



Top Stories

"Sunshine", "Queen" in the spotlight as 79th Annual Academy Award nominations announced

At 5:36:30 am local time, Hollywood was abuzz as the Oscar nominations were announced by Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences President Sid Ganis and past Oscar nominee Salma Hayek.

MySpace against sex offenders

MySpace together with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children established a partnership in order to enable AMBER Alert. This is a program that provides an early warning broadcast bulletin in cases of earnest child abduction.

Featured story

Kuiper Belt object to become comet

An object located in the Kuiper Belt just outside our solar system is on its way to becoming a comet, possibly the brightest comet ever seen by scientists.

Wikipedia Current Events

- India and Russia agree to jointly develop fifth-generation stealth fighter jets.
- Over 6,000 Armenians fill the streets of Istanbul to mourn and mark the assassination of Hrant Dink, editor of the dissident newspaper Agos.
- War in Somalia: The U.S. military

Wikipedia Current Events

conducts another air strike against supposed al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia.

• A Sudanese airliner, Air West Flight 612, carrying 103 people, is hijacked by a lone gunman and diverted to N'Djamena, Chad. The Air West flight lands at the airport in N'Djamena and the hijacker is arrested. It is not known what the hijacker's motives are.

• The flight data recorder (alternatively referred to as the 'black box') of Adam Air Flight 574 has been located off the coast of Sulawesi.

Microsoft to pay blogger to correct Wikipedia article

Software giant Microsoft has attempted to correct a Wikipedia article concerning the Microsoft Office Open XML format.

Wikipedia strongly discourages contributors involved with the subject of an article from editing the article, when a conflict of interest is likely. Instead, such contributors are advised to comment or suggest changes to the articles for the broader community of editors to review and implement, if found acceptable. Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales and administrators have on occasion blocked users thought to have violated these guidelines from editing Wikipedia.

Doug Mahugh from Microsoft contacted Rick Jelliffe, who is the

top technical officer for Sydney computing company Topologi - and offered to pay him for the time it would take to correct the article.

"Wikipedia has an entry on Open XML that has a lot of slanted language, and we'd like for them to make it more objective but we feel that it would be best if a non-Microsoft person were the source of any corrections," reads the email Mahugh wrote to Jelliffe.

One of Wikipedia's core policies is that articles must be written from a "neutral point of view" or NPOV.

"Would you have any interest or availability to do some of this kind of work? Your reputation as a leading voice in the XML community would carry a lot of credibility, so your name came up in a discussion of the Wikipedia situation today."

The e-mail also stated that Microsoft would not stop Jelliffe from disclosing the deal and rather encouraged him to post it on his blog at oreillynet.com. It also reassured Jelliffe that Microsoft did not have to approve any changes he made to the article.

"We were very disappointed to hear that Microsoft was taking that approach," Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales said. Wales stated that the proper thing for Microsoft was to write a "white paper" concerning the article, post it on an outside website and then link it to the discussion page of the Wikipedia articles' discussion

forums. "It seems like a much better, transparent, straightforward way," Wales said.

Microsoft spokeswoman Catherine Brooker said she believed the articles were heavily written by people at IBM, which is a supporter of the rival ISO-approved OpenDocument standard used by two leading Open Source office suites rather than the controversial Microsoft Office Open XML format.

Senate panel votes 12-9 against troop increase in Iraq

On Wednesday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 12-9 against President George Bush's plan to send 21,500 additional US troops to Iraq. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is made up of 11 Democrats and 10 Republicans.

The main statement in their resolution says, "[I]t is not in the national interest of the United States to deepen its military involvement in Iraq, particularly by increasing the United States military force presence in Iraq."

Senator Chuck Hagel (R) said, "We better be damn sure we know what we're doing, all of us, before we put 22,000 more Americans into that grinder."

Senator Joseph Biden (D) said, "not an attempt to embarrass the president. ... It's an attempt to save the president from making a significant mistake with regard to our policy in Iraq."

Senator Richard Lugar (R) said, "I am not confident that President Bush's plan will succeed."

The full Senate debate on the Iraq troop increase will begin next week.

MySpace to display AMBER Alerts

Internet social gathering website MySpace will start sending online alerts to Internet users in certain regions of the United States in order to help find missing children.

MySpace together with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children established a partnership in order to enable AMBER Alert. This is a program that provides an early warning broadcast bulletin in cases of earnest child abduction.

A week ago families of five teenagers, who were sexually abused by adult users from MySpace, sued the website stating that it showed negligence concerning its users' protection.

The company hired, in 2006, a former prosecutor from the United States Justice Department in order to ameliorate its online safety program. The representatives from MySpace stated that the AMBER alerts will appear in a little text box. The text box will be situated at the top of a profile. The website's users will be able to get additional information regarding the case, which will include photos and information about suspects.

Through a phone interview the CEO of MySpace, Hemanshu Nigam, stated that the company has been working with partners and law enforcement in order to find all the possible ways to protect children and keep sex offenders away from the website. He also mentioned that MySpace will provide technology the whole industry would benefit of.

MySpace is a fast-growing website, with about 150 million profiles. Half of all U.S. teenagers access such websites like MySpace with one goal – to make friends. This survey

was made by Pew.

While launching its safety program, the website now asks all its users to have a valid e-mail address. This will allow tracking down possible predators. New subscribers will get a verification e-mail with a link which the user must click to verify his or her identity.

MySpace made a deal with Sentinel Tech Holding Corp. to create a new technology, called Sentinel Safe. The technology will allow MySpace searching state and federal databases. Thus the company will be able to delete the profiles of the subscribed sex offenders.

MySpace is also developing new software called Zephyr to show parents what information can be publicly seen about their child. The information given to the adult concerns their children's name, age, and location on their MySpace profile. The adult's using this software will not be able to read the e-mails sent to their children or access their profiles however.

Glastonbury headliners announced

The Arctic Monkeys and Björk have been confirmed by the organisers of Glastonbury Festival to be the headliners at the 2007 event.

Mr Eavis and co-organiser Emily Eavis told the BBC in an interview that the "biggest band in the world" had also contacted them about performing but denied that it was U2 or Coldplay. He also added that "most of the line-up's now done" but it won't be released until after 1 April, the first date for ticket sales.

The full line-up release date has not been set but Emily Eavis told the BBC website that it was "in the coming months"

The application process for tickets has also been tightened with applicants having to first fill out a form online and supplying a photo. Then "the first 150,000 people that come through (on the hotline) will be booked in" on the 1 April. This process is all part of an attempt to stop ticket touts cashing in on the sell-out event.

Economy center stage in French elections

In face of a very complex economic environment, French voters will have to choose a new President later in this year. The Right-wing Presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy has promised to address what he calls the French "moral crisis... of work". His Socialist Party opponent, Ségolène Royale, the first woman candidate of a major French political party has criticized his announcements as little but talk. In fact French citizens have been puzzled at the rapidity with which "sarko" as his friends call him, has been shifting about, attempting to appear calm when it is clear that he is running for his political survival.

With unemployment for younger people running at alarming levels (15.5% in 2002 for those aged between 20 and 24 according to the OECD) and the memory of the 2005 riots still recent, Sarkozy promised to reign in government spending and implement tax policies that reward longer working hours. Unfortunately his way of reigning in the disadvantaged youth from the Paris suburbs, during riots generated by the police intervention which candidate Sarkozy ordered, was to slap them in jail and deport them when possible. Thus his style of leadership, established during a long occupation of the post of French Minister of Intérieur, suggests a stern, perhaps violent

future should he actually win the presidency.

A source of general well-being for the average French citizen, the 35 hour normal working week is seen by Mr. Sarkozy as contributing to the sluggish growth of the French economy. In previous years France's aversion to having "anglo-saxon" military, economic and labour policies imposed on all of Europe contributed to the rejection of the EU constitutional referendum. However, such views are now being challenged by the French right's main Presidential candidate as he proposes to cut taxes for the wealthy, abolish employer, but not employee tax on hours worked above 35 hours. He also proposes to decrease corporate taxes so that a longer line of senior managers will benefit from share option distributions. Needless to say, the high income bourgeoisie are enraptured about such possibilities.

As well as challenging France's history of solidarity and dedication to the work ethic, he is planning to roll back the boundaries of the State by adopting policies that will reduce the size of State organisations to allow for tax reductions in the hope of kick-starting the economy. The effect of his tax and spending reduction plans on state social provision has not yet been explained. His critics fear the result will be to dismantle the highly regarded French health and social system. Still, his position is moderate by comparison of many right-wing candidates from around the world.

Reaction from Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal was immediate in describing his proposal as "scandalous" and that tax reductions on the richest on society would aggravate the already existing social divisions in the

country. She argues that State spending on public services are essential at a time when such divisions existed in the country.

Mr. Sarkozy, pulled even in the polls one week after announcing his candidacy. Whether this was largely the effect of the multi-million euro marketing campaign which accompanied his announcement of candidacy is not clear.

New Zealand policeman caught speeding discharged

New Zealand policeman, Sergeant Gregory Arthur Smith was captured on a speed camera over the limit by 65 kilometres per hour (km/h). He has now been discharged without conviction in Invercargill District Court today (UTC+13).

Sergeant Smith, 42-years-old, was initially charged with dangerous driving. After being found not guilty of dangerous driving by Judge Kevin Phillips, he was discharged without conviction for driving at an excess speed.

Judge Phillips said, before he delivered his verdict, that the criterion for Sergeant Smith to be discharged was whether he was posing any danger to the public at his high speed. And, according to Sergeant Smith's lawyer, Bill Dawkins, Queens Drive (where the speed occurred) is different to other roads in New Zealand, "If ever there was a case where a court would not convict then this is the very type of roadway in which this might happen."

According to police witness, Inspector Carey Griffiths, road policing manager, after a few pursuits that had "gone bad" and police speeding, police policy had tightened up.

On February 9, 2006, Sergeant

Smith was caught on a speed camera hidden in a van, being operated by a civilian. He was caught going 115 km/h in a school zone in Winton, Invercargill. The speed limit was 50 km/h. Sergeant Smith was responding to a priority one level emergency involving a school bus with ten school children on board and another car.

Unrestricted digital music coming

Even as digital music revenue growth falters, major record labels are moving closer to releasing music on the Internet with no copying restrictions, a step they once vowed never to take.

Several technology companies' executives meeting in France at Midem (Marché international de l'édition musicale), the annual global trade fair for the music industry, hinted that at least one of the four major record companies could move toward the sale of unrestricted digital files in the MP3 format within months.

Most independent record labels already sell tracks digitally compressed in the MP3 format, which can be downloaded, e-mailed or copied to computers, cellphones, portable music players, and compact discs without limit.

The independents see providing songs in MP3 partly as a way of generating publicity that could lead to future sales.

For the major recording companies, however, selling in the MP3 format would be a capitulation to the power of the Internet, which has destroyed their control over the worldwide distribution of music.

Screen shot from the opening of the New Zealand Apple iTunes store.

Until last year, the industry was counting on online purchases of music, led by Apple's iTunes music store, to make up the difference, but, according to an industry report released in London last week, digital sales in 2006, while 80 percent ahead of the year before, grew slower than in 2005 and did not compensate for the decline in physical sales.

Even so, the move to MP3s is not inevitable, some insiders warn.

Publicly, music company executives say their systems for limiting copies are a way to fairly compensate artists and other copyright holders who contribute to the creation of music.

However, there are signs of a new appreciation in the industry for unrestricted copies, which could be sold as singles or through subscription services or made freely available on Internet sites that support advertising.

The EMI Group said last week that it would offer free streaming music on Baidu.com, the leading Web site and search engine in China, where 90 percent of music is "pirated". EMI and Baidu also agreed to explore developing advertising-supported music download services. This summer EMI licensed its recording to Qtrax, an ad-supported music distribution service.

Experiments by Yahoo!, which offered last year a handful of tracks from Norah Jones, Jessica Simpson, Jesse McCartney and Relient K without any digital restrictions, will continue this year, David Goldberg, vice president and general manager of Yahoo Music, said in an interview at Midem. Two of the major labels, Sony BMG and EMI, agreed to the tests in 2006.

In a handful of European countries, especially in France, consumer frustration has led to government proposals to legislate interoperability.

"There is a groundswell, and I say that on the basis of private conversations," said Rob Glaser, chief executive of RealNetworks, which sells digital music protected against piracy through the Rhapsody subscription service.

"It will happen between next year and five years from now, but it is more likely to be in one to two years," he said.

US troops in the Philippines to resume activities

The US embassy in the Philippines said Tuesday that military maneuvers between US and domestic troops will resume next month after its suspension last month when a Philippine court refused to transfer custody of Daniel Smith, a US Marine convicted of raping a Filipina, to the US embassy.

In a statement, the US embassy said that the Balikatan exercises will be conducted from February 8 to March 4, focusing on civil-military operations like bringing medical assistance to war-torn areas where alleged Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf militants are active.

US Navy ship visits are also planned.

Dozens of US troops are deployed on Jolo island in humanitarian projects, but officials said they also helped provide intelligence data that led to the killings of the two top leaders of the Abu Sayyaf.

The Abu Sayyaf is on Washington's

terrorist watchlist and has been blamed for bombings and for the kidnapping deaths of two Americans snatched in 2001.

US Ambassador to Manila, Kristie Kenney, said on Monday that relations between her country and the Philippines were back at a high after two of the most wanted Islamic militants here were killed.

"I feel very strongly that we must congratulate the Armed Forces of the Philippines. They are dedicated and doing a wonderful job of keeping the people safe," she said.

Ambassador Kenney said joint military exercises have been planned for all of 2007 but said they would focus mainly on humanitarian assistance.

Kenney's statement as she joined US troops in distributing relief goods to Bicol victims of a recent supertyphoon, preceded the arrival on Wednesday of US Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes.

The envoy's remarks were a departure from the tough words issued by the US government at the height of the custody controversy over the US Marine rape convict.

Hughes' three-day visit will be capped by a one-on-one meeting with President Arroyo. She will also meet with other government officials and visit Sulu, where American troops are helping the Philippine military supposedly to flush out Islamic militants.

It will be Hughes' first visit to Manila, where the US Embassy wants to shift the focus of the annual Balikatan joint military exercises between the two

countries from military training to humanitarian efforts.

Meanwhile, activist group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan on Tuesday said it opposes the resumption of the RP-US military exercises by launching a nationwide mass protests on February 8.

Bayan Secretary-General Renato Reyes does not believe that the Balikatan will focus mainly on humanitarian missions in Mindanao.

"That is just a public relations ploy. The Balikatan is the biggest bilateral military exercises between the Philippines and the US. It has always been a showcase of US military might and forward presence in the region. The Balikatan has always been a major US military operation," Reyes said.

The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) governing the annual Balikatan exercises, which usually brings 3000-5000 US troops to the Philippines, is castigated by several groups and individuals in the Philippines for its unconstitutionality and biased towards US interests.

"We must not forget the atrocities of the US then and the continuing atrocities and violations of national sovereignty that it commits now," Reyes said.

Today in History

1554 - Jesuit priests José de Anchieta and Manoel da Nóbrega established a mission at São Paulo dos Campos de Piratininga, which grew to become São Paulo, Brazil.

1924 - The first Winter Olympic Games opened at the foot of Mont Blanc in Chamonix, France.

1937 - The Guiding Light, the longest-running program in broadcast history, is first aired on

the NBC Red radio network.
1971 - General Idi Amin seized power from President of Uganda Milton Obote, beginning eight years of military rule.

2004 - Mars Exploration Rover Opportunity landed on Mars and rolled into Eagle crater, a small crater on the Meridiani Planum.
January 25 is Burns Night (Scots culture)

Quote of the Day

Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves.

~ William Pitt the Younger

Word of the Day

scamper; v

1. To run quickly and lightly, especially in a playful way.

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
+1-202-742-5918
(outside the U.S.)
+44-871-218-6397
(U.K. / Europe)

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