



Top Stories

Israel suspends air strikes after deadly strike on Qana

After the Qana tragedy when least 56 civilians, about 37 of them children, was killed Israel agreed to suspend its aerial activities in south Lebanon for 48 hours.

Gay teens assaulted and fined by police in Romania

Two gay teens were fined and assaulted by police after cuddling, holding hands and kissing in a public park in Bucharest, Romania. Homosexuality, including public manifestations of it, was decriminalised in Romania as late as 2001

Featured story

Hezbollah leader alleges prior Israeli-US planning of current conflict

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah claims that the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict is the result of an American-Israeli conspiracy to attack Lebanon and gain control over the state as a part of a "new Middle East".

Wikipedia Current Events

- Israel halts air strikes for forty-eight hours, after an airstrike kills sixty civilians in Qana, Lebanon.
- The UN Security Council is to hold an emergency meeting on the Middle East crisis after the deaths of more than 54 Lebanese civilians in an Israeli raid.

Wikipedia Current Events

- According to United Nations soldiers posted in Lebanon, Hezbollah has been using hospitals, orphanages, mosques, and United Nations posts as shields. The email came from one of the four Canadian UN observers who was killed in an Israeli strike.
- More than 54 civilians, at least 37 of them children, are killed in an Israeli airstrike on the Lebanese town of Qana.
- Ehud Olmert states that "Israel is not in a hurry to have a cease-fire" before it achieves its goals.
- 146 Rockets hit Israel, at least three in Haifa, wounding six people.
- The United Nations compound in Gaza City is stormed and ransacked by Palestinians protesting the 2006 Israel-Lebanon crisis and members of the Islamic Jihad militant group, who threw stones, and fired assault rifles. Eight vehicles were damaged and five people were wounded.

Israeli strike kills more than 50 civilians in Qana

In the deadliest single incident in the ongoing Israel-Lebanon conflict, an Israeli airstrike demolished a four-story building in the village of Qana in southern Lebanon, and according to the Red Cross, at least 56 displaced civilians, about 37 of them children, who were sheltering there were killed.

The strike flattened the house on top of sleeping residents. One rescue worker said "The victims all seem to be civilians, women and children". Abu Shadi Jradi, a civil defence official, said the bodies of at least 27 children were found in the rubble.

Villager Mohammed Ismail said "We want this to stop. May God have mercy on the children. They came here to escape the fighting. They are hitting children to bring the fighters to their knees."

Jim Muir, a BBC correspondent, said "The three storey building where families have been sheltering in the basement was crushed sideways into an enormous crater by the Israeli bomb strike". He added "Elsewhere in Qana and along the road up from Tyre, many buildings had been similarly crushed."

About nine out of ten residents are estimated to have left Qana, which has been heavily bombarded by Israeli forces in the current conflict. Those without cars, petrol and other means to leave are left behind. According to Jim Muir who had travelled to Qana along the road from Tyre, the route had been pitted with bomb craters.

Later, Israel agreed to a 48-hour halt in military activities while it investigated the bombing of Qana. However, the Israeli military said it would launch counterattacks in Lebanon if Hezbollah fired more rockets at Israel in the 48-hour period.

Lebanese reactions

Anger spread across Lebanon and the Arab world, several thousand Shiite muslim protesters gathered in front of the United Nations headquarters in Beirut and some smashed their way into the building. The protesters chanted "Death to Israel, Death to America".

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora called it Israel's "heinous crimes against civilians", and called off a scheduled meeting with US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice saying "There is no place on this sad morning for any discussion other than an immediate and unconditional ceasefire as well as an international investigation into the Israeli massacres in Lebanon now."

The Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr commented on the Israeli statement on the Qatar-based al-Jazeera TV station, "What do you expect Israel to say? Will it say that it killed 40 children and women?"

Israeli reactions

A senior air force commander said Israel had dropped a bomb on the building in Qana on the assumption it was sheltering Hizbollah crews and was unaware civilians were there. The commander said "Had we known there were that many civilians inside, especially woman and children, we certainly would not have attacked it".

According to the Israeli military, the building collapsed eight hours after the attack.

Brigadier General Amir Eshel, Head of the Air Force Headquarters told journalists at the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv

"the attack on the structure in the Qana village took place between midnight and one in the morning. The gap between the timing of the collapse of the building and the time of the strike on it is unclear".

Eshel and the head of the IDF's Operational Branch, Major General Gadi Eisenkot said the structure was not being attacked when it collapsed, at around 8:00 in the morning.

The Israeli military believes that Hezbollah explosives in the building were behind the explosion that caused the collapse: "It's possible that inside the house, something or other was being stored that caused an explosion - something that we didn't succeed in blowing up in the attack and that perhaps was left over there," Brigadier General Eshel said. "I say this very cautiously, because I currently don't have the faintest idea what the explanation for this gap could be."

Eshel added that Hizbullah rocket launchers were hidden in civilian buildings in the village. He proceeded to show video footage of rocket launchers being driven into the village following launches.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert expressed "deep regret" for the air strike, but said Israel would not declare a cease-fire until it had reached the targets it had set at the beginning of the war. Olmert, responding to harsh international criticism on the strike, said that Hezbollah had used Qana as a base for launching hundreds of rockets at Israel.

Arab world reactions

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said "I think Israeli officials and some American ones should be tried for

these sorts of crimes".

Hizbulla leader Hassan Nasralla said "We will now rig up the fire and retaliate with a vengeance. We will send rockets and death to the Zionist enemy, who will pay for this crime. We will hit the US and Britain for supporting this massacre".

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said "The massacre committed by Israel in Qana this morning shows the barbarity of this aggressive entity. It constitutes state terrorism committed in front of the eyes and ears of the world,"

The Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said "The Arab Republic of Egypt is highly disturbed and condemns the irresponsible Israeli attack on the Lebanese village of Qana, which led to the loss of innocent victims, most of which were women and children," a statement from the presidency said.

King Abdullah of Jordan said: "This criminal aggression is an ugly crime that has been committed by the Israeli forces in the city of Qana that is a gross violation of all international statutes."

International world reactions

The French president Jacques Chirac, released a statement "The president learnt with concern about the act of violence which cost the lives of numerous innocent victims, notably women and children in Qana." "France condemns this unjustified action, which demonstrates more than ever the need for an immediate ceasefire without which there will only be other such incidents." Wikipedia has an article about 2006 Qana airstrike.

United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair has said the "tragedy" in Qana shows the situation in the Middle East "simply cannot continue".

Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Margaret Beckett, called the strikes "absolutely dreadful" and "quite appalling". She said "We have repeatedly urged Israel to act proportionately,"

Pope Benedict said "In the name of God, I call on all those responsible for this spiral of violence so that weapons are immediately laid down on all sides."

Potent symbol

Qana became a potent symbol of Lebanese civilian deaths by Israeli military bombings after an earlier incident in April 1996, when a single Israeli shell killed more than 100 civilians sheltering at the base of U.N. peacekeepers in the village during Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" campaign.

Gay teens assaulted and fined by police in Romania

Two gay teens were fined and assaulted by police on 27 July at around 23:30 after cuddling, holding hands and kissing in a public park in Bucharest, Romania. According to their report, the two were subject to humiliation and physical assault by the officers and park guardians, who had approached them on the pretext of checking their identification cards. After beating up the two, one of the officers allegedly said that, "I should tie you up with chains and f*** you until you are cured of your sickness". The two teens were each fined 500 lei (approximately USD179) for "disturbing the public peace", the other alternative being a criminal record for the same offence. They

consider this charge to be ungrounded and an act of discrimination against sexual orientation, considering that a heterosexual couple were not prosecuted for engaging in similar acts a few metres away. One of the teens stated that: *I will never forget the hypocrisy with which they said they only wanted to see our id's, that they were only doing their job, when at 10 metres distance, a girl and a boy were having sex in the bushes.*

Additionally, the police offers threatened the teens that they would beat them again, with "no witnesses", when they were off duty.

Homosexuality, including public manifestations of it, was decriminalised in Romania in 2001, when Article 200 of the Penal Code was fully repealed. Since 2000, the country has an anti-discrimination law which explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

However, despite this, social attitudes remain conservative and discrimination remains widespread and rarely reported and investigated, with the 2006 Bucharest GayFest, held in early June, provoking a violent reaction from many passers-by, even if it took place successfully due to heavy police protection. Gay rights organisations have also complained that when the anti-discrimination law is applied, fines are too low (the average fine for an employer discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation is about 300 lei, or less than USD128).

Cassini photographs possible lakes on Saturn's moon, Titan

Cassini, a European and United States space probe, has taken pictures of what appear to be

lakes on the surface of Saturn's moon, Titan. If the findings are confirmed, then Titan will be the only other planetary mass, other than Earth, to have liquid lakes on their surfaces. Some of the 'lakes' also contain channels that lead to and from them. The lakes are believed to have been formed by rainfall of liquid methane or ethane.

Some radar images of the lakes and channels leading to and from them, show areas of black, which indicate that there is no image to display and scientists say that it could mean the surface of the 'lakes' are very smooth and flat.

"What we see is darker than anything we've ever seen elsewhere on Titan. It was almost as though someone laid a bull's-eye around the whole north pole of Titan, and Cassini sees these regions of lakes just like those we see on Earth," said U.S. Geological Survey Cassini interdisciplinary scientist, Larry Soderblom.

So far scientists have found at least 12 lakes which range between 6 and 62 miles wide.

"It was a real potpourri," said University of Arizona Cassini scientist, Jonathan Lunine.

"We've always believed Titan's methane had to be maintained by liquid lakes or extensive underground 'methanofers,' the methane equivalent of aquifers. We can't see methanofers but we can now say we've seen lakes ," added Lunine.

James Bond set at Pinewood Studios destroyed by fire

Firefighters have confirmed that the large James Bond sound stage at Pinewood Studios has been destroyed by fire. It is thought

eight fire engines were called to the scene near Iver Heath in Buckinghamshire on Sunday morning, where filming for *Casino Royale*, the latest Bond movie, has been completed.

Jen McVean witnessed the event, and she said the stage was "completely on fire". The set had been transformed into a replica of the Italian city of Venice, but Mrs McVean, who owns a firm at the studios, said: "Nothing is salvageable and there are many, many fire engines there." One spokesman said around 40 to 50 firefighters were at the scene.

It is reported that fire damage caused the building's roof to fall in and firefighters were damping the flames down with specialist equipment. "We do not know the extent of the damage to the 007 stage, although it is believed to be significant," a spokesman for Pinewood Studios said. "Filming was not taking place. A production had completed filming and its film sets were in the process of being removed," he added.

No one was reported injured in the incident.

Pinewood, which was created in 1935, was the filming ground for *Dr No*, the first ever James Bond movie in 1962. It merged with Shepperton Studios in 2001, and high-budget movies like *Harry Potter* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* have since been filmed there.

In 1984, a sound stage caught fire, but it reopened in January 1985 and was named the Albert Broccoli sound stage in honour of the man who produced many Bond films. In 1997, Pinewood was hit by fire again after flames broke out in the roof of a sound building

where *The Avengers* was being recorded.

Charles Kennedy rejects leadership allegations

Charles Kennedy, who stepped down as leader of the British Liberal Democrats party this January, is planning a fresh campaign for his old job, according to today's *News of the World*. But Mr Kennedy, who resigned after admitting he had problems with alcohol, has dismissed such reports.

A senior party source claimed Mr Kennedy is holding weekly meetings with key aids about preparing to contest the Liberal Democrats current leader, Sir Menzies Campbell. It is also claimed Mr Kennedy is "deadly serious" about the challenge.

The source added that if Sir Menzies fails to deliver at this September's Liberal Democrat conference, the bid could be mounted then, but it is more likely to come after the next General Election, which is expected to take place in 2010.

Mr Kennedy's key advisors, which apparently includes the head of campaigns Lord Razzell, are said to be planning a tactic to oppose a potentially damaging biography of Mr Kennedy which is due to hit the shelves later this summer.

In a response to the allegations, a statement released on behalf of Mr Kennedy by the Liberal Democrats said: "As everyone knows, long-standing friends and political colleagues remain close to me. We meet frequently and it is simply fanciful to read anything else into such a normal ongoing state of affairs."

According to Lord Newby, who was

Mr Kennedy's chief of staff during his reign as Liberal Democrat leader, said the story was "ridiculous".

Sir Menzies, who was chosen by party members to head the party in March, has been criticised over his performance as leader, especially during Prime Minister's Questions. On Friday, Peter Black, a Liberal Democrat Welsh Assembly member, issued a cutting attack on the 65 year-old, telling him to "shape up". A recent poll also says that support for the Liberal Democrats has slumped to its lowest point since 2002. The *Guardian/ICM* survey put the Liberal Democrats at 17%, with the Conservatives on 39% and Labour on 35%.

However, Sir Menzies told BBC *Newsnight* recently that he "would not be judged by opinion polls after a few months". He also said: "If I didn't think I had the energy, the values and the judgement to be the leader of the Liberal Democrats, I wouldn't have offered myself for the job."

Australian PM mobbed by anti-Israel protesters

Australian Prime Minister John Howard was mobbed by protesters in Perth, Western Australia on Saturday, angry at the stance he has taken on the recent conflicts in the Middle East.

Leaving a Liberal party conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the West Australian capital, Howard was mobbed by 200 protesters angry at Howard's support for Israel and the Australian government's lack of action.

Protestors kicked, punched and threw projectiles at the Prime Minister's vehicle as police struggled to keep the angry mob

under control. One protestor managed to break off the Australian flag attached to the front of Mr Howard's vehicle.

Protestors, demanding a cease fire in the Middle East chanted "we want peace" and handed out flyers proclaiming "Cluster bombs are used by Israel to burn our families in Lebanon. Is this fair?"

Police were taken by surprise at the speed by which the protest escalated into violence. "We were surprised by the approach. It was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration," one officer said. "It had been peaceful up to that point."

Police arrested two men and charged them with disorderly conduct.

Prior to the protest, Mr Howard told his party conference that two things must happen before peace can be realised in the middle east. "There will not be a solution to the conflict in the Middle East until two things happen," he said.

"The first is that there must be conditional acceptance throughout the entire Arab world, without exception, of Israel's right to exist in peace and stability behind secure and internationally recognised boundaries.

"The entire Arab world, including Hezbollah, Iran and Syria, must give up forever the idea that the Israelis can be driven from their land .

"The second condition is that there has to be a equally unconditional acceptance, including on behalf of the Israelis, of the need and the justice of an independent Palestinian state.

"There has to be a two-state solution."

Today in History

1667 - The signing of the Treaty of Breda ended the Second Anglo-Dutch War.

1777 - French nobleman Marquis de Lafayette entered the American revolutionary forces as a Major General.

1917 - World War I: The Battle of Passchendaele began in West Flanders, Belgium.

1941 - Holocaust: Hermann Goring ordered SS general Reinhard Heydrich to develop a final solution to the Jewish question.

1971 - Apollo program: The first Lunar Rover was used during the Apollo 15 mission to the moon.

July 31 is Qi Xi in the Chinese lunar calendar (2006), Ka Hae Hawai'i Day in Hawai'i, feast day of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

Quote of the Day

"I am in favor of cutting taxes under any circumstances and for any excuse, for any reason, whenever it's possible."

~ Milton Friedman

Word of the Day

docile; adj

1. Ready to accept control or instruction.
2. Yielding to supervision, direction, or management.

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