Top Stories

Official Myanmar death toll increases to 78,000
Myanmar has raised the official death toll from the recent Cyclone Nargis to 77,738, with another 55,917 listed as missing. This is still below estimates from the United Nations and the Red Cross. The UN is working to improve access to Myanmar.

Asbestos controversy aboard Scientology ship Freewinds
The MV Freewinds, a cruise ship owned by the Church of Scientology, is reportedly docked due to an ongoing investigation into blue asbestos on the ship. Sources have reported that the Freewinds was sealed in April. While the Church of Scientology insists the ship will sail again, controversy remains over its safety. Wikinews has exclusive statements from Lawrence Woodcraft, who supervised work on the ship in 1987.

Zimbabwe presidential run-off date set
The second round of the Zimbabwean presidential elections between incumbent Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai has been set for June 27.

Featured story

California Supreme Court strikes down ban on gay marriage
The Supreme Court of California in a 4-3 decision has struck down California's ban on gay marriage. The decision struck down two laws one from 1977 and another more recent one due to a referendum in 2000. Prior to this case, California allowed extensive benefits to gay couples that were in practice close to those given to heterosexual couples.

Wikipedia Current Events

• The United States reaches a deal with North Korea to resume food aid with 500,000 tonnes of food to be sent to North Korea during the next year.

• The State Peace and Development Council in Burma doubles the death toll from Cyclone Nargis to 78,000 with 55,917 people missing and 19,359 people injured.

German Football: Lahm signs contract with Bayern Munich until 2012
Philipp Lahm has agreed to terms on a three-year extension to his current contract with newly crowned German champions Bayern Munich which will keep him in Munich until June 30, 2012.

"I'm delighted about it, otherwise I wouldn't have done it," Lahm commented before of a final pre-match training session today. Talks with the board and incoming coach Jürgen Klinsmann in recent weeks had been "very productive. I sense a real new beginning here, and that's what persuaded me," he told the respected Süddeutsche Zeitung.

Red Cross says 100 dead after roadworks trigger pipeline explosion in Nigeria
Roadworks have triggered a massive explosion and fire on a fuel pipeline running through Ijegun, a suburb on the outskirts of Nigerian capital Lagos. Although the Nigerian Emergency Management Agency puts the...
The current death toll at ten, the Nigerian Red Cross says at least 100 people have died.

The oil pipeline was fractured after a construction vehicle struck it and erupted into a fireball, with fuel running down the street. At least twelve homes caught fire, and students ran from a nearby school that was also threatened.

According to witnesses, students are among the dead.

Firefighters have extinguished the blaze and work is now underway to try and reunite people separated during the fire and account for those present at the time.

Disasters such as this happen regularly in Nigeria, but they are usually attributable to organised criminals breaking into pipes for their content or terrorist attacks, whereas today's event appears to have been an accident.

Zimbabwe presidential run-off date set
The second round of the Zimbabwean presidential elections between incumbent Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai has been set for June 27.

"It is hereby notified that the Zimbabwe electoral commission with the approval of the minister of justice made the following notice: a poll shall be taken on Friday, June 27, 2008, for the purpose of electing a person to the office of president."

Although Mr. Tsvangirai says taking the poll on June 27 is illegal, the government has issued an emergency law, George Chiweshe, chairman of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission claiming that "some of the resources were depleted during the first election, so we need more time to prepare for the runoff."

However Mr. Tsvangirai's party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), is worried that Mugabe, whose rule Tsvangirai called a "dictatorship" when speaking earlier in Belfast, will use the time to intimidate voters.

In the first round the MDC won 47.9% of votes against the incumbent Zanu-PF's 43.2%. President Mugabe, Zanu-PF's leader, has told his central committee today that the first round was "disastrous" and that "as leaders we all share the blame, from the national level to that of branch chairman."

Both leaders have fired criticisms at each other's parties, Mugabe saying the MDC and its supporters are "playing a very dangerous game" and are waging war in rural constituencies, Tsvangirai telling the BBC that "the people who have taken over are the military."

Guards at Nova Scotia jail refuse to work after asbestos discovery
Nine correctional workers at the Cape Breton Correctional Facility in Sydney, Nova Scotia refused to work after the discovery of asbestos in the facility by the Canada's Department of Justice. The guards walked off the job after the Occupational Health and Safety Committee at the facility was made aware of the situation.

Joan Jessome, president of the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, told The Canadian Press that the guards refused to show up for their Thursday night shift, and did not show up for work on Friday.

Jessome stated that the guards' refusal to work is permitted under the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act. "What they've done is not a work stoppage. What they've done is exercise their right to refuse to do the work because they believe it's unsafe," said Jessome.

"What they've done is exercise their right to refuse to do the work because they believe it's unsafe."
—Joan Jessome

The issue of asbestos in the facility was raised months ago, and an April 25 inspection found that the asbestos was properly labeled to prevent staff from accidental exposure.

The location is undergoing testing, however preliminary results show that the levels of asbestos in the facility are within safe limits. Air testing conducted on May 8 in the facility did not show traces of the carcinogenic material.

The Department of Justice stated in a press release Friday that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police will be providing emergency staffing to the correctional facility as needed, and that new inmates will be sent to one of the four other correctional facilities in Nova Scotia.

"If the RCMP are required, they will be called upon."
—Sheri Aikenhead

Sheri Aikenhead, a spokeswoman for the guards union said the guards were "very upset" at the news of the asbestos.

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for the provincial Justice Department, talked to The Canadian Press: "At the moment we're satisfied that managers are safely managing the situation there. If the RCMP are required, they will be called upon." Aikenhead said that an inmate had complained about the possibility of the presence of asbestos this past March.

The Cape Breton Correctional Facility is a provincial jail which houses 76 inmates. The facility is 33-years old, and asbestos was used in construction as a fire retardant. If asbestos fibers are disturbed and inhaled they can lead to lung scarring and lung cancer.

Official Myanmar death toll increases to 78,000

State run television in Myanmar has reported that the death toll from the recent cyclone has increased dramatically to 77,738. In addition to this, 55,917 people are still officially missing.

In what are admittedly rough estimates, the United Nations (UN) estimates that more than 100,000 have died, while the International Red Cross projects 128,000 deaths. At least 10,000 people died just in Bogale Township in the Pyapon District of the country.

The United Nations has reported that 2.5 million people are homeless, or in need of help in the Irrawaddy Delta.

The military junta that governs the country says that it can handle relief operations and that they are going well. It is still turning down international offers to transport aid directly to the affected areas. According to state television, Prime Minister Thein Sein said, "We have already finished our first phase of emergency relief. We are going onto the second phase, the rebuilding stage."

"Time is life," said Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development & Humanitarian Aid to reporters at Bangkok International Airport in Thailand. "No government in the world can tackle such a problem alone. This is a major catastrophe."

Michel was returning from a trip to Yangon where he was unsuccessful at urging the junta to allow direct aid despite its pride and paranoia about the outside world.

Aid groups, including UN agencies, say only a fraction of the required relief is getting through and, unless the situation improves, thousands more lives are at risk.

According to The New York Times, the United States and some European allies had considered a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for "humanitarian intervention" in Myanmar, which would give authorization for a relief mission without approval of the military authorities in Myanmar. The idea was dismissed after it became clear that China would veto any such resolution.

The US has a assembled number of ships, helicopters, transport airplanes and marines in the region, ready to assist in cyclone relief if given approval by the government of Myanmar. US officials say that helicopters can bring in assistance to areas inland from the coast and further help distribute supplies across the country. Myanmar has approved fewer than 20 cargo planes to bring supplies to the capital, Yangon.

Aid groups, including UN agencies, say only a fraction of the required relief is getting through and, unless the situation improves, thousands more lives are at risk.

According to UN spokesperson, Michèle Montas, Holmes will arrive in Myanmar on Sunday. He will be carrying a letter from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to Senior General Than Shwe, who has twice previously refused to converse with Ban.

California Supreme Court strikes down ban on gay marriage

The Supreme Court of California in a 4–3 decision has struck down California's ban on gay marriage. The decision struck down two laws, one from 1977 and another more recent one due to a referendum in 2000. Prior to this case, California allowed extensive benefits to gay couples that were in practice close to those given to heterosexual couples.

The Court's headquarters in San Francisco has been located at the United Nations for the provincial Justice Department, talked to The Canadian Press: "At the moment we're satisfied that managers are safely managing the situation there. If the RCMP are required, they will be called upon." Aikenhead said that an inmate had complained about the possibility of the presence of asbestos this past March.

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The Court's headquarters in San Francisco
Francisco, California, which it shares with the Court of Appeal for the First District. Image: Coolcaesar.

The case in question consisted of a consolidation of six cases being appealed. Parties included a variety of gay couples and the city of San Francisco which wanted to recognize gay couples.

The opinion, written by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, stated that that there was no legitimate basis to discriminate based on sexual preference. Moreover, the court found that the laws were unconstitutional given the protections of the California Constitution. The opinion was also signed by Justices Kathryn Werdegar, and Carlos Moreno and Justice Joyce Kennard who also wrote an additional concurrence. Justice Marvin Baxter wrote dissent also signed by Justice Ming Chin. Finally, Justice Carol Corrigan wrote a dissent saying that although she personally favored gay marriage the people of California clearly had not and the popular will should not be overruled by the court.

Supporters of gay marriage said the ruling was a milestone. "This decision will give Americans the lived experience that ending exclusion from marriage helps families and harms no one," said Evan Wolfson, executive director of Freedom to Marry.

Edward Zelinsky of Yeshiva University, whose work was cited in the brief of California's attorney general supporting the law, characterized the court's opinion as "problematic in important respects." He criticized the court for failing to explain adequately why its logic does not apply to other non-traditional forms of marriage such as polygamy.

Since the decision is based upon the California Constitution, it cannot be appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States.

Currently in the United States different states have taken different positions. Although a variety of states allow civil unions, at present only Massachusetts has legalized gay marriage. State courts have disagreed as to whether gay couples should be treated like heterosexual couples.

Asbestos controversy aboard Scientology ship Freewinds

Controversy has arisen over the reported presence of blue asbestos on the MV Freewinds, a cruise ship owned by the Church of Scientology. According to the Saint Martin newspaper The Daily Herald and the shipping news journal Lloyd's List, the Freewinds was sealed in April and local public health officials on the Caribbean island of Curaçao where the ship is docked began an investigation into the presence of asbestos dust on the ship. Former Scientologist Lawrence Woodcraft supervised work on the ship in 1987, and attested to the presence of blue asbestos on the Freewinds in an affidavit posted to the Internet in 2001. Woodcraft, a licensed architect by profession, gave a statement to Wikinews and commented on the recent events.

According to The Daily Herald, the Freewinds was in the process of being renovated by the Curaçao Drydock Company. The article states that samples taken from paneling in the ship were sent to the Netherlands, where an analysis revealed that they "contained significant levels of blue asbestos". An employee of the Curaçao Drydock Company told Radar Online in an April 30 article that the Freewinds has been docked and sealed, and confirmed that an article about asbestos ran in the local paper.

Lloyd's List reported that work on the interior of the Freewinds was suspended on April 27 after health inspectors found traces of blue asbestos on the ship. According to Lloyd's List, Frank Esser, Curaçao Drydock Company's interim director, joined Curaçao's head of the department of labor affairs Christiene van der Biezen along with the head of the local health department Tico Ras and two inspectors in an April 25 inspection of the ship. "We are sending someone so that they can tell us what happened, where it came from, since when it has been there," said Panama Maritime Authority's director of merchant marine Alfonso Castillero in a statement to Lloyd's List.

The Church of Scientology purchased the ship, then known as the Bohème, in 1987, through an

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organization called Flag Ship Trust. After being renovated and refitted, it was put into service in June 1988. The ship is used by the Church of Scientology for advanced Scientology training in "Operating Thetan" levels, as well as for spiritual retreats for its members. Curaçao has been the ship's homeport since it was purchased by the Church of Scientology.

According to his 2001 statement, Lawrence Woodcraft had been an architect in London, England since 1975, and joined Scientology's elite "Sea Organization" (Sea Org) in 1986. He wrote that he was asked by the Sea Org to work on the Freewinds in 1987, and during his work on the ship "noticed a powdery blue fibrous substance approximately 1 ½" thick between the paint and the steel wall," which he believed to be asbestos. He also discovered what he thought was blue asbestos in other parts of the ship, and reported his findings to Church of Scientology executives. Woodcraft discussed his experiences in a 2001 interview published online by the Lisa McPherson Trust, a now-defunct organization which was critical of the Church of Scientology.

"The Freewinds regularly inspects the air quality on board and always meets or exceeds US standards." —Church of Scientology spokeswoman Karin Pouw

Church of Scientology spokeswoman Karin Pouw responded to Radar Online about the asbestos reports, in an email published in an article in Radar on May 1. "The Freewinds regularly inspects the air quality on board and always meets or exceeds US standards," said Pouw. She stated that two inspections performed in April "confirmed that the air quality is safe," and asserted that the inspections revealed the Freewinds satisfies standards set by the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Clean Air Act.

Pouw told Radar that "The Freewinds will be completing its refit on schedule." The Church of Scientology-affiliated organization Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) had been planning a cruise aboard the Freewinds scheduled for May 8, but according to Radar an individual who called the booking number for the cruise received a message that the cruise had been delayed due to ongoing work on the ship. Citing an article in the Netherlands Antilles newspaper Amigoe, Radar reported on May 6 that a team from the United States and supervised by an independent bureau from the Netherlands traveled to Curaçao in order to remove asbestos from the Freewinds.

"If the Church of Scientology claims to have removed the blue asbestos, I just don't see how, it's everywhere. You would first have to remove all the pipes, plumbing, a/c ducts, electrical wiring etc. etc. just a maze of stuff." —Lawrence Woodcraft

"I stand by everything I wrote in my 2001 affidavit," said Lawrence Woodcraft in an exclusive statement given to Wikinews. Woodcraft went on to state: "I would also comment that if the Church of Scientology claims to have removed the blue asbestos, I just don't see how, it's everywhere. You would first have to remove all the pipes, plumbing, a/c ducts, electrical wiring etc. etc. just a maze of stuff. Also panelling as well, basically strip the ship back to a steel hull. Also blue asbestos is sprayed onto the outer walls and then covered in paint. It's in every nook and cranry."

Many Scientologist celebrities have spent time aboard the Freewinds, including Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes, John Travolta, Kelly Preston, Chick Corea, Lisa Marie Presley, Catherine Bell, Kate Ceberano, and Juliette Lewis. Now magazine reported that Tom Cruise has been urged to seek medical attention regarding potential asbestos exposure, however a representative for Cruise stated he has "absolutely no knowledge" of the recent asbestos controversy. Cruise, Holmes, Travolta and Preston have celebrated birthdays and other events on the Freewinds.

"There is not now and never has been a situation of asbestos exposure on the Freewinds." —Church of Scientology

In a May 15 statement to the United Kingdom daily newspaper Metro, a representative for the Church of Scientology said that "There is not now and never has been a situation of asbestos exposure on the Freewinds." The Asbestos and Mesothelioma Center notes that agencies have recommended anyone who has spent time on the Freewinds consult with their physician to determine if possible asbestos exposure may have affected their health.

Raw blue asbestos is the most hazardous form of asbestos, and has been banned in the United Kingdom since 1970. Blue asbestos fibers are very narrow and thus easily inhaled, and are a major cause of mesothelioma. Mesothelioma is a form of cancer which can develop in the lining of...
the lungs and chest cavity, the lining of the abdominal cavity, or the pericardium sac surrounding the heart. The cancer is incurable, and can manifest over 40 years after the initial exposure to asbestos.

"This is the most dangerous type of asbestos because the fibres are smaller than the white asbestos and can penetrate the lung more easily," said toxicologist Dr. Chris Coggins in a statement published in OK! Magazine. Dr. Coggins went on to note that "Once diagnosed with mesothelioma, the victim has six months to a year to live. It gradually reduces lung function until the victim is no longer able to breathe and dies."

**2008 Young Designers' Exhibition to interact with the world**

2008 The 27th Young Designers' Exhibition, famed as the largest show from students' creations, recognized by International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) since last year, started at Taipei World Trade Center yesterday and will close at Sunday (May 18) with participations from 87 academical units in Taiwan and 20 units from United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, and Australia to showcase varied achievements from design industry.

Not only several design competitions, sponsors like International Forum Design (IF), EPSON, MUJI (in Japanese: 無印良品, Mujirushi Ryōhin), Tsann Kuen Trans-nation Group will also showcase different solutions for design, creative, and cultural industries. In addition, Taiwan Design Center, the show organizer, also designed several site events like "On-line Graduate Season Show", "Carrer Match-up", "Creative and Cultural Showcase and Performance", "Seminars of YODEX 2008" to link the actual exhibition with on-line exhibition.

Besides of the early-announced "Wow! Taiwan Design Award", winners from "2008 Young Designers' Competition" and "2008 YODEX Interior Design Competition" will also be announced this Saturday (May 17).

**Predictable random number generator discovered in the Debian version of OpenSSL**

A major security hole was announced on May 13, 2008 in the pseudorandom number generator (PRNG) of the Debian version of OpenSSL, one of the most used cryptographic programming libraries. The problem affects all the Debian-based GNU/Linux distributions, like Ubuntu and Knoppix, that was used to create SSL/TLS keys since September 17, 2006. The bug was discovered by Luciano Bello, a Debian package maintainer.

This vulnerability was caused by the removal of two lines of code from the original version of the OpenSSL. These lines were used to gather some entropy data by the library to seed the PRNG used to create private keys. Without this, the only dynamic data used was the PID of the software. Under Linux the PID can be a number between 1 and 32,768, that is a too small range of values if used to seed the PRNG and will cause the generation of predictable numbers. Therefore any key generated can be predictable, with only 32,767 possible keys for a given architecture.

These lines were removed as "suggested" by two audit tools (Valgrind and Purify) used to find vulnerabilities in the software distributed by Debian. These tools warned the Debian maintainers that some data was used before its initialization, that normally can lead to a security bug, but this time it was not the case, as the OpenSSL developers wrote on March 13, 2003. Anyway this change was erroneously applied on September 17, 2006, when the OpenSSL Debian version 0.9.8c-1 was released to the public.

Even though the Debian maintainer responsible for this software released a patch to fix it on May 8, 2008, the impact may be severe. OpenSSL is commonly used in software to protect the passwords and to offer privacy. Any private key created with this version of OpenSSL is weak, that includes session keys that are created and used only temporary. This means that any data encrypted with these keys can be decrypted without a big deal, even if these keys are used (but not created) with a version of the library not affected, like the ones included in other operating systems.

For example any web server running under any operating system may use a weak key created on a vulnerable Debian-based system. Any encrypted connection to this web server (HTTPS) established by any browser can be decrypted. This may be a serious problem for sites that requires a secure connection, like banks or private web sites. Also, if some encrypted connection was recorded in the past, it can be decrypted in the same way.

Another serious problem is for the network security software, like OpenSSH and OpenVPN, that are used to encrypt the traffic to...
protect passwords and grant the access to an administrative console or a private network protected by firewalls. This may allows hackers to gain illegal access to your computer, network or private data traveled over the network, even if you don’t have an affected version of OpenSSL.

The same behavior can be applied to any software or protocol that use SSL, like POP3S, SSMTTP, FTPS, if used with a weak key. This is the case of Tor, software used to offer strong anonymity on the TCP/IP, where about 300 of 1,500-2,000 nodes used a weak key. With 15-20% of weak Tor nodes, there is a probability of 0.34-0.8% circa to build a circuit that has all tree nodes weak, resulting in a full loss of anonymity. The problem may also affect anonymous remailers like Mixmaster that use OpenSSL to create private keys, even if currently there is no official announcement.

Wikipedia Current Events

A suicide bomber kills at least nine people, including 7 police, and wounds 90 in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo.

• The President of the United States George W. Bush arrives in Saudi Arabia to discuss rising fuel prices with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia later announces plans to raise its output by 300,000 barrels a day.

• The runoff election for the 2008 presidential election between the President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change is set for June 27.

• Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden leaves an audio message on the Internet vowing to continue the fight against Israel.

Today in History

1590 – Anne of Denmark was crowned Queen Consort of Scotland in the abbey church at Holyrood Palace.
1865 – The International Telecommunication Union, an international organization that standardizes and regulates international radio and telecommunications, was founded as the International Telegraph Union in Paris.
1900 – Second Boer War: The Siege of Mafeking in South Africa was lifted after 217 days, a decisive victory for the British against the Boers.
1943 – World War II: Royal Air Force Dam Busters successfully deployed bouncing bombs on German dams in Operation Chastise.
1954 – The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education, outlawing racial segregation in public schools because "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal".

Quote of the Day

Nothing happens to anybody which he is not fitted by nature to bear.
~ Marcus Aurelius

Word of the Day
tourniquet n
1. A tightly-compressed bandage used to stop bleeding by stopping the flow of blood through a large artery in a limb.

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