



Top Stories

NATO and Iran talk for first time in 30 years

Last week, NATO and Iran had contact for the first time in thirty years, NATO officials stated Thursday. The visit to Brussels by the Iranian diplomat was the first "since the regime of the Shah" collapsed by the Ayatollah Khomeini led Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Irish economy sees biggest contraction in decades

The economy of Ireland shrank by 7.5% in the last quarter of 2008 compared to the same period a year previously, according to official statistics. The decline is the worst in decades. For the entire period of 2008, the economy contracted by 2.3%, the first loss since 1983.

Dam in Indonesia bursts, dozens killed

On Friday, a dam burst in a southwestern suburb of Jakarta, Indonesia, killing at least 52 people and displacing a further 1,490. Officials warn that the death toll will likely increase.

Four-storey building collapses in Lagos, Nigeria; two dead

A residential four-storey building collapsed in Lagos, Nigeria on Tuesday. At least two people have died, and another fourteen people have been rescued from the debris.

Wikipedia Current Events

Serial Shooter Dale Hausner is sentenced to six death sentences for six murders between 2005 and 2006.

- All six people in a recent helicopter accident are discovered dead in Turkey.
- A flash flood and the Situ Gintung dam's failure kill at least 58 people in Tangerang, Indonesia.
- A suicide attack kills at least 50 people and injures 100 others in Jamrud, Pakistan.
- A radioactive lead ball is missing from a deconstructed factory in Tongchaun, Shaanxi, China.
- Russia will establish a military force to protect its territorial claims in the Arctic.
- The Lancet accuses Pope Benedict XVI of "distorting...science" in his argument against the use of condoms.
- The United Kingdom's economy shrank by 1.6% in the fourth quarter of 2008.
- Corsican nationalist Yvan Colonna is sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering Corse-du-Sud Prefect Claude Érignac in 1998.

Courts uphold firing of Pennsylvania cop who lost sense of smell

An appeals court said a Pennsylvania police department was justified in firing an officer

because he lost his sense of smell in an off-duty motorcycle accident.

The court said the Coller Township firing was valid because police need their sense of smell to detect substances like drugs, alcohol, hazardous materials, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled.

David Agostino, 44, suffered anosmia, a partial or full lack of sense of smell, due to head trauma suffered from a 2004 crash in Ohio. Officials in Coller Township, a Pittsburgh suburb in Allegheny County, honorably discharged him because they were worried the condition created a risk.

Attorneys for Agostino unsuccessfully argued a sense of smell is not part of the physical exam for prospective police officers, and that there was no statute or police regulation that cited lack of sense of smell as grounds for firing a police officer.

But during the court hearing, a fellow officer testified Agostino could not smell the odor of marijuana and alcohol after pulling over a motorist following a high-speed chase. His police chief also said he failed to smell leaking gas from an elderly resident's furnace.

"(The chief) explained that Agostino's inability to smell if the furnace was leaking gas created a hazardous situation, placing Agostino, the resident and the public in danger because 'it could

have possibly caused an explosion," Judge Bernard L. McGinley wrote in the decision.

Agostino, of South Fayette Township, could not be reached for comment by media reports after the decision by the three-judge Commonwealth Court panel.

Study of soft cheese wins oddest book title award

The 2009-2014 World Outlook for 60-milligram Containers of Fromage Frais has won the Diagram Prize, the British award for the year's oddest book title.

The Philip M. Parker study about the future of soft cheese beat out the runner-up, Baboon Metaphysics, for the annual humorous literary award.

Other contestants this year included the medical manual Curbside Consultation of the Colon and the hobby handbook Strip and Knit With Style.

The Parker book was an 188-page study of the global retail market for fromage frais, which literally means "fresh cheese". Fromage Frais got 32 percent of the 5,034 votes cast by the public for the award. Baboon Metaphysics received 22 percent.

Horace Bent, who runs the competition, said he thought one of the more risqué titles would win because four of the last seven winners had vulgar titles: High Performance Stiffened Structures, Living with Crazy Buttocks, The Big Book of Lesbian Horse Stories and If You Want Closure in Your Relationship, Start With Your Legs.

"But I'm thrilled that the public steered clear of smut and bestowed the 'odd title' crown on Prof Parker's worthy winner, and

turned the supermarket chiller into the Petri dish of literary innovation," Bent said in a statement.

The Diagram Prize was first awarded in 1978, and has been voted on by the public since 2000. Previous winners include People Who Don't Know They're Dead: How They Attach Themselves to Unsuspecting Bystanders and What to Do About It; Bombproof Your Horse; and How to Shit In The Woods: An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art.

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton says America helps fuel illegal drug trade

United States secretary of state, Hillary Clinton stated in an interview on Mexican radio that Americans are helping to fuel the illegal drug trade between the U.S. and Mexico. Clinton was on a two day tour of the nation.

"Our insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade. Our inability to prevent weapons from being illegally smuggled across the border to arm these criminals causes the death of police officers, soldiers and civilians. I feel very strongly we have a co-responsibility," said Clinton.

Clinton also gave thanks to and praised the effort Mexico was putting forth to stop the flow of drugs over the border. "Clearly, what we have been doing has not worked and it is unfair for our incapacity...to be creating a situation where people are holding the Mexican government and people responsible."

Mexico's president, Felipe Calderon responded by saying that "binational cooperation in this area should be strengthened." Mexico has used troops in some towns in

an attempt to regain control of the cities, which has resulted in many gun battles with drug cartel members and Mexican troops. Ongoing trucking disputes between the U.S. and Mexico have also contributed to an already tense sit

Increased drug related violence in towns and cities on the U.S.-Mexico border has claimed more than 6,000 lives since 2008.

North Korea missile launch looks imminent

North Korea may be planning to launch one of its Taepodong-2 missiles in the next few days, having announced earlier that it intends to put a communications satellite into space.

U.S. intelligence officials announced Wednesday that a missile had been rolled out to a pad at its Musudan launch facility. It is unknown whether the missile is in fact carrying a satellite, or if a warhead may be in its place. The missile is reported to be capable of carrying either. Only after a post-launch analysis will officials be able to determine what the missile may have been carrying.

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented that were North Korea to launch a missile, they would be in violation of a United Nations Security Council resolution, and that the U.S. would voice its opposition with the U.N. if North Korea went through with the plan.

Fears abound over the possibility of the missile being used in warfare, with the Taepodong-2 rumored to be able to reach the U.S. states of Alaska and Hawaii.

Japan has warned that it will shoot down any such missiles launched by North Korea with its U.S.-made

Patriot anti-missile defense system.

South Korea's response was less specific, with chief nuclear envoy Wi Sung-lac saying "If North Korea launches [a] rocket, certain countermeasures are unavoidable."

The previous launch of a Taepodong-2 missile was in 2006, which ended in failure after it went out of control and was destroyed.

Turks and Caicos Islands Premier resigns

Michael Misick, the Premier of the United Kingdom overseas territory the Turks and Caicos Islands, resigned Monday from his post in the West Indies territory. He is accused of corruption. Oliver Galmo Williams, a member of Misick's Progressive National Party, has been sworn in to replace him as Premier.

Misick had previously announced plans to resign on March 31 but says he wants to allow his successor more time to form a government, even though the UK intends to suspend most of the constitution. A retired British judge is leading a Commission of Inquiry, with an interim report pointing to a "high probability of systemic corruption." Misick also called the suspension of the constitution "tantamount to being re-colonised".

"I still think I have the majority of support in the public and in the country but suddenly the majority of elected members, who represent voters at this time, wanted me to step aside, therefore I think I have done the honourable thing. At this time the country needs a unified government. I did not want to hold on to leadership at all costs," he told the Caicos

Free Press.

British Governor Gordon Wetherell is expected to be given power by the UK. Misick, a judge who trained in Britain, is accused of selling state lands to property developers for his own profit.

New Jersey teen faces child porn charges for posting nude photos of herself online

A 14-year-old American girl, living in New Jersey, is facing possible child pornography charges after posting nude photos of herself online.

The teen, who was not identified by media reports due to her age, was charged with possession and distribution of child pornography for posting 30 nude photos of herself on MySpace. If convicted, she may have to register as a sex offender.

The Passaic County Sheriff's Office investigated the teen for about a month before filing the charge. They were informed after the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children tipped off a state task force about the photos.

The girl, who posted the photos online for her boyfriend, could also face up to 17 years in prison, although authorities said such a lengthy sentence is unlikely. She has been released on her mother's custody.

"We consider this case a wake-up call to parents," said Bill Maer, Passaic County sheriff's spokesman. Authorities said there could be other arrests like this one in the future.

Maureen Kanka, the mother of seven-year-old Megan Kanka, whose death led to the Megan's Law requiring authorities to make

information public about registered sex offenders, said charging the 14-year-old was doing more harm than good.

"This shouldn't fall under Megan's Law in any way, shape or form," Kanka said. "She should have an intervention and counseling, because the only person she exploited was herself."

Prosecutors have charged teens who send and receive sexually suggestive photos in such states as Connecticut, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and Washington

However, legal experts told media reporters that the recent New Jersey case was a rarity.

"I'm not sure I've seen a prosecution like this coming out of a social networking site," said Seth Kreimer, a constitutional law professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Preliminary investigation results released on Canadian helicopter crash

Two stud bolts of the Sikorsky helicopter that crashed recently off the coast of Canada broke causing first a loss in oil pressure followed by a deadly crash landing on Thursday March 12, 2009 killing 17 of 18 people on board.

"I can safely say now that the stud broke in flight and the loss of oil pressure was a result of that," Mike Cunningham, the Transportation Safety Board (TSB) of Canada 's lead investigator said, "So far, we cannot find any other anomaly that would account for that loss of oil pressure. There is further analysis and work to be done on exactly how and why that stud broke."

Upon examination of the wreckage and seats, it was determined the helicopter landed at an acceleration of about 20g. On impact windows and doors flew off. It is not known at this time whether the victims drowned or were killed in this violent impact.

"It was [...] belly first in an upright position with a tail low attitude. That's what the damage is telling us," Allan Chaulk, a TSB investigator, "We are just scratching the surface of analyzing the data we've so far collected."

The United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) did issue a directive to replace the titanium studs to steel studs before any Sikorsky S92 helicopters can resume flights. So far about 30% of helicopters worldwide still need to make the update.

Sikorsky had issued an Alert Service Bulletin to helicopter operators in January to replace the studs by 1,250 flight hours or within the year. A S-92A flight in Australia prompted the alert when it lost oil pressure and needed to make an emergency landing.

During the examination of the wreckage, TSB investigators are uncertain why two of three aircraft flotation devices did not activate to keep the aircraft from sinking. The cockpit voice and flight data recorders were operational between cruising altitude of 9,000 feet and the descent to 800 feet, and then an unexplainable electrical malfunction caused them to cease operating.

Parts of US airplane fall from sky in Brazil

Portions of a DC-10 jet registered to the Miami, Florida-based Arrow Cargo company fell from the sky over a residential area in the city

of Manaus, Brazil on Thursday.

Parts of one of the turbines of the aircraft caused some damage to a car and a few houses, but no injuries were reported. The airplane was traveling to its destination of Bogota, Colombia. According to the Brazilian Defense Ministry, the parts that detached are the rear exhaust diffuser and a section of the exhaust. The involved plane, registered N526MD, was built in 1978.

"I opened the window after I heard this huge boom and I see this thing up in flames, right in front of my doorway," said Aparecida Silva, a local resident, to Globo TV. "I had no idea what it was, I thought it was some weird, ugly thing or a UFO or something."

Rai Marinho, a representative for the Arrow Cargo in Manaus, said that the jet, which was carrying an engineer and three crew members, had engine difficulties soon after taking off. It was able to keep flying, but was obliged to divert to Medellin due to inclement weather, where it landed without incident. The representative added that his company would pay residents for the damage.

Relics of 39 saints found by British Museum

Relics of 39 saints were found by staff of the British Museum today in a 12-century German portable altar. The altar had been donated in 1902, but the altar had not been opened until today.

It had been opened for a cleaning and a check on its condition, prior to being scheduled for display in a new medieval art gallery at the Museum tomorrow. When it was opened, James Robinson, the curator of medieval antiquities, found a linen cloth which itself

contained several dozen bundles of cloth, each of which was labelled.

The back of the altar contained a list of names, including those of John the Baptist, James, John, and Mary Magdalen, and 35 others, indicating that relics of these individuals were believed to be encased there. However, only 39 bundles were found, indicating that at some point before the most recent rearrangement of the bundles in the 19th century, one had been lost.

One of the bundles contained a relic of Saint Benedict of the early 6th century. The reliquaries and relics will remain in the Museum.

Businesses and individuals worldwide to turn lights off as part of Earth Hour 2009

Earth Hour 2009 takes place Saturday, March 28, 2009 between 8:30 to 9:30 pm local time when communities will participate by turning out their lights starting in New Zealand and progressing along time zones around the world.

Earth Hour began as a symbolic initiative against global warming by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). "[It is] The largest demonstration of public concern about climate change ever attempted." Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General said.

Earth Hour began in 2007 with around 2 million participating, and increased to about 50 million in 2008. The Empire State Building, Las Vegas Strip, the Eiffel Tower, Petronas Twin Towers, the Peace Tower, the Parliament Buildings, the Christ the Redeemer statue, Acropolis of Athens, the Egyptian pyramids, and the Colosseum are some notable landmarks which will honour Earth Hour Saturday

evening.

WWF organisers wished 1,000 cities would enlist in Earth Hour, however this was surpassed as this year over 2,400 have signed up to take part.

"The Government of Canada's continued participation in Earth Hour is an indication of our commitment to being mindful consumers. As the custodian of one of the largest office building portfolios in the country, Public Works and Government Services Canada is committed to incorporating environmental practices into waste management, water conservation and the efficient use of energy in our buildings." Christian Paradis, Minister of Public Works and Government Service said.

"Supporting Earth Hour is part of our commitment to help create a healthier environment for Canadians. Simple actions such as turning off the lights can help improve our environment and tackle climate change as well as empower Canadians to make important lifestyle changes that benefit their families and their environment. We encourage Canadians to take part in Earth Hour." Jim Prentice, Minister of the Environment.

Today in History

193 – Praetorian Guards assassinated Roman Emperor Pertinax and sold the throne in an auction to Didius Julianus.
1795 – Partitions of Poland: The Duchy of Courland, a northern fief of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, ceased to exist and became part of the Russian Empire.

1802 – German astronomer Heinrich Wilhelm Matthäus Olbers discovered 2 Pallas, the second

asteroid known to man.

1979 – British Prime Minister James Callaghan was defeated by one vote in a motion of no confidence by the House of Commons after his government struggled to cope with widespread strikes by trade unions during the "Winter of Discontent".

1979 – A partial core meltdown of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA resulted in the release of an estimated 43,000 curies (1.59 PBq) of radioactive krypton to the environment.

2005 – The Sumatra earthquake hit Indonesia, killing approximately 1,300 people.

March 28 is Earth Hour (20:30 local time in various areas, 2009); Teachers' Day in the Czech Republic

Quote of the Day

I do not understand those terrors which make us cry out, Satan, Satan! when we may say, God, God! and make Satan tremble. Do we not know that he cannot stir without the permission of God? ...

I am really much more afraid of those people who have so great a fear of the devil, than I am of the devil himself. Satan can do me no harm whatever, but they can trouble me very much, particularly if they be confessors.

~ Teresa of Ávila ~

Word of the Day

daub v

- To apply something to a surface in hasty or crude strokes.

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