



Top Stories

Explosion near Afghanistan base kills 14, U.S. Vice President may have been target

An explosion outside an American military base in Afghanistan occurred as U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney was making a surprise visit.

Scorsese finally scores Oscar gold with "The Departed"

Martin Scorsese's violent epic *The Departed* captured the Best Picture of 2006 at the 79th Annual Academy Awards, held Sunday evening in Los Angeles.

Featured story

Liberals in Quebec gain support over separatist Parti Québécois

Following an upcoming election in Quebec, the Parti libéral du Québec (Liberal Party of Quebec) are in the lead, well ahead of the separatist Parti Québécois (PQ), says a poll done by Montreal based newspaper *Le Devoir*.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The International Criminal Court names Ahmed Haroun, a Sudanese cabinet minister, and Ali Kosheib, a leader of the janjaweed as the first war crime suspects in the Darfur conflict.
- Canada's House of Commons votes not to extend provisions of its anti-terrorism legislation that allows for preventative arrests and forced testimony. (Fox News)

Wikipedia Current Events

- After rumours that authorities were going to raise interest rates in an attempt to curb inflation, the SSE Composite Index of the Shanghai Stock Exchange tumbles 9% from unexpected selloffs, the largest drop in 10 years, triggering major drops in worldwide stock markets.
- After the Chinese market drop, the Dow Jones Industrial Average in the United States drops 416 points amid fears for growth prospects, the biggest one-day slide since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Sell orders are made so fast that a second analysis computer has to be used, causing an instantaneous 200-point drop at one point.
- Advisers to the Food and Drug Administration recommend that the agency approve a Sanofi-Aventis SA bird flu vaccine.
- Israel Defence Forces withdraw from the West Bank town of Nablus, three days after a raid to arrest suspected militants.
- A suicide attack at Bagram Air Base while Vice President of the United States Dick Cheney is visiting kills 23, but the Vice President is not injured. The Taliban claims responsibility, and declares that Cheney was their intended target.
- North Korea and South Korea meet at a ministerial level for the first time since the conclusion of six-party talks about the North Korean nuclear weapons program.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The ambassadors from the United States and Italy to Sri Lanka are injured by mortar fire while visiting eastern Sri Lanka.
- Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea Michael Somare removes Minister for Defence Martin Aini from office over the Julian Moti affair.
- Drought in southwestern China is threatening the drinking water supply of 1.5 million people.
- Guinean general strike, 2007: Unions declare the strike over and urge workers to return to their jobs, following President Lansana Conte's appointment of a Prime Minister acceptable to them.
- The Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court names the former Sudanese minister Ahmed Muhammad Harun and Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb as chief suspects in its investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. The Government of Sudan has announced that it will not hand over the named men to the ICC.

Explosion near Afghanistan base kills at least 19, U.S. Vice President may have been target

A suicide attack at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan at 10:30 a.m. Afghan time has left at least 19 dead reports the Associated Press. President Hamid Karzai's office said 23 people were killed and 20 were injured. Agence France-Pressé has

reported that at least one U.S soldier was killed in the attack. A South Korean soldier was among those killed said the South Korea's defence ministry.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to be a Taliban spokesman, said that Dick Cheney was the target of the attack. Cheney made a surprise visit to the base. He ate breakfast with Major General David Rodriguez, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division and troops. Cheney had been in his room before the explosion occurred. He was quickly escorted to a nearby bomb shelter, where he remained, unharmed, until the situation settled.

Bagram Air Base is located about 47 kilometer about Kabul.

Man United hold on for FA win at Reading

Reading and Manchester United clashed today in a fifth round FA cup replay at the Madjeski Stadium. Neither team fielded a full strength side, with Leroy Lita and Steven Hunt on the bench for Reading, and Christiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney as substitutes for United.

United started the game with a blitz, scoring 3 goals in the first 6 minutes. Gabriel Heinze started the scoring by shooting in a John O'Shea cross. 2 minutes later, Louis Saha received a long ball from Rio Ferdinand and sent the ball into the back of the net, doubling the lead. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer then scored the 3rd, as he beat the offside trap and curled the ball into the net. Reading did not give up the fight, and scored on 23 minutes, when Dave Kitson headed home an Ingimarson cross. The game stayed at the 3-1 scoreline for much of the rest of the game, until 84 minutes, when Leroy Lita scored to force an

edgy finish. Litas powerful header off a Glen Little cross left keeper Edwin Van Der Sar helpless, leaving Reading in sight of extra time. A shot by Brynjar Gunnarsson which rattled of the crossbar could have caused an amazing comeback, but Manchester United were able to hold on, and advance to the sixth round of the FA cup.

Manchester will face Middlesbrough in the next round, who defeated West Bromwich Albion today after a penalty shootout.

US and Italian ambassadors attacked in Sri Lanka

The U.S. and Italian ambassadors to Sri Lanka were "slightly injured" when their helicopters were targeted by mortars on a landing strip in Batticaloa.

The projectiles were fired by the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka's east on Tuesday, officials said.

U.S. ambassador Robert Blake is reported to be "alright", Italian Pio Mariani suffered head wounds from shrapnel. They had already landed and disembarked from their aircraft when the explosions took place.

A spokesman for LTTE said they mistook them for a military target, and have apologized. They blame the military, who they say landed the diplomats in a site used for attacks on the rebels, even this very morning.

The ambassadors were reportedly visiting the area that was recently liberated by the Sri Lankan forces to observe the development activities of the area.

Microsoft to acquire health information search engine

Microsoft decided to buy a health information search engine called Medstory. This is the company's

first step towards an involvement in the health market. The software that Medstory develops involves artificial intelligence techniques which are applied to both medical and health information stored in medical journals, as well as government documents. No additional information on the Medstory purchase was disclosed.

According to Peter Neupert, vice president for health strategy at Microsoft, the acquisition of Medstory represents the first step in assembling technologies which can serve well for the consumer experience in health care.

In 2006 Microsoft bought Azuxxi, which is a clinical health care service system. It searches and displays information about the patient from many sources. The information might be provided by: scanned documents, X-rays and even ultrasound images.

Microsoft decided to make its move into the health care system at a time when many websites, that provide various information on health, started to significantly rise their traffic and receive investments.

The industry analyst and Medstory investor, Esther Dyson, mentioned that the technology provided by Medstory is not just a search engine, it also represents an ontology engine. He also outlined the fact that Microsoft has acquired "some of the best deep technology" in the fast growing field of medical search engines.

Egypt sentences blogger to four years for insulting Islam

An Egyptian blogger, Abdul Kareem Suleiman Amer, known online as Kareem Amer, was sentenced to four years in prison on Thursday for insulting Islam on his weblog.

Blogs had been considered a relatively safe means of expression for citizens of countries with restrictive Islamic laws. Mideast governments have harassed & arrested bloggers before, but Kareem is the first to receive jail time.

Kareem had written about becoming a human rights lawyer and working for the betterment of Muslim and Arabic women; however, the Al-Azhar University expelled him in 2006 for criticizing the school's religious leaders.

He had criticized various Muslim beliefs and suggested that there was no God. The court took special interest in his posting to Coptic blogs, i.e. those run by Egyptian Christians.

His arrest last November inspired rallies in Washington, Rome, Paris, London and Stockholm.

Gamal Eid, the Executive Director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, said that the most repressive regime for blogging had been Tunisia, followed by Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya, which have blocked sites and limited internet access. Expressing surprise at the severity of the sentence given Egypt's recent history, he said it was a "gloomy day for all the advocates of freedom of expression", not only in Egypt but also around the world.

Reporters Without Borders, the Paris-based advocacy group for press freedom condemned the sentence. Pointing out that President Mubarak had promised in 2004 to end prison terms for press offenses, it called the sentence a "message of intimidation" to Egyptian bloggers who, it said, were emerging as an "effective bulwark" against what it called the

regime's authoritarian excesses.

Dress code threats close Peshawar schools

Schools in the city Peshawar, Pakistan were closed for two days at the end of last week after anonymous threats were received warning female students to wear veils in class.

The threats, believed originating from members of the Taliban movement, along with the detention of two would-be suicide bombers before they exploded themselves, raised tensions and closed the schools out of safety concerns for the students.

One of the two suicide bombers was a woman who attempted enter the Koochi Bazaar, a market in Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. Purses carried by women are routinely searched before entering the market. Explosives were discovered in the purse carried by a woman who refused the search and tried to walk away.

New Zealand's state broadcaster plans to dismiss 160 workers

The state broadcaster of New Zealand, Television New Zealand (TVNZ), has announced its plans to fire at least 160 people because they have falling revenue, mainly from their NZ\$9.3 million advertising loss.

A memorandum, or "memo", was circulating the 1,100 employer, TVNZ yesterday from CEO, Rick Ellis, which stated that their "guesstimate" of job losses was around 130-160. 50 of the job losses will be from the news and current affairs department, where a total of 350 people currently work. The numbers are not set in stone, according to a spokesperson for

TVNZ.

The lay-offs have been expected since late last year where he announced it to a parliamentary select committee.

The union which represents some of the staff working at TVNZ, Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union, said that some of the staff are asking themselves how TVNZ will be able to start and manage the new digital 24 hour news channel with fewer staff. They are seeking to talk to TVNZ.

In two weeks time, staff will be asked what they think of the proposed changes, which also includes a top level management restructuring.

Steve Mahery, broadcasting minister, said, "The restructuring of TVNZ is an operational issue, and I expect they'll meet their charter requirements. How they structure the company to achieve this is entirely up to them."

Liberals in Quebec gain support over separatist Parti Québécois

Following an upcoming election in the Canadian province of Quebec, the Parti libéral du Québec (Liberal Party of Quebec) are in the lead, well ahead of the separatist Parti Québécois (PQ), says a poll done by Montreal based newspaper Le Devoir.

The Liberals are at 37%, 28% the Parti Quebecois, and 24% for the Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) (Democratic Action of Quebec).

The Liberals, which is the current government in the province, could win again if they had a 6-point lead, says Jean-Marc Leger,

president of Leger Marketing.

Quebecers were also asked who is leading the best campaign; 31% for Jean Charest, 25% Mario Dumont, and 14% for André Boisclair.

Jean Charest, who is the leader of the Quebec Liberals, wants Quebec to stay in Canada while the Parti Québécois, lead by André Boisclair, wants to separate completely. If the PQ were to win, the province could separate from Canada. However, the federal government could step in if it was immediate. Mario Dumont, who is leader of the Action démocratique du Québec, wants Quebec to stay in Canada.

However, more Quebecers want to stay in Canada then to separate. About 56% say no and 44% say yes. According to past polls, the percentage of Quebecers wanting to separate from Canada has not changed rapidly.

The official voting day is March 26.

Today in History

- 364 - Valentinian I was elected Roman Emperor by officers of the Roman military at Nicaea, Bithynia.
 - 1838 - Lower Canada Rebellion: Robert Nelson, leader of the Patriotes, proclaimed the independence of Lower Canada.
 - 1900 - Second Boer War: The 118-day Siege of Ladysmith was lifted.
 - 1972 - United States President Richard Nixon's visit to the People's Republic of China concluded with the two countries issuing the Shanghai Communiqué, pledging to work toward the full normalization of diplomatic relations.
 - 1986 - Prime Minister Olof Palme of Sweden was assassinated in Stockholm.
- February 28 is Peace Memorial Day in Taiwan.

Quote of the Day

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
 See how these names are feted in the waving grass
 And by the streamers of the white cloud
 And whispers of the wind in the listening sky.
 The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
 Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
 Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun
 And left the vivid air signed with their honour.
 ~ Stephen Spender ~

Word of the Day

suppliant; n
 One who pleads or requests earnestly.

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