



Top Stories

26 Americans, mostly CIA agents, charged for kidnapping in Italy

On Friday an Italian judge ordered 26 americans, a CIA-led team, to stand trial for kidnapping of Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr in 2003.

North Korea agrees to end nuclear program

North Korea has agreed to end its nuclear program and close down its nuclear facility at Yongbyon within 60 days.

Featured story

Cars big winner as 34th Annual Annie Awards handed out

Cars drove home the big prize last night, from the 34th Annual Annie Awards, while Flushed Away won five awards, the most of the night. The animation industry's highest honor, ASIFA-Hollywood's Annies recognise contributions to animation, and Wikinews was there, capturing moments on the red carpet.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Top Democrats in the U.S. Congress have warned President George W. Bush that he does not have the authority to go to war with Iran.
- Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the current leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, has been wounded in fighting in Baghdad according to Arab TV stations.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Six Colombian legislators are arrested due to alleged links to paramilitary groups including Senator Álvaro Araújo, the brother of Foreign Minister María Consuelo Araújo.
- Al Gore announces plans for Live Earth concerts across seven continents in July 2007 to raise awareness of global warming.
- The Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon claims that the Sudanese government had broken a promise to allow a human rights mission into Darfur.
- An Air Mauritania plane with 79 people on board is hijacked, and lands safely.
- The Iranian government says members of Jundallah were responsible for yesterday's attack in Zahedan, Iran. An Iranian lawmaker accuses the Pakistani government of harboring Jundallah militants.
- The Hamas-led Palestinian government has resigned to make way for a new administration. The Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh remains as caretaker Prime Minister and will select a new cabinet.
- South Korea agrees to resume high level talks with North Korea following the deal over North Korea's nuclear program.
- The United States will build a military communications facility near Geraldton, Western Australia.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Foreign Minister of China, Li Zhaoxing, is visiting Japan hoping to improve bilateral relations between the nations. The Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao will visit Japan in April.
- Chris Ellison, the Australian Minister for Justice, warns anti-whaling protesters and the Japanese whaling fleet they could face questioning over recent clashes in the Southern Ocean. Meanwhile, the crew were evacuated from the largest ship in the Japanese Antarctic fleet, the Nisshin Maru, following a fire.
- The trial of 29 suspects in relation to the 2004 Madrid train bombings begins in Madrid, Spain.
- The European Union plans to set up a single hotline for parents to report missing children.

Harper snubs breakfast club visit to Ottawa; all other Canadian parties represented

CityTV reporter Dwight Drummond accompanied a diverse crew of Toronto public school students to Ottawa, with intentions of meeting Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

While students, part of an inner-city breakfast club, had the opportunity to tour the Parliament Buildings at length, Harper stayed far away from the quick, scheduled hello. He failed to even send an MP in his place, to the event, scheduled as part of Black History Month.

Every other political party with seats in Parliament sent a representative to greet the visitors. Present was the deputy leader of the Liberal opposition party, Michael Ignatieff, and prominent NDP MP Olivia Chow, who is the wife of NDP leader Jack Layton.

While Chow and Ignatieff both hold office in Toronto, where the Citytv broadcasts to, and the Conservatives were shut out of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), even those without self-interest dropped by. Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe spoke to the students, despite the fact his party only runs candidates in Quebec.

City's coverage of the tour focused on what the students did see, rather than what they missed.

Harper seems to have made a regular practice of ignoring or delaying scheduled visits. Canadian Auto Workers union leader Buzz Hargrove mentioned he has yet to talk to the Prime Minister. Hargrove represents over 265,000 workers in every province and territory in Canada.

A weak spot in HIV spotted

Scientists have revealed a place on the outside part of HIV virus that might be vulnerable to antibodies blocking the virus from infecting human cells. This could mean that an anti-HIV vaccine is possible in the future.

According to Peter Kwong, researcher at U.S National Institute of Health (NIH), this study is likely to contribute to finding of HIV's "site of vulnerability" which can be targeted with a vaccine that prevents initial infection.

The team of researchers have made atomic-level images of HIV and revealed the structure of a protein

on the surface of the virus. This protein, called gp120, is bound to an infection-fighting antibody and seems to be susceptible to attacks by this antibody called B12. B12 can broadly neutralize the virus.

Researchers detailed the precise interaction as the virus tries to grab and infect cells sent to protect the body. They have captured an image of how the virus of human immunodeficiency attacks the human cells. Dr. Gary Nabel, an NIH vaccine expert and a co-author of the research, describes this first contact between the virus and the cells as a 'cautious handshake' which then becomes a 'hearty bear hug'. The virus grabs and infects the cells that are aimed at protecting the body.

Then the virus mutates quickly to fight the immune system's attacks as well as to stop antibodies that block the proteins with help of which HIV binds to a cell to infect it.

Scientists agree that a vaccine against AIDS is the only way to stop the pandemic of this disease, but, with all importance of these findings, much work and studies is still needed. This implies that any vaccine against AIDS is still many years away.

The AIDS virus has killed more than 25 million people since it was first detected in 1981. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most severely affected by the epidemic. Approximately 40 million people live with HIV.

About a dozen potential vaccines are currently under development. Two products, one by Merck and one by Sanofi-Aventis, are now in advanced human trials.

Gamespy, IGN award Galactic Civilizations II expansion Editors' Choice

Plymouth, Michigan, United States - This week, independent software developer Stardock released Galactic Civilizations II: Dark Avatar, an expansion to their PC turn-based strategy game Dread Lords. Industry websites IGN and GameSpy responded with Editors' Choice awards, while UGO gave it an A. The expansion had previously been named as one of GameSpy's Most Wanted Games of 2007.

Reviewers cited the significant increase in customization options, better artificial intelligence, and an improvement in graphics quality as decisive factors. UGO's Adam Swiderski noted that "if creating a fleet of death-dealing starships sounds like fun to you (and it really should), this is your dream playground," while GameSpy's reviewer suggested that "after a week of playing Dark Avatar, you may forget Master of Orion altogether." Criticism mostly revolved around "uninspired" ground combat, a too-generic tech tree, and the continued lack of multiplayer support.

The original game received some publicity for its lack of copy protection, but gained far more by the actions of a StarForce forum administrator, who made a post linking to an illegal BitTorrent download of the game. StarForce developer Protection Technology later claimed this to be a poorly-considered attempt to demonstrate the result of not using their software, which is designed to prevent software piracy. The result was a media backlash against the company, including satirical commentary by gaming webcomic/blog Penny Arcade describing the action as "extortion." Its writer, Jerry Holkins, asked that

"publishers distance themselves from a company that has shown such contempt for their industry."

The expansion is available as an online purchase in CD or digital download form through Stardock's gaming subsidiary, TotalGaming.net. A compilation of the original and expansion has also been released as Galactic Civilizations II: Gold Edition and is available in stores, say Stardock. Their retail game releases still contain no copy protection, but online activation is required to download updates.

Air Mauritania Boeing 737 hijacked

A hijacked Air Mauritania Boeing 737 passenger plane has landed on Spain's Canary Islands after making a fuel stop in Western Sahara, officials in Mauritania said today. It was hijacked after the takeoff from the Nouakchott airport.

While on the plane, the man demanded it to be flown to France to seek asylum.

The 71 passengers and eight person crew were let out when the hijacker landed the plane in Las Palmas. Several people were wounded by a gun and the suspect was arrested.

Reports say that it is unconfirmed as to what the man's motive was. Mauritanian police are still investigating.

North Korea agrees to end nuclear program

North Korea has agreed to end its nuclear program and close down its nuclear facility at Yongbyon within 60 days. An international team of inspectors will be allowed into their facilities in exchange for financial and humanitarian aid, along with

economic and energy assistance. The deal was reached during "six party talks" involving North Korea, the United States, Japan, China, South Korea and Russia.

In return, North Korea will receive 50,000 metric tons of fuel oil. If it closes down more facilities, as planned, the country will get 1 million tons eventually. So far there is no agreement on getting rid of North Korea's plutonium stockpile, which is estimated to be sufficient to produce six to eight atomic bombs.

U.S. President George W. Bush called the agreement a "unique deal". "First of all, unlike any other agreement, it brings together all of North Korea's neighbors in the region, as well as the United States" said Bush during a press conference at the White House.

According to Bush, the United Nations also agrees with the terms of the resolution. Washington's former envoy to the United Nations, John Bolton, however, said the agreement undercut UN sanctions.

As a consequence of the development in North Korea's policy, South Korea is now set to resume high-level talks with its northern neighbor. The negotiations will start on February 27, 2007 in Pyongyang and could lead to the delivery of rice and fertilizer to the impoverished North.

Israel to webcast al-Aqsa mosque excavations

Israel's administration press-service has said that webcams are being installed at the holy site of the Al Aqsa Mosque-Temple Mount complex in Jerusalem, to enable people to watch excavations at the site over the Internet.

Users will be able to watch live the

archaeological process and the following construction works from February 15.

Excavations at the site were halted on Sunday after protests by Muslims, who feared that the digging and the construction of a new pedestrian bridge in the area can have a negative impact on the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Qubbat as-Sakhra.

Last week Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas declared the construction and blockade as "hostile measures" against Muslims. Israeli authorities say that these worries are groundless. They also accuse "irresponsible elements" of manipulating Muslim sentiment in order to gain political mileage.

The Internet broadcast is to be set at the official website of the Israel Antiquities Authority, the department responsible for archaeological research within the country. Currently the site includes a three-minute video that explains in English the essence of the project in interpretation of the main archaeologist of Israel – Dr. Gideon Avni, the director of the Excavations and Surveys Department of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

BaselWorld Fair 2007 to open its doors in April

The year 2007 marks the meeting of the major representatives of the watch and jewelry industry at BaselWorld Show, Basel, Switzerland. The Show will take place in the period of April 12 - 19, 2007. The international event is to attract over 2000 companies from 45 countries and about 90,000 visitors.

At present day the luxury goods business holds quite strong

positions in the world industry and is still developing at high rates due to appropriate economic climate. Thus, BaselWorld is perceived by watch and jewelry producers and their partners as favorable new grounds for their further development.

BaselWorld is organized annually by MCH Swiss Exhibition (Basel) Ltd with a purpose to provide new business opportunities for the participants who are expected to exhibit their latest products in the exhibition area of about 160,000 m2. Visitors come to BaselWorld to keep aware of the current trends of watch and jewelry making, while retailers and wholesalers discover new partners and strengthen their links with well-established ones.

The exhibition is divided into product sectors presented in the six exhibition halls, among them there are the Hall of Universe and the Hall of Elements. This year the management of the Show has taken care of updating and redecorating the design of the halls.

All the participants of the event will be able to expand their business contacts beyond the fair in the BaselWorld Village located nearby. The 'village' comprises special facilities for partners to discuss their matters in informal atmosphere.

Australian PM visits New Zealand

The Australian Prime Minister (PM), John Howard has arrived in New Zealand today for various duties.

While in New Zealand Mr Howard will talk to the New Zealand PM, Helen Clark; participate in a joint New Zealand and Australian CEO conference at Wellington's Victoria University; open the new high

commission for Australia in Thorndon; lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior; and talk to the leader of New Zealand's opposition party, National, John Key.

Ms Clark has said that their talks will cover various topics, including trade, global warming, problems in the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and the settling of Tonga, and about New Zealand's apples continuing to be banned in Australia. They will also talk about other regional, and international topics. Keith Locke, Green party member, is urging that Ms Clark talks to Mr Howard about sensitive issues, including urging Australia to withdraw from Iraq, release David Hicks from Guantanamo Bay, and Australia not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. Mr Howard said, "We remain quite concerned about Fiji and will compare notes and talk about that as well as other bilateral issues."

Mr Howard said that the relationship between himself and Ms Clark are good. "We put aside any ideological differences we might have and we focus very much on getting good results." He also said that the relationship between Australia and New Zealand "...has got a lot of history, it has got a lot of common culture, it has got a lot of common sporting endeavour. But, like all close relationships, if you take them for granted they tend to fray at the edges over time."

Mr Howard will return to Australia on Friday.

U.S. general to head NATO forces in Afghanistan

General Dan McNeil, the highest-ranking U.S. general, will soon lead NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Following a year of increasing

violence in the south of Afghanistan, NATO forces began to attack the heartland of the Taliban. NATO Commander General McNeil is expected to enact a more aggressive policy towards militants than his predecessor, British General David Richards. General Richards supported a peace agreement in the city of Musa Qala, but his plan of action failed when an estimated 200 Taliban fighters overran the town on Thursday. McNeil was appointed two weeks after the Defense Department extended the tour of 3,200 10th Mountain Division soldiers.

Col. Tom Collins, a spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force, said that McNeill's arrival and increased troop levels underscored American commitment in Afghanistan. Today there are 26,000 troops in Afghanistan compared to 9,500 troops in 2002. About 14,000 of these troops are under NATO command, 12,000 of whom train Afghan forces in the area. McNeil, who served in Afghanistan in 2002-2003, said "We will quit neither post nor mission until the job is done or we are properly relieved."

Today in History

1249 - Louis IX of France dispatched Andrew of Longjumeau as his ambassador to the Mongol Empire.

1804 - Lt. Stephen Decatur led a raid to destroy the captured USS Philadelphia in Tripoli, denying her use to the Barbary States in the First Barbary War.

1923 - Howard Carter unsealed the burial chamber of Tutankhamun, a Pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt.

1978 - The first computer bulletin board system, CBBS, was established by Ward Christensen during a blizzard in Chicago, Illinois.

February 16 is Statehood Day in Lithuania (1918)

Quote of the Day

The counsels of impatience and hatred can always be supported by the crudest and cheapest symbols; for the counsels of moderation, the reasons are often intricate, rather than emotional, and difficult to explain. And so the chauvinists of all times and places go their appointed way: plucking the easy fruits, reaping the little triumphs of the day at the expense of someone else tomorrow, deluging in noise and filth anyone who gets in their way, dancing their reckless dance on the prospects for human progress, drawing the shadow of a great doubt over the validity of democratic institutions. And until people learn to spot the fanning of mass emotions and the sowing of bitterness, suspicion, and intolerance as crimes in themselves — as perhaps the greatest disservice that can be done to the cause of popular government — this sort of thing will continue to occur. ~ George F. Kennan

Word of the Day

placate; v

1. To calm down a person or situation; to bring peace.

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