



Top Stories



Mauritanian refugees begin returning home from Senegal

Venezuelan police arrest bank robbers, free hostages



Police have arrested four bank robbers who took as

many as sixty hostages in a two-day siege after the robbery was botched.

Featured story

Anonymous plans to protest Church of Scientology on February 10

The Internet-based group "Anonymous" released a new



video on YouTube Monday, announcing international

protests outside Church of Scientology centers set for February 10.

Wikipedia Current Events

Iran's judiciary sentences 54 Baha'i religion followers for 'anti-

Wikipedia Current Events

regime propaganda'.

•Snow storms cuts the Beijing-Guangzhou railway and paralyzes China's Chunyun

•The United States House of Representatives passes a \$146 billion economic stimulus package.

•Venezuelan gunmen hold 30 hostages in a bank in Guárico state before fleeing the scene in an ambulance with several hostages. The gunmen are subsequently captured.

•United States presidential election, 2008: Voters in Florida go to the polls to determine presidential nominees.

•Hillary Clinton wins the Democratic Party primary election with no delegates awarded from, nor much campaigning in, the state.

•John McCain wins the Republican Party primary ahead of Mitt Romney.

•Rudi Giuliani announces he will drop out and endorse John McCain.

•Near-Earth asteroid 2007 TU24 passes Earth at a distance of 334,000 miles (537,500 km), and observations reduce the estimate of its size from 2,000 feet (610 m) diameter to 800 feet (250 m).

•A missile strike by the Pakistan Army in North Waziristan kills ten suspected militants.

•A car bomb in Thenia, Algeria kills at least three people.

Grass fires break out in wide area of Texas

In the U.S. state of Texas, grass fires spread across 2,000 acres of land, destroying at least two dozen structures in the process. The fires were fueled by gusty winds of up to 60 miles per hour.

No injuries or deaths have been reported. Residential areas in Tarrant, Wise, Parker, Nolan, Burnet, and Callahan counties were evacuated as firefighters struggled to put out the flames. Fires were also reported in Dallas, Denton, and Collin counties. Many of these fires have now been contained, officials say.

In response to the fires, Texas governor Rick Perry activated the state's Emergency Operations Center at the highest level. In addition, 152 counties instituted burn bans.

Military aircraft were sent to the area to help douse the fires. According to officials, two CH-47 Chinook helicopters are on standby in Grand Prairie, waiting for the winds to slow down before taking to the skies with buckets of water. Six UH60 Blackhawk helicopters are on standby in Austin and San Antonio as well.

Sharolyn Holder, a North Texas resident, said, "My house is sitting back there with fire all around it. My son's house has already burned some. It's just so stressful."

Craig Civale of WFAA-TV said that a lack of water contributed to the

spread of the fires. "We've seen areas where fire trucks simply ran out of water, tanker trucks ran out of water, and had to stop battling the blazes at these homes; and pretty much watch them burn down until more water came to the area," he said.

Officials in Tarrant County believe that a fire in Benbrook may have been started by a cigarette thrown onto an interstate highway.

Parts of U.S. Route 377 and Interstate 35 were closed due to the fires.

The heavy winds had other adverse effects for Texas residents. Around 75,000 homes in the area were reported to be without power in the afternoon due to the wind knocking down several power lines.

Some flights at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport were delayed more than half an hour or cancelled after the wind forced officials to limit use of the runways.

Venezuelan police arrest bank robbers, free hostages

The four gunmen who were holding as many as 60 hostages in a bank in Altigracia de Orituco, Venezuela, cut a deal with police that allowed them to drive off with five hostages after freeing the remaining.

The Governor of Guárico Eduardo Manuitt, in explaining the deal to media, said that the robbers would not be followed.

However, after the ambulance had been allowed to drive to the outskirts of Caracas, police surrounded the vehicle and arrested all four of them. The five hostages are said to have been

freed, though there are no reports of injuries as of yet.

"This nightmare is over"
—Gov. Eduardo Manuitt

After the ambulance was surrounded, roadside negotiations were begun, Manuitt told state television. The gunmen released three hostages before surrendering their weapons, after which they were ordered to the ground and arrested. "This nightmare is over," he said.

The four suspects are said to be male and all in their twenties. They were armed with pistols and a hand grenade. They had threatened to kill the hostages if police stormed the bank.

Earlier estimates thought there were 30 hostages, but freed hostages have suggested there were as many as 60. Among the hostages were a pregnant woman, a two-week-old infant and several children.

During the standoff, hostage Vanessa Saavedra managed to call Colombia's Caracol Radio by cell phone, saying: "We don't want them to shoot ... We don't want them to open fire. Please."

The siege has called attention to the problem of crime in Venezuela. The country has been facing one of the highest rates of gun-related deaths in the world. President Hugo Chávez has made promises to deal with the problem.

Indonesia reports 100th human death from bird flu

Two people, a nine year old boy and a 23-year-old woman from Jakarta in Indonesia, have died from the H5N1 Avian Flu virus marking the country's 100th death from the disease. Both died on

Sunday, January 27.

"The woman died yesterday, but we just received the results that she's positive with bird flu. The total number of deaths is now 100 out of 124 positive cases," said National Bird Flu Center spokesman, Joko Suyono.

Nearly half of all humans that died from H5N1, have been from Indonesia. Nearly half of those infected in the country received the virus from poultry that was contaminated with the virus.

So far, 223 people from 13 different nations around the world have died from H5N1.

Mauritanian refugees begin returning home from Senegal

Mauritanian refugees stuck in Senegal for nearly two decades after fleeing ethnic clashes in their home country have begun returning to Mauritania under a U.N.-sponsored program. But many do not want to return.

There were goodbye ceremonies and welcoming ceremonies attended by officials on both sides of the Senegal River as more than 100 former refugees were ferried on motorized pirogues.

A spokesman for the United Nations refugee agency, Alphonse Munyaneza, explained international funding will help pay for resettlement.

"Each refugee returning back to Mauritania will receive a piece of land equivalent to 140 square meters for establishing a house. UNHCR and the government of Mauritania will provide construction material so that they can build a house," explained Munyaneza. "We will provide three months of food ration. We will

provide a tent also."

"Each refugee returning back to Mauritania will receive a piece of land equivalent to 140 square meters for establishing a house."
—Alphonse Munyaneza

Mauritanian refugee children broke out in song and laughter when officials arrived at their camps close to the border to get the process going.

There are more than 20,000 Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. Officials say the return program will extend over 18 months.

One of those happy to go is Haddy Sy. She says she left Mauritania after she was beaten up. This took place during a wave of ethnic violence that began in Arab Moor-dominated Mauritania in 1989 and escalated into border clashes, forcing tens of thousands of black, mostly ethnic Fula, Mauritians into exile.

In the late 1990s, more than 30,000 refugees returned by their own means and some U.N. assistance.

Sy says she is leaving behind many good things in Senegal, including a peaceful setting, but that she is still happy to return to her home country.

Since taking office last year, the government of the elected, post-coup President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi has been making efforts to bring home the refugees, including several thousand more in Mali.

But many in Senegal do not want to return home, like Yaraah Sow, who lives in the Dagana refugee camp about 400 kilometers northwest of Dakar.

He says he is still very bitter about what happened nearly 20 years ago. He said his father, who was a civil servant, was attacked by a mob and died of internal bleeding at the gates of a hospital after doctors refused to treat him.

Sow accuses the military of seizing all his family's property. He says that two of his younger brothers died on the trip to Senegal. He says his children are now going to school and that they are better off in Senegal.

One of the refugee leaders, Mohamed Ali Sow, who left when he was 10, says he is studying at a university in Senegal to become a lawyer to defend the rights of chased out Mauritians.

He says the return program has been rushed, because he says people who had their property seized, houses burned, and jobs taken away, should have guarantees these will be restored. He says until then, he does not think it is wise to go back.

Bank robbers take hostages in Venezuela

Updated story above.

On Monday, four men entered a branch of Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria in Altigracia de Orituco, Venezuela, a small city south-east of the capital Caracas. Allegedly, the bank heist did not go as planned, and the men became trapped in the bank with police outside. In the resulting standoff, approximately 30 employees and customers were taken hostage.

Today, after the standoff has lasted more than 24 hours, with a helicopter hovering above, the bank is surrounded by hundreds of

heavily armed police, television crews, and the victims relatives. The gunmen released a few hostages on Monday evening and two employees escaped, including a security guard who ran from the building as the gunmen fired shots at him.

"We are in real danger. They can kill us. Please help."
—Unknown hostage

The hostages, which are said to include a pregnant woman and small children, occasionally appear in the windows of the bank, ostensibly to show relatives that they are still alive. One hostage displayed a placard in of the windows. It read, "We are in real danger. They can kill us. Please help."

The hostage takers are demanding an ambulance in which they wish to be allowed to drive away with their stolen goods and a handful of hostages. Negotiators said they had turned down an offer to let them surrender in front of live cameras with guarantees that police would not fire a shot.

Police cut off running water to the bank, but have made deliveries of food, drinking water, and diapers. Some hostages have sent text messages to relatives and one even managed to place a phone call to regional radio station.

Speaking on Unión Radio, local security official Manuel Granadillo said, "They appear to be new at this. They could do something crazy and then anything could happen."

State-run media has largely ignored the standoff, while other outlets have been giving frequent and detailed reports. Crime is a

growing political issue in Venezuela. Opinion polls have indicated that it is the number one concern of the population.

Bush delivers final State of the Union address

President George W. Bush has delivered his seventh and final State of the Union Address to Congress and the American people. In the speech he urged the American public to support his Iraq policies and called on other politicians to take action to boost the U.S. economy.

Since 2008 is a presidential election year and he has already served the Constitutional maximum of two four year terms, he may not run again. Since State of the Union addresses are traditionally only given yearly in January, he will likely not give another one.

Rather than focus on the past, Bush talked at length about the issues that will shape his legacy - starting with the war in Iraq and his decision to send in an additional 30,000 U.S. troops.

"Some may deny the surge is working, but among the terrorists there is no doubt," he said. "Al-Qaeda is on the run in Iraq, and this enemy will be defeated."

About half the speech dealt with foreign policy, with a heavy focus on the Middle East. President Bush talked about his hopes for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, and issued a challenge to the government of Iran.

"Come clean about your nuclear intentions and past actions, stop your oppression at home, and cease your support for terror abroad," he said. "But above all, know this: American will confront

those who threaten our troops, we will stand by our allies, and we will defend our vital interests in the Persian Gulf."

Bush also spoke of his determination to protect the American economy. He acknowledged many Americans worry the slowdown in economic growth could evolve into a full-blown recession, and he sought to calm their fears.

"In the long run, Americans can be confident about our economic growth," he said. "But in the short run, we can all see that growth is slowing."

The president called on Congress to pass the economic stimulus package the administration worked out with Democratic and Republican leaders in the House. And he urged lawmakers to re-authorize a program that enables the government to secretly monitor communications between Americans and terror suspects abroad without a prior court warrant.

On these and other matters, Bush said everyone should put politics aside.

"In this election year, let us show our fellow Americans that we recognize our responsibilities and are determined to meet them," he said. "And let us show them that Republicans and Democrats can compete for votes and compete for results at the same time."

Two of the Democrats running for their party's presidential nomination — Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama — were in the chamber for the president's speech.

The official Democratic response to

the address was delivered by Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius.

"Tonight's address begins the final year of this presidency, with new leaders on the horizon and uncertainty throughout our land," she said. "Conditions we face, at home and abroad, are results of choices made and challenges unmet."

Ole Miss player arrested; charged with selling steroids

Jared Foster, a transfer quarterback with the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) Rebels football team, was arrested yesterday in Oxford, Mississippi and charged with selling steroids.

Rebels head coach Houston Nutt said that Foster will not be allowed to remain with the team.

Foster was arrested for alcohol possession by a minor and contributing to the delinquency of a minor in 2006 while a star player for Madison Central High School in Madison, Mississippi. Prosecutors agreed then not to try the case on the conditions that Foster help police in a steroid investigation and stay out of trouble.

Anonymous plans to protest Church of Scientology on February 10

The Internet-based group "Anonymous" released a new video on YouTube Monday, announcing international protests outside Church of Scientology centers set for February 10. The video "Call to Action" uses the same computer synthesized voice as a previous video titled "Message to Scientology", which was posted to YouTube last Monday. The "Message to Scientology" video has been viewed over 1,400,000 times, and the "Call to Action"

video has already been viewed over 237,000 times.

Anonymous is taking action against the Church of Scientology in response to what it sees as suppression of freedom of speech on the Internet. The group was first motivated after the Church of Scientology issued a copyright infringement claim to YouTube regarding a promotional video of Scientologist Tom Cruise speaking about his beliefs and using Scientology jargon. The Church of Scientology also issued a legal complaint to the website Gawker.com which is also hosting the video, but Gawker has stated it will not take the video down because it is newsworthy.

Anonymous set up a movement called "Project Chanology" to coordinate their efforts, and took down several Church of Scientology websites through denial-of-service attacks. Members of Anonymous have also participated in prank calls to Church of Scientology centers, as well as protests or "raids" outside Scientology buildings, and have posted some of their exploits to YouTube....

Anonymous is a collective of individuals united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing. ...

—Anonymous, "Call to Action".

In the "Call to Action" video, Anonymous denies that they are composed solely of "super hackers", stating "Anonymous is a collective of individuals united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing, that someone must bring light to the darkness, that someone must open the eyes of a public that has slumbered for

far too long." The video goes on to state "We want you to be aware of the very real dangers of Scientology," citing what they term "gross human violations".

Specific controversial events in Scientology history are cited in the video, including Operation Freakout and Paulette Cooper, and Operation Snow White. Operation Freakout was the name of a Church of Scientology operation whose goal was to "get P.C. [Paulette Cooper] incarcerated in a mental institution or jail or at least to hit her so hard that she drops her attacks." Paulette Cooper had written a book critical of Scientology called The Scandal of Scientology. Operation Snow White was the name of a Church of Scientology operation where members of the Church's secretive Guardian's Office infiltrated United States government agencies in Washington, D.C. including the I.R.S. The F.B.I.'s investigation into Operation Snow White led them to discover the planning of actions taken against Paulette Cooper.

The video concludes by inviting the viewer to "take up the banner of free speech" and protest with Anonymous world wide. In an email to CNET News, Anonymous stated that cities where unknown activities are planned on February 10 include New York City, Montreal, Houston, London, Melbourne, and Los Angeles.

On Friday, two spokespersons for the Church of Scientology commented on the recent actions of Anonymous. A spokesman told News.com.au "These types of people have got some wrong information about us," and Church spokeswoman Yvette Shank told Sun Media that she regarded members of Anonymous as a

"pathetic" group of "computer geeks". On Monday, Radar reported that the Church of Scientology has asked the U.S. Attorney General's office in Los Angeles, the F.B.I., and the LAPD to start a criminal investigation of possible criminal activity related to the Internet attacks. A source told Radar that the Church of Scientology is arguing that the Internet attacks are a form of "illegal interference with business." Radar also reports that the Church of Scientology is emphasizing its status as a religious organization in the United States, in order to assert that the Internet attacks can be classed as hate crimes....

I'm mainly concerned because you shouldn't be doing things that are illegal, you just shouldn't. ...

—Mark Bunker, XenuTV.com.

On Saturday, Mark Bunker of the website XenuTV.com posted a video to YouTube criticizing the illegal actions of Anonymous and suggested legal methods for them to retaliate against the Church of Scientology, including peaceful protesting, writing letters to their government representatives, and persuading the United States government to take away the Church of Scientology's tax exempt status. In the video, Bunker states "I'm mainly concerned because you shouldn't be doing things that are illegal, you just shouldn't. It's not morally right, and it's not right when Scientology does it, it's not right when we do it." Bunker's video post has been viewed over 156,000 times. On Sunday, Bunker posted a follow-up video to YouTube where he gives advice to Anonymous on how to peacefully picket. He also provides viewers

with resources and weblinks to more information on how to hold a peaceful protest. He concludes this video by imitating Obi-Wan Kenobi's Jedi mind trick technique and voice from Star Wars, stating "And if I may, as Obi-Wan, tell you: You will do nothing illegal".

Today in History

1649 – English Civil War: King Charles I was beheaded for high treason in front of the Banqueting House in London.

1826 – The Menai Suspension Bridge connecting the island of Anglesey and the mainland of Wales, one of the world's first modern suspension bridges, opened.

1930 – The world's first radiosonde, a device attached to weather balloons to measure various atmospheric parameters, was launched by meteorologist Pavel Molchanov in Pavlovsk, USSR.

1948 – Nathuram Godse shot Mahatma Gandhi, political and spiritual leader of India and the Indian independence movement, to death with a Beretta pistol at Birla House in Delhi.

1968 – Vietnam War: Forces of the Viet Cong and the Vietnam People's Army launched the Tết Offensive on Tết (Vietnamese New Year's Day) to strike military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam.

Quote of the Day

We do not see faith, hope, and charity as unattainable ideals, but we use them as stout supports of a nation fighting the fight for freedom in a modern civilization.

Faith — in the soundness of democracy in the midst of dictatorships.

Hope — renewed because we know so well the progress we have made.

Charity — in the true spirit of that grand old word. For charity literally translated from the original means love, the love that understands, that does not merely share the wealth of the giver, but in true sympathy and wisdom helps men to help themselves.
~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

Word of the Day

dichotomous adj

1. Dividing or branching into two equal pieces.

About Wikinews
Word of the Day http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page
About Wikinews Print Edition
For more information about Wikinews Print Edition visit: http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Print

About Wikinews
We are a group of volunteer journalists whose mission is to create a diverse community where citizens from around the globe (including you) can collaborate to report the news on a wide variety of current events. By making our content perpetually available for free redistribution and use, we hope to contribute to a global digital commons.
Got news and no computer? Call the Wikinews Hotline +1-866-653-4265 (toll-free in the U.S.) +1-202-742-5918 (outside the U.S.) +44-871-218-6397 (U.K. / Europe)
License
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License. Articles published in this Print edition were created by Wikinewsies. Other content released under the GNU Free Documentation License.
To view a copy of the CC-BY license, visit: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/ or send a letter to Creative Commons 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor San Francisco, California, 94105, USA
To view a copy of the GFDL, visit: http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html
Wikipedia Current Events http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Current_events Today in History http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page Quote of the Day http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page