since the destruction of a major Shiite shrine in Samarra two weeks ago sparked reprisal attacks. Local people have accused the Shiite-led, US-backed government's police and other security forces of abducting and killing Sunni civilians.

The dumping of bodies bearing signs of torture and killed execution-style has become a feature of Iraq's violence between armed factions.

Meanwhile, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad warned that the country is vulnerable to rebels' attempts to exploit the political situation caused by the shrine attack. "There is a concerted effort to provoke civil war," he said.

Iraq's parliament is expected to sit on Sunday for the first time since the December elections.

Study reveals 10% of telecommuters work nude

A survey by SonicWALL, a Sunnyvale, CA, based company, reports that 10% of worldwide telecommuters are nude while working, finding 12% for men and 7% for women, respectively.

A gender gap also exists for showering on work-at-home days, with 44% of women showering, while only 30% of men did. The survey also found that 39% of both sexes wear sweats while working from home.

The survey also covered less racy topics, including opinions on productivity. 76% felt that working at home increased productivity.

The number of telecommuters has increased sharply in recent years. For example, 43% of U.S.

government employees telecommute, at least part of the time; up from only 19% one year ago.

Bonobo chimp threatened in Congo

The Congo's population of Bonobo, or Pygmy, Chimpanzee (*Pan paniscus*) is dwindling, according to researchers.

Dr. Ino Guabini, a primatologist with the World Wildlife Fund reports that only about 5,000 remain in Congo. In 1984, their numbers were estimated at 100,000.

It is illegal to hunt Bonobos, but their meat is considered tasty; and is a traditional food in the Congo. The meat is often sent to expensive & secretive restaurants in Congolese cities.

The Bonobo is best-known for resolving squabbles through sex rather than violence. Rivals are greeted with genital handshakes and sensual body rubs. Fights are often settled with a "French kiss" and sex, either heterosexual or homosexual. Bonobo's communication is primarily vocal.

DNA evidence suggests that the Bonobo and Common Chimpanzee separated just 500,000 years after they diverged from the last common ancestor with humans, between 4 to 7 million years ago. Chimpanzees are the closest living relatives to humans, and are an important research model in both biology and psychology.

Police release photographs of those of interest in connection with Cronulla riots

New South Wales police have released photographs of up to 20 men who are of interest in connection with the race riots in

the Sydney suburb of Cronulla in December, 2005.

Strike Force Enoggera detectives have been vigorously investigating the riots over the past few months. Police have reportedly shown photographs at schools, pubs and clubs in an attempt to identify those who they are looking for.

Detective Superintendent Ken McKay told the media on February 23, 2006 that they wanted "people who were involved in assaults, throwing missiles and damaging vehicles at Cronulla on December 11 to come forward and hand themselves into police". He warned them that they would have around 10 days before the photos would be released publically.

According to a statement on NSW Police's website, police have exhausted all other investigative angles and have released the photos "of excellent quality and predominantly from news organisations" in an attempt to gain information from the general public.

In addition to the photographs, police will release a video showing "a large number of Middle Eastern males and vehicles that police wish to identify in relation to their behaviour on the night of December 12." according to NSW Police. The videos have been supplied to police by witnesses. One was filmed at a service station in Cronulla and the other was filmed on the corner of The Kingsway in Cronulla.hatchback with a rear P-plate.

Of late, two further arrests have been made in relation to the Cronulla riots. A27-year-old man handed himself into police at Penrith, yesterday and was

subsequently charged with two counts of riot and affray. On February 27, 2006, police arrested a 23-year-old man at his home in Cronulla. He was charged with hinder police and police allege that he tried to prevent police from arresting another man during the Cronulla riots.

LINK to the photos at Sydney Morning Herald

So far, 66 people have been arrested in connection with the riots. Police say "anyone who can assist the strikeforce in identifying these people or if they have any other information in regards to riots and revenge attacks at Cronulla, Maroubra and Brighton is urged to contact Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000..."

Events cancelled at Humber due to college strike

Due to the province-wide college strike, events at Humber College in Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada have been cancelled or delayed.

Latin Jazz Night, set to happen on Wednesday evening at 8:00 pm is cancelled, as is an Evening of Sketch Comedy, which was scheduled for Sunday, March 12 at 8:00 pm.

The Evening of Sketch Comedy is organized by students of the Humber School of Comedy. Humber is the only institution to offer comedy courses at a post-secondary or post-graduate level. The Evening is a part of students' marks.

Theatre Humber's production of The Rover has survived the axe. Set to play from Friday, March 31 – Saturday, April 8 at the Humber Theatre, it has been pre-emptively postponed.

Faculty of 24 colleges across the province went on strike as of Monday night, after no deal was made in continued collective bargaining.

Sault professor sides with students during college strike

Jerry Zuchlinski, a natural resources professor at Sault College, is taking the side of the administration during the 2006 Ontario college teachers' strike.

The Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario professor disagrees with OPSEU's suggestions that staff is overworked and underpaid, while joining his colleagues on the picket lines. He told newspaper Soo Today, "I don't feel that the faculty concern with being overworked is valid. I do the same job that they do." While the the rest of the faculty carried signs stating, "Faculty care about quality education," Professor Zuchlinski's read, "FACULTY LAZY GREEDY + STUPID."

The position is especially bold, as 92.2% of Sault's faculty support the strike, the fourth highest percentage overall. St Clair voted overwhelmingly in favour, with 96.6%, while Loyalist was least supportive of the action, with 64.0%.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union denied the final deal offered by the College Compensation and Appointments Council on Monday night. Faculty have been without contracts since 31 August 2005.

Zuchlinski said the faculty were offered a deal that would pay many as much as \$95,000 per year, which, according to Sault College Campus News represents a 12.6% increase over four years. The strike comes just a month

before the end of the school year, which means courses may be extended into the spring and summer, making it difficult for students to find jobs to pay tuition.

Australian emergency services personnel exposed to asbestos

At least 250 members of New South Wales' emergency services personnel have been informed that they could die from exposure to fatal levels of asbestos following emergency response training south of Sydney.

Members of the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) unit are thought to be at risk. They were told last week they may contract life-threatening illnesses following training on a demolition site at Holsworthy Army Barracks. The site was created to simulate rescues in the event of a terror attack or natural disaster. It has been regularly used by emergency services personnel since 2004.

Some of the emergency services personnel spent up to three weeks at a time crawling through the rubble.

Reports claim that when notified last week, senior personnel were left devastated. It can take decades for asbestos related illnesses to appear and can take up to 30 years before those exposed can be cleared of infection.

In addition to the emergency service personnel, doctors, nurses and hazardous material personnel could also be at a mild risk. Even Morris Iemma, premier of New South Wales, who visited the site has been warned he could be at risk.

According to the Daily Telegraph, a

repected Sydney newspaper, it has been established that "No proper tests were done at the site before it became a training ground for hundreds of top-level rescuers in 2004", "Personnel were kept in the dark for up to a year about the asbestos before being told last week", "NSW public officials and a host of ministers may have been exposed", "Ambulance chief Greg Rochford and Mr Mullins have been at the site and must face a health clearance", and "The Dust Diseases Tribunal is conducting an investigation into the long-term impact the mass exposure could have on emergency services in NSW."

Small plane crashes on median of Interstate 75 in Michigan

A small, single-engine plane crashed in the median of Interstate 75 near Holly, Michigan Tuesday afternoon. The crash site is located about 100 feet from the East Holly Road overpass, near Exit 98, with approximate geographical coordinates of 42.784283° N 83.535847° W.

The Piper model PA-28-180 aircraft crashed in the median during mid-afternoon local time, and slowed traffic when police and rescue teams were en route to the scene. According to local television station WEYI, two passengers were aboard the plane, and did not sustain any large injuries.

According to the FAA database, the plane was manufactured in 1968, and was issued a license in 1970. The most recent owner according to the database is a flying school in Coldwater, Ohio.

New Zealand's 2006 Census is held

Tonight (March 7th) is Census night in New Zealand, when all people in the country are legally

required to fill in Census forms. The census of population and dwellings is conducted by the New Zealand government department Statistics New Zealand, which (with two exceptions) has done so every five years since 1881. This year is the first time that New Zealanders can choose whether to fill in the traditional paper forms or fill them out online.

6500 Census collectors were employed this year to deliver the forms and collect them over the days following the Census, along with 400 supervisors.

As in previous years, some people have tried to evade the Census. Libertarianz party members and others gathered at the Wellington Botanical Gardens to incinerate their forms. Another man announced he had been cryogenically frozen overnight and pronounced "legally dead" to avoid filling in the forms.

Data collections manager Dave Martyn said legal action would be taken against people deliberately not taking part in the Census.

"The fine is usually \$500 per form plus court costs. If the person still doesn't fill out the form, the ongoing cost is \$20 a day until they do."

Preliminary Census results are scheduled to be released in May 2006.

U.S. Pentagon releases Guantanamo detainees' names

The U.S. Pentagon, under court orders, today released the name of hundreds of Guantanamo detainees.

An Associated Press request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) brought about the release

of the information, but the U.S. military is not being cooperative in doing so. The Pentagon has released 6 000 pages of documents on a website.

The documents are the transcripts of Combatant Status Review Tribunals of 500 detainees. The transcripts were released in June 2005 in response to an Associated Press FOIA request, but with the names blacked out.

House approves renewal of the Patriot Act

The House of Representatives voted Tuesday to reauthorize with small revisions several amendments to the USA Patriot Act, clearing the way for the Patriot Act to be re-signed into law by President Bush.

The bill, which passed the House with a vote of 280-138, will be sent to President Bush this week. Major provisions of the Patriot Act were approved earlier this year by both the House and the Senate. This bill offered slight revisions to past amendments to the overall act. The act itself was set to expire on March 16.

Representative F. James Sensenbrenner (R - Wisconsin), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, introduced the Senate bill into the house for consideration and urged his colleagues to vote for its passage under a special suspension of the rules.

Sensenbrenner highlighted three revisions in arguing for the bill's passage. One change established a person's right to challenge legally any orders given to him or her under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. The bill also included multiple provisions allowing that anyone who is

ordered by the FBI under a number of acts to produce evidence or testimony does not have to reveal the name of anyone from whom he or she sought legal advice. The amendment also contains a section that amends the original act to specify that libraries are not considered wire or electronic communication service providers.

The Senate passed the same measure last week by a vote of 89-10.

Today in History

1841 - The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that captive Africans who seized control of La Amistad, the trans-Atlantic slave-trading ship carrying them, had been taken into slavery illegally.

1862 - Ironclad warships USS Monitor and CSS Virginia fought to a draw in the Battle of Hampton Roads.

1932 - Eamon de Valera of Fianna Fáil became President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, succeeding W.T. Cosgrave of Cumann na nGaedhael.

1945 - A bomb raid on Tokyo started a firestorm, killing 100,000.

1959 - Barbie, the world's best-selling doll, debuted at the American International Toy Fair in New York City.

March 09 is Baron Bliss Day in Belize

Quote of the Day

"Some choices will choose you. How you face these choices, these turns in the road, with what kind of attitude, more than the choices themselves, is what will define the context of your life." ~ Dana Reeve

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