



Top Stories

Iran 'suspends' releasing British soldiers; Shots fired near Iranian Consul in Basra, Iraq

Iran's National Security Council has announced that it will "suspend" the releasing of 15 British sailors and marines detained by Iranian forces on March 23, 2007.

School children and teachers taken hostage in Philippines

The head of a day care centre in Manilla, Philippines, has boarded a bus containing 32 children and 2 teachers from the centre and is currently holding them hostage, demanding better education rights and better housing for them.

Featured story

Mass wedding held against racism in Belgium

In February, three couples refused to pledge their wedding vows in front of the black alderman of the city of Sint-Niklaas, because of the colour of his skin. So he decided to organise a mass wedding, to send a positive signal against racial discrimination in Belgium.

Wikipedia Current Events

- U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates supports closing the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and moving dangerous inmates elsewhere.
- Powerful tornadoes hit several U.S. states, killing a couple in

Wikipedia Current Events

Oklahoma, a woman in Colorado and a man in Texas.

- King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia describes U.S. presence in Iraq as an "illegal occupation."
- At least 104 Iraqis die as a result of suicide bombings in markets in Shi'ite areas of Baghdad and in the town of Khalis.
- The U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passes a US\$2.9 trillion budget blueprint which results in a surplus after five years but relies heavily on the expiration of the Bush tax cuts to do so. The U.S. Senate passed a similar budget blueprint last week with negotiations to ensue.
- Insurgency in Somalia: Helicopters drop bombs near an insurgent stronghold in Mogadishu just hours after six people die in a gun battle.
- Beef from the United States goes on sale in Japan as a ban imposed due to mad cow disease in the U.S. is lifted.
- The Sri Lanka Navy intercepts 10 Tamil Tiger boats sinking three of them with 16 people estimated to be dead.

2007 Cricket World Cup: West Indies vs New Zealand

New Zealand beat the West Indies by 7 wickets (with 64 balls remaining) in the Super 8 phase in the World Cup at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda.

This was West Indies second game of the Super 8 stage, having already lost to Australia only yesterday. For New Zealand it was their first game in this stage, although they already had two points carried forward from their group stage victory over England.

Toss: New Zealand won, and elected to field first.

Body of alumnus found at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York

The body has been identified as Anson Tripp, 29, of Amherst, Massachusetts. After a subsequent autopsy, the death was declared a suicide.

The body of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute alumnus was found in the South East stairwell of the CII building of the school's Troy, New York campus by a college employee at approximately 10 AM. The former student had driven to RPI that morning from his home in Amherst, Massachusetts.

In a letter to the school community, President Shirley Jackson begins: I am sorry to report that there has been a fatality on the Troy Campus this morning. In order to ensure the safety of all members of the Rensselaer Community and to allow the Troy Police and Public Safety to secure the campus, Rensselaer will cancel all classes and close its offices on the Troy Campus effective 12:00 noon today. All athletic activities will be postponed until further notice.

Initially authorities said the wound was "consistent with that from a gunshot," however authorities have ruled that the broken bones and trauma to the head were sustained during the fall.

Earlier in the day WNYT reported that:

Investigators are not calling this case a homicide. At an afternoon news conference they said there was no weapon found at the scene and they have not determined an exact cause of death. Police say it's possible the victim fell from the ninth floor after being injured somehow. Authorities have not said there was a shooting. However, people in the area reported hearing shots.

Capital News 9 relates that the victim "had severe head trauma, although there is no official cause of death at this point".

The Times Union also reported that:

Troy police spokesman Sgt. John Cooney said the body of an out-of-state, former RPI student in his late 20s was found between the fourth and fifth floor of the George M. Low Center for Industrial Innovation at 10 a.m. by RPI employees...The Troy police emergency response team and Colonie SWAT team are going through the building, which is still occupied with students, faculty and staff, who could be seen looking out of the building. Rensselaer County District Attorney Patricia DeAngelis is also on the scene.

The building has since been evacuated and school president Dr. Jackson (quoted above) urged students and all non-essential staff to also leave campus (except for the dorms).

Iran 'suspends' releasing British soldiers; Shots fired near Iranian Consul in Basra, Iraq

Iran's National Security Council has announced that it will "suspend" the releasing of 15 British sailors and marines detained by Iranian forces on March 23.

"We had decided to release the lady in the group, but with the political ballyhoo by London, this decision will be for the time- being suspended," said Iranian National Security Council Secretary, Ali Larijani. On Wednesday, Iran stated that at least one soldier, 26 year-old Faye Turney, would "be released very soon."

"British leaders have miscalculated this issue. This case may face a legal path" if we are faced with "fuss, and wrong behavior from Britain," added Larijani.

Britain says that they will not negotiate the release of their soldiers saying that there will be "no bargaining."

"The important thing for us is to get them back safe and sound, but we can't enter into some basis of bargaining. What you have to do when you are engaged with people like the Iranian regime, you have to keep explaining to them, very patiently, what it is necessary to do and at the same time make them fully aware there are further measures that will be taken if they're not prepared to be reasonable. What you can't do is end up negotiating over hostages; end up saying there's some quid pro quo or tit for tat; that's not acceptable," said Tony Blair. the U.K.'s Prime Minister.

Iran also stated on Iranian state-run radio that if the United Kingdom goes to the United

Nations Security Council or further freezes relations with the nation, they will further delay the release of the soldiers.

According to the Reuters news agency, the United Kingdom is circulating a 15-page draft statement for approval by the U.N. Security Council "deploring" the continuing detention and endorsing UK's stand that the soldiers "were operating in Iraqi waters as part of the Multinational Force-Iraq under a mandate from the Security Counciland at the request of the government of Iraq. Members of the Security Council support calls for the immediate release of these MNF personnel."

"We are not seeking to put Iran in a corner. We are simply saying, 'Please release the personnel who should not have been seized in the first place,'" said a spokesperson for British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

The sailors and marines from the frigate HMS Cornwall had been inspecting, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1723, a ship that was believed to be smuggling cars into Iraq, though it was subsequently cleared after inspection when Iranian gunboats surrounded the sailors and arrested them at gunpoint.

Shots have been reported to be fired at the Iranian Consul in Basra, Iraq.

The Iranian Consul said that "British soldiers had surrounded [their] office in the southern city and fired shots into the air" calling the incident a "provocative act" and that the incident "could worsen the situation of the British sailors."

Britain stated that the incident did take place but it was a "geographical coincidence" and that

no shots were fired.

"A vehicle approached the rear of one of our convoys. A number of rounds were fired. The vehicles returned fire. Nobody dismounted and the vehicle disappeared. There is absolutely no linkage with the location other than geographical coincidence. There was no encirclement and no rounds were fired in the air," said Major David Gell, a spokesman for the British forces in Basra.

No injuries or casualties have been reported.

U.S. bill to force China raise the value of yuan

Eswar Prasad, a professor at the trade policy from the Cornell University, warns the United States legislators, that their bill could poison the relationship between USA and China.

This warning was given regarding the U.S. bill, which is meant to force China to raise the value of its national currency yuan. Currently yuan has a value, which is about 40% lower than it should be, as stated by the legislators, which gives the Chinese trading companies a huge advantage on the international trading ground.

Professor Prasad, who was a China trade expert and an economist at the International Monetary Fund until late last year, said that this bill would not have a long lasting effect and would not influence the problems the legislators are trying to avoid.

The opinion of the China trade specialist was that the USA should try to collaborate with Chinese officials in order to fix the problem of U.S. trade deficit and the current instabilities in the Chinese economy. The strategy to force the

Chinese Government to do something would only worsen the relationship between the two countries.

The expert's opinion was it was more important to concentrate on the question what framework of the monetary policy could substitute the fixed exchange rate of the Chinese currency, which helped China in anchoring the inflation expectations.

Mr. Prasad added that the best way to stabilize the Chinese economy would be to couple an inflation objective with a flexibility of exchange rate.

The bill needs two thirds of the votes both in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the Senate, in order President George W. Bush would not have the possibility to veto the bill.

Iran Foreign Minister: Britain must admit to trespassing before soldiers are released

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that Britain must admit to illegally entering Iranian waters before the 15 sailors and marines detained by Iran on March 23 are to be released.

"This [situation] can be solved. But they have to show that it was a mistake, that will help us to end this issue. Admitting the mistake will facilitate a solution to the problem," Mottaki said during a summit in Saudi Arabia.

Britain has not yet responded to the comment "By the time HMS Cornwall knew that our forces had been detained unlawfully by the Iranians, they were in Iranian waters, and again military engagement would have put a lot of lives at risk. I think that they

took the right decision"
—Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister

According to a UK government report, the Iranian government initially gave the position of the incident as a location outside Iranian territorial waters. However, on March 24, General Alireza Afshar, Iran's top military general, stated that the sailors were engaged "in illegal and suspicious activities" inside Iranian waterways at the time of their detention and that the sailors "have admitted to violating the territorial waters of the Islamic republic".

After the UK government queried the statement by General Alireza Afshar, the Iranian government gave a revised position for the incident, now placing it inside Iranian territorial waters.

Despite the increased tension, Mottaki stated that officials from Britain will be able to see the soldiers.

"We have accepted that [the request by Britain], there is no problem. Measures are underway [to allow officials to meet] them. They can meet them," said Mottaki.

Meanwhile, the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon called for the release of the soldiers saying "I'd like to see them released."

Ban has a scheduled meeting on Friday morning with Mottaki to discuss the current detainment of the British soldiers and plans to ask for their release.

The sailors and marines, from the frigate HMS Cornwall, had been inspecting, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1723, a ship that was believed to be smuggling cars into Iraq, though it

was subsequently cleared after inspection, when Iranian gunboats surrounded the troops.

In parliament yesterday, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was asked about the rules of engagement for UK forces operating under a UN mandate in Iraqi waters. Blair suggested that "the rules of engagement do allow [UK] forces to take whatever measures are necessary in their own self-defence...I think that [the soldiers] took the right decision and did what was entirely sensible," said Blair in reference to the UK forces not engaging in military combat when first confronted by the Iranians.

Blair also commented on the response by the crew of HMS Cornwall. "By the time HMS Cornwall knew that our forces had been detained unlawfully by the Iranians, they were in Iranian waters, and again military engagement would have put a lot of lives at risk. I think that they took the right decision," said Blair.

NHL: Hecht leads Sabres over Devils

The Devils came into Wednesday night's game trailing the Buffalo Sabres by five points in the Eastern Conference, and with the Pittsburgh Penguins hot on their trail. New Jersey needed the win to close the gap to three points, and to stay ahead of the Penguins. Neither happened, however, as the Sabres defeated the Devils before 18,690 at HSBC Arena in Buffalo, New York.

Just 1:55 into the first period, Jochen Hecht scored his first of two goals, his 18th of the season, assisted by Jason Pominville and Dmitri Kalinin, who would pick up two assists in the game. At 6:42, Scott Gomez responded for the

Devils to tie the game at 1-1. Patrik Elias and Brian Rafalski were credited with assists. In the second period, Buffalo would make it 2-1 at 7:25, when Daniel Paille, assisted by Adam Mair and Teppo Numminen scored. The Sabres scored again at 11:47, when Jochen Hecht would tally his second goal of the game from a pass by Daniel Briere. Dmitri Kalinin was also credited with an assist on the goal. Trailing 3-1, New Jersey came back with their own goal at 13:49, when Paul Martin picked up his third goal of the season, narrowing the deficit to one goal. Ales Kotalik would put the game out of reach at 15:52, when he would beat Martin Brodeur for his 15th goal of the season. Dainius Zubrus, along with Chris Drury, would be given credit for assisting the play. With two seconds remaining in the game, the Devils Zach Parise scored, but it was too late, as the Sabres would hold on for the win.

Martin Brodeur saved 19 of 23 shots faced. Ryan Miller, the 3rd star of the game, stopped 28 of 31 shots faced, accumulating a .903 save percentage in the game.

Philadelphia at New Jersey Fri Mar 30, 2007, 7:30 pm EDT

NY Islanders at Buffalo Fri Mar 30, 2007, 8:00 pm EDT

Final Harry Potter book's cover art released

The publishing companies Bloomsbury (U.K.) and Scholastic (U.S.) released cover art for the seventh Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.

"The structures around Harry show evident destruction and in the shadows behind him, we see outlines of other people," David Saylor, Scholastic's art director, said in a statement describing the U.S.

version. "For the first time, the cover is a wraparound. On the back cover spidery hands are outstretched toward Harry. Only when the book is opened does one see a powerful image of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, his glowing red eyes peering out from his hood."

The children's U.K. version of the cover shows an adult Harry, Ron, and Hermione. The adult U.K. version shows a locket with a serpentine forming an 'S'. It is believed to be a horcrux in which Lord Voldemort stores part of his soul.

The seventh, and final, book is due out on July 21, 2007.

The U.S. covers for the Harry Potter series are drawn by Mary GrandPré. The U.K. covers are drawn by Jason Crockett.

Flaming debris nearly hits LAN airliner

A LAN Airlines Airbus A340 was making its approach into Auckland when incandescent objects flew by at super-sonic speeds. Australian and New Zealand media initially reported that it was debris from a Russian satellite breaking up during re-entry. NASA said it was more likely to be meteors.

The Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand is set to investigate the incident.

North Korea asks for food aid

According to an official for World Food Programme (WFP), North Korea has admitted that the country faces food shortages and needs help. WFP is appealing to donor countries to step up aid, and to the UN to keep food aid outside of the nuclear debate. Food donations dropped dramatically after North Korea carried out its

nuclear test bombing. North Korea's shortage may be approaching 20% of what it needs to feed its people.

Man killed during hooligans clashes in Athens

A 25 year old man was killed during clashes between fans of Olympiacos and Panathinaikos in the suburb of Peania, in east Athens. The victim died at a central hospital from several injuries he suffered. The fight happened prior to a local women volleyball game in Peania. However, witnesses and residents told Alter Channel that the clashes had no relation with the game but were pre-organized by hooligan clubs in the area. The event caused political turbulent in Greece as long as Greek police and the Minister of Public Order have been accused by some media for their failure to prevent fans' clashes.

Senate passes spending bill with withdrawal date

Despite a veto threat from US President Bush, the US Senate today passed a spending bill that includes a time-table for a US withdrawal from Iraq. Passing 51-47, the legislation echoes that passed recently by the House. It sets a goal of pulling all combat troops out of Iraq by the end of March 2008, without explicitly demanding their removal.

Further escalation of sectarian violence in Iraq

A series of bombings in Baghdad and Khalis in Iraq killed as many as 130 people. The areas targeted were mainly Shia and many victims were women and children in market places. Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri al-Maliki condemned the attacks and called for restraint, urging Iraqis to work with security forces to prevent the violence getting out of control.

Today in History

1867 - U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward negotiated the purchase of Alaska for US\$7.2 million from Russia.

1912 - Sultan Abdelhafid signed the Treaty of Fez, making Morocco a French protectorate.

1940 - World War II: Wang Jingwei was installed by Japan as head of the puppet government in China.

1961 - The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, an international treaty aimed against the illicit manufacture and trafficking of narcotic drugs, was signed.

1981 - John Hinckley, Jr. shot and wounded U.S. President Ronald Reagan and three others outside the Washington Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C.

March 30 is Education and Sharing day in the United States (2007); Spiritual Baptist Shouter Liberation Day in Trinidad and Tobago.

Quote of the Day

I have been all men known to history,
Wondering at the world and at time passing;

I have seen evil, and the light blessing

Innocent love under a spring sky.
~ R. S. Thomas ~

Word of the Day

jactitation; n

1. Bragging or boasting, especially in a false manner to another's detriment.
2. (medicine) Restless twitching or tossing in bed.

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