



Top Stories

NATO and Iran talk for first time in 30 years

Last week, NATO and Iran had contact for the first time in thirty years, NATO officials stated Thursday. The visit to Brussels by the Iranian diplomat was the first "since the regime of the Shah" collapsed by the Ayatollah Khomeini led Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Irish economy sees biggest contraction in decades

The economy of Ireland shrank by 7.5% in the last quarter of 2008 compared to the same period a year previously, according to official statistics. The decline is the worst in decades. For the entire period of 2008, the economy contracted by 2.3%, the first loss since 1983.

Czech PM calls Obama's rescue plan a 'road to hell'

Mirek Topolanek, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and the head of the European Union, called United States President Barack Obama's plan to spend almost US\$2 trillion to revive the country's faltering economy a "road to hell".

Four-storey building collapses in Lagos, Nigeria; two dead

A residential four-storey building collapsed in Lagos, Nigeria on Tuesday. At least two people have died, and another fourteen people have been rescued from the debris.

Wikipedia Current Events

Germany admits that the unidentified Phantom of Heilbronn serial killer never existed.

- Sudan alleges that an aircraft attacked an arms trafficking convoy near Port Sudan in January 2009.

- Forty-seven fragments of the meteoroid 2008 TC3 are discovered in Sudan's Nubian Desert.

- A car bomb kills at least 16 people and injures 35 others in Baghdad, Iraq.

- International Space Station Expedition 19 launches aboard the Soyuz TMA-14 from Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome.

- A Taliban suicide attack kills at least 11 people and injures 20 others in Jandola, Pakistan.

- Two tornadoes injure 24 people and damage 108 homes in Mississippi, United States.

- Somali pirates hijack ships from the Isle of Man, Greece, and the Seychelles, while three other ships escape.

- A bus/truck collision kills 14 people and injures four others in Petushki, Russia.

Girls in Florida sell pink lemonade, donate money to breast cancer research

Two 8-year-old girls in Orlando, Florida, located in the United States have made a big donation

to the research and curing of breast cancer. Victoria Petrucelly and Jesse Theobald along with classmates from their third grade class at The Christ School, raised almost US\$24,000 by setting up lemonade stands and selling pink lemonade.

The two girls were thinking about starting the lemonade stand in 2008, but were inspired to donate money when Petrucelly's mother, who suffered from the disease, died on Valentine's Day, February 14.

"When my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, we decided to make it a pink lemonade stand to raise money for people with cancer," Petrucelly said to the press. Other cash donations were made by companies like Publix Supermarkets and the restaurant chain Chick-Fil-A.

Between the students and two girls, nearly 65 gallons of the sweet and sour drink were sold on the weekend ending March 22. They hoped to raise just \$50. MD Anderson Cancer Center, which is located in Orlando, received the donation, presented by the two girls in a ceremony earlier this week.

NATO and Iran talk for first time in 30 years

Last week, NATO and Iran had contact for the first time in thirty years, NATO officials stated Thursday. "[An Iranian] diplomat met with Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and

Security Policy Martin Erdmann," said chief alliance spokesman James Appathurai. The Iranian embassy in Brussels declined to comment on the visit.

The visit to Brussels by the Iranian diplomat was the first "since the regime of the Shah" collapsed by the Ayatollah Khomeini led Iranian Revolution in 1979.

"It was a first informal contact about the subject of Afghanistan, [but] we have not yet programmed a second meeting.", said Appathurai. Afghanistan's opium production and the stream of Afghan refugees crossing Iran's border, makes that "the Iranians are interested in possible cooperation on Afghanistan," a NATO official stated.

Earlier on Thursday, Iran said that it would attend the international meeting on Afghanistan next week in The Hague, Netherlands. Appathurai added that "the fact that Iran has accepted to go to the conference in The Hague is good news and constitutes a new step in the regionalisation of the Afghan issue".

Irish economy sees biggest contraction in decades

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The construction industry has suffered badly as a result of the recession, with a 24% fall in output, the largest decline ever recorded. Industrial output plunged at an annualised rate of 12.5%.

Unemployment has also shot up. It currently stands at around 10%, twice as high as the levels reported last year. The economy has also experienced deflation.

Alan McQuaid, the senior economist at Bloxhams Stockbrokers, said that the statistics "highlight the extent of the Irish economic out-turn and the huge task facing the Government in attempting to get the country's public finances back in order."

"Quite simply, there is no hope of sorting out our budgetary position by 2013 without economic growth, and we are a long way off that at the moment," McQuaid said, noting that "(...) one has to go back to the 1956-1958 period for the last time we had a decrease of this magnitude."

"(...) As things currently stand, it is not hard to see double digit declines in real GDP over the coming quarters," he said. "The extreme weakness of the economy at this point in time must also raise serious questions marks about the wisdom of the Government's intention of imposing further income levies on already hard-pressed consumers and PAYE workers. All that can be said is that the outlook for economic output and employment in 2009 are fairly bleak indeed."

The Irish government is creating an emergency budget, due to be unveiled in April.

Tornadoes rampage through Mississippi

Residents in Mississippi awoke to scenes of destruction after two tornadoes touched down before sunrise near the town of Magee and in a rural area of Lauderdale

County, around 90 miles east of Jackson.

Dozens of homes and a church were demolished, and at least 20 people injured near Magee. Mayor Jimmy Clyde in an interview on NBC's Today show commented that the town was in "dire straits."

The town is currently without power, and most roads heading into and out of town have been made impassable by debris. No deaths have been reported so far.

Eleven homes and businesses were damaged by the tornado in Lauderdale County, near the Alabama border. In Magee, the only thing left standing at the 100-year-old Corinth Baptist church are its doors. "Our church is still here, because our church is the people, but the building is gone," said a parishioner.

Two people had to be airlifted to the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

Mississippi Department of Transportation workers are laboring to restore power and other utilities to the affected areas.

Due to the time of a day, many people were caught off guard and were forced to scramble to safety. One resident tearfully summarized the night's events: "I lost everything."

Judge refuses to dismiss charge against Barack Obama assassination plotter

A federal judge refused to dismiss a charge against an Arkansas man accused of plotting to assassinate Barack Obama.

Paul Schlesselman, 18, argued the threats against Obama were not a

"true threat" under the law because they were made during questioning by law enforcement officials while he was in custody, and he could not have carried them out.

Judge J. Daniel Breen rejected the argument, claiming he could not go beyond the facts outlined in the indictment. "Due to the limited information available to the court, the bulk of the defendant's argument is unsupported by applicable facts," Breen wrote in a statement.

Schlesselman, of West Helena, and Daniel Cowart, 20, of Bells, Tennessee, are accused of plotting to kill dozens of black people during a murder spree that would end with them attempting to assassinate Obama.

Schlesselman has also filed a motion to suppress evidence collected by police; a hearing on that motion is set to go before Breen on April 16. The court has already rejected a motion by Schlesselman and Cowart to dismiss the charges against them because the racial makeup of the grand jury was predominately African American.

The men have been charged with targeting members of a specific race, conspiracy to rob a federal firearms licensee and possession of a sawed-off shotgun.

One day after attempted rescue, six stranded whales die on Australian beach

Six whales have died after becoming stranded on a southwest Australia beach, one day after conservation officials attempted to rescue them.

A pod of about 90 long-finned pilot whales were stranded on Hamelin

Bay Tuesday. More than 70 of the mammals died, along with four dolphins, but about 10 whales were guided back out to sea by officials from the Australian Department of Environment and Conservation.

Six of the rescued whales washed up on a different beach less than a day later. Three died of natural causes Wednesday, and the other three were shot by veterinarians due to their poor condition.

About 180 volunteers, wildlife officers and veterinarians participated in the Tuesday rescue effort, but officials said there had always been a risk that the whales could be stranded again. "It is frustrating, there is a lot of effort by the community and by DEC staff, it is a frustrating process when that happens but it's not totally unexpected," said John Carter, state conservation department officer.

The other four whales rescued Tuesday are still believed to be at sea, and department officials are monitoring the ocean to verify their safety.

Almost 500 whales have died in five mass beachings over the last five months. The West Australian coast has seen 21 mass whale and dolphin strandings since 1984, according to the department.

The whales tried swimming back to shore shortly after the Tuesday rescue, but conservation officials guided them to deeper waters with the hopes that they would stay out at sea. Scientists cannot explain what draws whales so close to shore.

The whales were stranded Wednesday in a remote location where conservation officials could

not transport rescue equipment. At least one of the whales was attacked by sharks, officials said.

US Air Force jet crashes in California

A United States Air Force F-22A Raptor fighter jet crashed in the Mojave Desert in the southwestern United States on Wednesday, according to officials.

The airplane, which seats one person, crashed at approximately 10:30 am local time about 35 miles northeast of Edwards Air Force Base in California. The cause of the accident has not yet been ascertained, and the fate of the pilot is unknown. The jet was on a test mission when it crashed.

The F-22 is a supersonic fifth-generation fighter jet. It was originally designed in the 1980s as a means of entering Soviet airspace and attacking Soviet bombers if they attempted a nuclear strike. After the Cold War ended, the jet was then used as a long-range fighter jet.

This is the second crash involving an F-22. In 2004, another Raptor crashed in a Nevada during a test mission. The pilot managed to eject from the aircraft safely and did not sustain any injuries, although the plane was destroyed.

Today in History

1794 – To protect American merchant ships from Barbary pirates, the United States Congress passed the Naval Act to establish a naval force of six frigates, which eventually became the United States Navy.

1851 – Explorer Lafayette Bunnell and other members of the Mariposa Battalion became the non-indigenous discoverers of California's Yosemite Valley.

1977 – Two Boeing 747 airliners

collided on a foggy runway at Los Rodeos Airport on Tenerife in the Canary Islands, killing 583 people and resulting in the worst aircraft accident in aviation history.

1998 – The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the drug sildenafil, better known by the trade name Viagra, for use as a treatment for erectile dysfunction, the first pill to be approved for this condition in the United States.

2002 – A suicide bomber killed about 30 Israeli civilians and injured about 140 others at the Park Hotel in Netanya, triggering Operation Defensive Shield, a large-scale counter-terrorist Israeli military incursion into the West Bank, two days later.

March 27 is Cheti Chand, Gudi Padwa and Ugadi in various parts of India (2009); Feast day of Rupert of Salzburg (Roman Catholic Church)

Quote of the Day

There's a good time coming, boys!
A good time coming.

We may not live to see the day,
But earth shall glisten in the ray
Of the good time coming.

Cannon-balls may aid the truth
But thought's a weapon stronger;
We'll win our battles by its aid,
Wait a little longer.

~ Charles Mackay ~

Word of the Day

daub *v*

To apply something to a surface in hasty or crude strokes.

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