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Monday, January 9, 2017

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## Former Irani president Rafsanjani dies, aged 82

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Yesterday, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, president of Iran from 1989 to 1997, died in hospital in Tehran after a heart attack, Iran's state television reported. He was 82 years old.



Rafsanjani in 2015.  
Image: Siamak Ebrahimi/Tasnim News. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Born in 1934, Rafsanjani studied theology in Qom. He was one of the leaders of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran which overthrew the Shah to make Iran a religious republic. He was the first to hold, for nine years, the speakership of the post-revolution Iranian parliament. Rafsanjani was also appointed top representative of supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on the supreme defense council, effectively Iran's military commander-in-chief in 1988 for the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

The year after the end of Iran-Iraq war, Rafsanjani became president and led the country in post-war reformation and improving relations with other Arab nations. Rafsanjani was elected for a second term and served as president till 1997. In 2005, Rafsanjani participated in the presidential election, but lost to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Rafsanjani joined with the reformers in 2009 when hardliner Ahmadinejad was re-elected as the president. The Guardian Council blocked his candidature for the presidency in 2013, citing his age. Rafsanjani later supported moderate Hassan Rouhani, who won the 2013 election. Rouhani is to re-run in May of this year.

Rafsanjani's burial is scheduled for Tuesday.

## At least 56 killed in Brazil prison riot

Thursday, January 5, 2017

At least 56 inmates, mostly of rival drug gangs, were killed during a Sunday riot in Anisio Jobim Penitentiary Centre, a state prison located in Manaus, Brazil, according to official report. Some of those killed were decapitated.

According to Amazonas state Public Security Secretary Sergio Fontes, members of two criminal organisations, the Família do Norte (FDN) and the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), were involved.

The conflict started on Sunday. It lasted at least seventeen hours until the authorities quelled the riot on Monday at 7 a.m. local time, according to Fontes.

According to Fontes, 74 inmates and twelve officers were held hostage, of whom some were released and others killed. Six decapitated bodies were thrown over the walls.

The Anisio Jobim Penitentiary Centre houses, by reports, several times its supposed capacity of inmates; 2230 on a capacity of 590 according to Reuters, 1224 on 454 according to BBC.

According to officials, during the riot 112 inmates escaped.

Fontes said competition for drug trade was the main reason for the riot. Former National Public Security Force secretary Jose Vicente da Silva said Brazil's prison system mismanagement and economic recession contributed to the riot.

This latest riot is considered the deadliest since the 1992 prison massacre in Carandiru Penitentiary, São Paulo, where 111 inmates were killed, most by the police who stormed the penitentiary.

Within a day of the latest riot at the Anisio Jobim Penitentiary Centre, individual riots at two other Manaus prisons reportedly occurred. At least 72 inmates escaped from one of these prisons.

Brazil has more than 600,000 inmates nationwide.

# Indian actor Om Puri dies

Friday, January 6, 2017



Om Puri in 2010.  
Image: gdcgraphics. (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Indian film actor Om Puri died this morning of heart failure at his Mumbai home, according to reports. He was 66.

Born in Haryana in 1950, Puri trained at the Film and Television Institute of India. He starred in both arthouse and conventional movies, making his debut in *Ghashiram Kotwal* in 1976. He gained national prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. Internationally, he starred in British, Hollywood, and Pakistani projects.

Two weeks ago Puri was looking back on his career on Twitter. "I have no regrets at all. I have done quite well for myself. I didn't have a conventional face, but I have done well, and I am proud of it." Honours include the National Film Award for Best Actor in 1982, the Padma Shri in 1990, and an honorary Order of the British Empire award in 2004.

His wife Nandita and son Ishaan survive him. Tributes have come from colleagues in the film industry, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Friend Ananth Mahadevan, an actor and director, called the death "a personal loss and a loss to cinema because he was truly India's international star."

## Slow-cooking dinosaur eggs may have contributed to extinction, say scientists

Wednesday, January 4, 2017

A joint research team from the University of Calgary, American Museum of Natural History, and Florida State University announced on Monday that the eggs of non-avian dinosaurs such as the duck-billed dinosaur took as long as six months to hatch, far longer than had previously been believed.

Bird eggs incubate for 11 to 85 days, about half the time of most other egg-laying vertebrates. Scientists had thought dinosaur eggs were more like those of modern birds than

modern reptiles, but this long hatch time is far more reminiscent of monitor lizard than magpie.



*Protoceratops andrewsi* display at the American Museum of Natural History.  
Image: Daderot. (CC0 1.0/Public Domain)

The scientists reached this conclusion by comparing CT scans of the teeth of dinosaur embryos of two different species, the *Protoceratops andrewsi*, which had eggs weighing under 200 grams, and *Hypacrosaurus stebingeri*, a type of duck-billed dinosaur that had eggs twenty times that size. They observed the von Ebner lines, patterns that form in vertebrate teeth as they grow, to determine how long the overall developmental process was taking. "They're kind of like tree rings, but they're put down daily," said Florida State University co-author Gregory Erickson. "And so we could literally count them to see how long each dinosaur had been developing." They found the *Protoceratops* embryo was about three months old and the *Hypacrosaurus* about six months.



Skull from a *Protoceratops andrewsi* embryo.  
Image: Dinoguy2. (CC BY-SA 1.0)

According to the research team, this may be one reason why dinosaurs did not recover after the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event 65 million years ago. Both the eggs and any parents guarding them would have drawn the attention of predators and been unable to flee floods or other problems. Guardians might not have been able to move far to find food. This, researchers say, would have put dinosaurs at a disadvantage over animals with quicker-hatching eggs and their mammalian competitors.

Natural History Museum Curator and study co-author Mark Norell cites advances in imaging technology as the reason why this study is being published today: "We know very little about dinosaur embryology, yet it relates to so many aspects of development, life history, and evolution, [b]ut with the help of advanced tools like CT scanners and high-resolution microscopy, we're making discoveries that we couldn't have imagined 20 years ago."

The research team plans to study more fossilized dinosaur embryo skeletons to confirm their findings. Specifically, the current study did not include the skeleton of a velociraptor or any other dinosaur considered closely related to birds.

“ We could literally count [the growth rings] to see how long each dinosaur had been developing. ”

—Gregory Erickson of Florida State University



# Israeli ex-minister Yaakov Neeman dies aged 77

Tuesday, January 3, 2017

Yaakov Neeman, an Israeli politician who served as justice minister and finance minister under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, died in his Jerusalem home on Sunday. He was 77.



Yaakov Neeman in 2012  
Image: Oyoyoy. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Born in 1939 in Tel Aviv, Neeman, alongside future President Chaim Herzog, founded law firm Herzog, Fox and Neeman in 1972. He was appointed finance minister in 1979, a position he held until 1981. He was later appointed justice minister by Netanyahu, based on his legal training and loyalty.

Unusually for a senior minister, he had never served in the Knesset. He held the job for two months before resigning; he was being investigated for perjury. Michael Ben-Yair, Attorney General of the day, launched the probe after Neeman testified at a bribery trial. Neeman was cleared.

Neeman regained the Justice Ministry post in 1997, resigning again the next year. He blamed insufficient support from Netanyahu and resumed law. In 2009 Netanyahu was reelected, again appointing Neeman minister of justice. In 2013 this role passed to the Hatnua party's Tzipi Livni.

Neeman's last resignation, in 2013, came as he was under investigation by the Israel Tax Authority for evading tax via his law company. The Tel Aviv Magistrates Court ultimately acquitted him.

Outside law and politics Neeman was also an industrialist. He worked with Israel Aircraft Industries, airline El Al, and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission. In 1986 he was credited as key to convincing business partner Herzog, who was then president, with pardoning members of the Israel Security Agency; after a bus was hijacked, security forces shot dead two Palestinians once the hijack had concluded.

Neeman specialised in tax law. A fluent English speaker, he had degrees from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and New York University. His wife and six children survive him.

Current President Reuven Rivlin spoke of a good lawyer and advisor whose wisdom he had sought as recently as last week. "The entire Justice Department bows his head", said current

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked. Herzog's son Isaac Herzog, leader of the opposition Zionist Union, spoke of "a tender-hearted, broad-minded and generous man" who "was a mentor and close friend for tens of years."

Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein said Neeman was "a unique figure in our public life, blessed with talent and pleasantness, who believed in his heritage and his people with his entire body." Netanyahu called Neeman "one of the senior jurists in the country, of a sharp mind and a warm Jewish heart."

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## Hollywood sign modified to read 'Hollyweed'

Tuesday, January 3, 2017

The Hollywood sign in Los Angeles, California was modified to read "Hollyweed" on Sunday. Security camera footage shows the perpetrator was dressed all in black, said Sergeant Robert Payan.



The Hollywood sign as it normally appears.  
Image: Oreos. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Christopher Garcia, a spokesperson of the Los Angeles Police Department, said the suspected male offender is being investigated for trespassing rather than vandalism. The sign was not physically damaged; the modification was done using black tarpaulins decorated with signs of peace and heart to alter the "O" to read lowercase "e".

Betsy Isroelit, a Hollywood Sign Trust spokesperson said, "There was obviously recent legislation in California that may have inspired people. But to me, it looks more like a New Year's Eve prank." On November 9, legislators voted in favor of a ballot for legalising recreational use of marijuana in California for the age group of 21 and above.

Previously, on January 1, 1976, Daniel Finegood had vandalised the sign using curtains in a similar manner to read "Hollyweed". As a college student, Finegood had modified the sign for an assignment in art class. Finegood, in 1990, had modified the sign again, signifying a political issue, modifying the sign to read "Oil War" to protest the Persian Gulf War.

The sign was vandalised in 1992 before the US presidential election. Supporters of presidential election candidate Ross Perot altered the sign to read "Perotwood".

The law legalising recreational marijuana is due to come into effect in 2018.

# Gunman kills Burundi environment minister Emmanuel Niyonkuru

Tuesday, January 3, 2017

A gunman shot Burundi environment minister Emmanuel Niyonkuru dead early on Sunday, local time (UTC+2).

Police said they detained a woman accompanying Niyonkuru. The 54-year-old minister was returning home for the night in Bujumbura. Burundi has seen turbulence since President Pierre Nkurunziza sought a third term in early 2015, winning it in a disputed election. Protesters claim Nkurunziza violated a peace deal and the constitution. Since then around 450 have died.



Bujumbura, from file.  
Image: Amakuru. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Nkurunziza tweeted his thoughts were with "the family and all Burundians". Also detained were two security officers watching over Nkurunziza's Bujumbura home, and the manager of a bar the minister attended regularly. Police spokesperson Pierre Nkurikiye and Nkurunziza both called the attack an "assassination".

It is the first time a minister has died in the violence gripping the nation, which had eased in recent months. On Saturday a grenade was thrown into a church 40 km (25 miles) north of Bujumbura, wounding several. Nkurikiye said the church was illegal, and its leader was in custody.

Nkurunziza vowed the killers of Niyonkuru would face consequences.

## UK documentary claims fire weakened RMS Titanic

Tuesday, January 3, 2017

A documentary broadcast on Sunday on the UK's Channel 4 claims the RMS *Titanic* was weakened by a three-week fire before its infamous 1912 sinking.



The wrecked bow of RMS *Titanic*  
Image: U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Institute for Exploration/University of Rhode Island. (CC0/Public License)

More than 1,500 people died when the vessel sank partway between Southampton, England and New York, United States. The disaster has long been thought down to a collision with an iceberg.

*Titanic: The New Evidence* focuses upon research by Irish journalist Senan Molony, who spent 30 years investigating the accident. Based on photographs of RMS *Titanic* at the shipyard that built it in Belfast, Ireland, he suggested fire by spotting large black streaks in the region struck by the iceberg.

The documentary claims expert analysis confirmed these streaks likely signify a large fire in a fuel store. Alleging temperatures of up to 1,000 degrees Celsius, Molony said metallurgists had opined "when you get that level of temperature against steel it makes it brittle, and reduces its strength by up to 75 per cent."

Molony claims "This isn't a simple story of colliding with an iceberg and sinking. It's a perfect storm of extraordinary factors coming together: fire, ice and criminal negligence[....] The fire was known about, but it was played down. She should never have been put to sea." He said J Bruce Ismay, President of the firm behind construction of RMS *Titanic*, ordered the twelve men tasked to attempting to control the fire to avoid informing passengers. Molony also claims the ship backed into its Southampton berth in a bid to hide fire damage.

A 1912 report to the UK Parliament mentioned, but dismissed as a cause, the on-board fire. Ray Boston suggested in 2008 fire may have broken out ten days prior to departure. Boston investigated the disaster for twenty years. Richard De Kerbrech, who wrote several books documenting the accident, said Molony's proposal the fire severely weakened the ship's structure is believable.

Molony said "Nobody has investigated these marks before or dwelled upon them." The photographs, taken by engineers on the ship, only recently came to light when they were sold at auction.

## Tyrus Wong, *Bambi* artist, dies at 106

Monday, January 2, 2017

On Friday, Tyrus Wong, a Chinese-US painter who inspired the style of Disney animated film *Bambi*, died at home of natural causes in Sunland-Tujunga, Los Angeles, according to his daughter Kim Wong.



Born on October 25, 1910 in Guangdong province, China, Tyrus Wong left the country with his father at the age of nine under fake names "Look Tai Yow" and "Look Get". Wong's father taught him the art of calligraphy using water instead of ink on newspapers.



File photo of Tyrus Wong.  
Image: Gwenwynne. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Wong used to work as a houseboy after school in Los Angeles earning half a dollar per day. Wong's principal in junior high school helped arrange a scholarship in Otis Art Institute for his art skills. At Otis, Wong studied Western art and graduated in 1935. In 1934, a landscape of Wong's appeared in an exhibition organised by the Art Institute of Chicago which also featured a Pablo Picasso etching, "Two Nudes". For two years, from 1934 to 1936, he worked for the Works Progress Administration to create paintings for public buildings.

In 1938, Wong began work in the Disney animation studio as an in-betweener — creating hundreds of intermediate images for the appearance of motion. Walt Disney noticed his work. Wong's forest paintings of deer strongly influenced the style of *Bambi*. Wong worked at Disney for only three years before he was sacked in 1941, following an employee's strike in which Wong did not participate. Next year, Wong became a Warner Bros. concept artist, drawing storyboards and set designs for live-action films. Films he drew concept art for included *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *The Wild Bunch*. After more than a quarter century at Warner Bros., Wong retired in 1968. Wong gained US citizenship in 1946.

Wong influenced animator Andreas Deja, the creator of Lilo from *Lilo & Stitch* and Jafar from *Aladdin*. Wong also worked as a janitor, designed greeting cards, and picked asparagus during the lows in his career.

Wong was named a Disney Legend in 2001. Wong is survived by three daughters and two grandchildren.

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