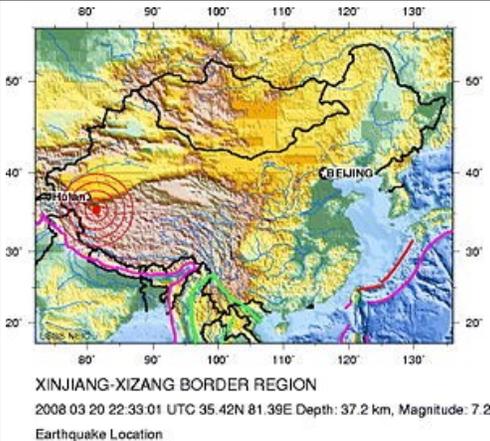




Top Stories



Large 7.2 earthquake strikes China

A large magnitude 7.2 earthquake has struck western China in the Xinjiang region which houses the Tarim Basin where at least 1/3 of China's oil reserve supply is held.

Major US presidential candidates have passport files breached

Just hours after firing two contract employees for inappropriately examining the passport file of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Hillary Clinton that her passport file was also breached. John McCain, the Republican candidate for president, also had his file breached.



After 9 months, Belgian coalition delivers government

After almost nine and a half months,

Top Stories

government formation talks in Belgium have resulted in a new government. New Prime Minister Yves Leterme was sworn in by King Albert II today. The coalition partners have set out several deadlines for major decisions on which agreement still could not be reached during the formation.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Wikinews interviews author and filmmaker John Gaspard

Author and filmmaker John Gaspard spoke with Wikinews on his three low budget feature films and books. He told us how he was able to make his latest movie, Grown Men, for under \$13,000 and how his popular book, Digital Filmmaking 101, came to be. He even had a few tips for the amateur filmmakers reading this.

Wikipedia Current Events

7.2-magnitude earthquake hits western China.

- President Nicolas Sarkozy announces that France will reduce its airborne nuclear weapons arsenal by a third.
- Alain Bernard sets a world record for the men's 100 meters freestyle with a time of 47" 60.

Red Bull Racing F1 team must prove safety after David Coulthard suffers crash

The Red Bull Racing Formula One racing team must prove to the Malaysian Grand Prix stewards

that one of their cars is safe to race after Scottish driver David Coulthard suffered a crash at Friday's opening practice. It was his second major suspension failure in as many weekends and his third major accident, having had his last race ended prematurely after a collision with Felipe Massa's Ferrari.

A part failure caused Coulthard to run off the road. When he subsequently hit a kerb both sides of the front suspension completely failed, ripping both wheels loose. He was unable to participate in any more pre-race practice.

After stewards met team head Christian Horner and technical head Adrian Newey a statement was released stating that the FIA technical delegate required to receive a detailed technical report from Red Bull. The purpose of this would be to prove that the vehicle is race worthy as determined by an article in the technical regulations. This article gives stewards the powers to prevent cars from competing if they are deemed to be unsafe.

"The Stewards, having met with the Team Principal and Technical Representative of Red Bull Racing in relation to the incident involving Car 9 in Practice 1, have requested that the competitor provide to the FIA Technical Delegate a report verifying that the integrity of the suspension is such that the car should not be deemed 'of dangerous constructions' under Art 2.3 of the 2008 Formula One

Technical Regulations," read the statement.

Howard told reporters he believed there would be no problems with clearing the vehicle for tomorrow's race. The failed component, he said, had been fitted immediately after the race at Melbourne. "It was a front right track rod that failed. You can see that the adhesives failed and it just looked like a human error. So we have absolutely no concerns about the car's safety for tomorrow."

Coulthard was also confident. I am not worried about my safety. Mechanical failures are part and parcel of grand prix racing unfortunately... We did 10,000 kilometres in testing in the car. It was just a new part which did just six laps. It was a fault in the manufacturing process and game over. One jumbo falls out of the sky you don't ground them. All history shows that things fail now and again. With the front suspension the car rides up."

Social networking site lets users run virtual campaign for US president

Each day, in living rooms, bars, and message boards across the United States, debates rage and opinions flare over the upcoming presidential election: "Which candidate has the most experience?" "Which candidate will best be able to unite Americans?" "Which candidate will work to bring about real change in Washington?" Time and again, these questions have been asked and answered by television pundits; they have been analysed in editorials, written about in blogs, and tackled in speeches by the candidates themselves.

But in one corner of the Internet, another oft-ignored, yet equally-

important issue is being raised: vegetables.

"I eat them, knowing full well they have no nutritional (sic) value and cannot be fully digested by the human digestive system. But its fun once in awhile to see what you had for dinner last night, the following morning. Why I put this in here....I don't know. Nutrition is important, but humans are basically more inclined to eat meat." This is one of the many platform issues of Jack the Wiz, an Independent candidate for President of the United States.

The Wiz is not really running for President. But he is one of the top-rated Presidential candidates on U4Prez.com, a website that allows users to run a virtual campaign, complete with supporters, press releases, and caucuses, which are lively discussions on serious political issues. They can even compare their rating with the likes of John McCain, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama, all of whom have profiles set up. One blogger described it as "the MySpace of politics".

Candidates create a profile, where they outline their platform and expound their views on subjects ranging from global warming and immigration to religion and conspiracy theories. Just like in other social networking sites, candidates can leave comments on others' profiles; they can also rate other candidates on a scale of 1 to 10 and become a supporter of another campaign. All of this is factored into a candidate's rating, which ultimately determines who will become the next virtual President of the United States.

Eric Gurr, creator of U4Prez.com, says you shouldn't be fooled by the site's MySpace-like facade.

"It's all about the politics," he says. "I think most of our users have accounts on MySpace and Facebook, and use U4prez strictly for the political dialogue." Wikinews conducted an email interview with Gurr, in which he discussed how the site works, how the Internet has affected politics, and who he is endorsing for President.

Interview

Wikinews What compelled you to create U4Prez.com?

Eric Gurr: I was having a discussion with a business co-hort and I had suggested that the average Joe was probably better able to be president of the United States than many of the politicians considering running. This was back in 2006. I had at about this same time read the book Wikinomics. My first inclination was to create a wiki, on how to solve political problems. But the social networking side was a more natural fit.

WN Have you had any prior experience in politics or political studies?

EG: No I really haven't. I've never run for office, and never really been a part of a campaign. I read quite a bit and I'm a bit of a polymath when it comes to history and economics. When I read a book like Freedom from Fear, or Modern Times by Paul Johnson, I check the footnotes. When I read an article on-line, for some reason I have an inclination to check up on the author to see if his facts are right.

WN What goes on in a typical U4Prez candidate's campaign?

EG: We have three distinct

profiles. The quick drive by profile with little information, the interested candidate who probably posts once or twice a week, and the die-hards. The die-hards of course drive the site. These candidates are passionate and amazingly well informed.

WN What measures are taken to stop trolling and prevent heated debates from becoming too heated?

EG: In the first couple of months we had to moderate the site twenty four hours a day. As the election has heated up this has oddly become less of a concern. We never censor political thought, but we do put dirty word filters in place. The dialogue gets heated, but almost never crosses the line. I've been contacted by ABC News, slate.com and quite a few other news outlets and their first impression is that this is just a bunch of college kids arguing about things they don't understand. The reality is quite different. The debate is structured in caucuses, and we occasionally hold moderated debates between specific candidates. The average age of the candidates is about 35, so this is a much more serious crowd than you would suppose.

WN How is a candidate's rating calculated? What specific factors are taken into account?

EG: Candidates must campaign. The core score is ratings by other candidates on a scale of 1 to 10. But this is only about 70% of total score. After six months of use, we developed a voting algorithm based on how members were using the site. You could literally have a perfect score of ten from members, and never get in to a

runoff. You have to debate the issues, you have to visit and vote on other candidates platforms. In other words, you need to campaign. This boosts your candidate rank and overall score.

WN Were any of the real-life candidates' profiles created by the candidates themselves?

EG: Not to my knowledge. I have seen in the log files that many of the candidates' campaigns have visited the site. Many of the profiles from the real-life candidates were created by us early in the process. We simply pulled the information from their official sites. That said, many of the third party or independent candidate profiles are created by the candidates themselves, or their staffs.

WN Many of the top-rated candidates on your site are independent or third party candidates. Why is this the case online but not in real life?

EG: It has to do with viability. We took a survey several months ago and found that many of the candidates who were professed third party supporters intended to vote for either a Democrat or Republican in the real election.

WN Do you think most users take the site's political aspects seriously, or are they more interested in the social networking aspect?

EG: It's all about the politics. I think most of our users have accounts on MySpace and Facebook, and use U4prez strictly for the political dialogue.

WN In your opinion, has the internet has significantly affected the way presidential elections unfold?

EG: Absolutely. The support and money raised by Ron Paul ultimately led to the nomination of John McCain. The more traditionally conservative candidates lost millions to Paul. This was entirely an internet phenomenon. Because of the communication capabilities of the web, people who have a strong interest in politics naturally migrate to the web. At u4prez for example, our members aren't likely voters, they are voters. This is true for just about any politically oriented site. Some of the candidates are picking up on this and using the web to deliver truly custom messages directly to real voters.

WN How do you think the internet will affect politics in the 2012 election and beyond?

EG: The influence of certain websites will grow exponentially. The big question is what will the impact of the bloggers become? We are rolling out a new feature on the site in the next couple of weeks to allow our members to rate political blogs. As of now, there is no clearinghouse for political blogs. We are going to fill a big gap with this feature. The print media decline will continue and probably accelerate. To help this process along we as members of the web community need a way to vet new content and content creators. With some of the bigger problems facing our country, a medium is needed for more interactive debate. Television, radio and newspapers cannot offer any

solution to this problem. The election of 2008 will be the last where the web isn't the driving communication force for any serious candidate.

WN Is there any political issue that you feel has been overlooked by the media?

EG: The baby-boomers. In January of 2008 the first baby-boomer became eligible for social security. In the next twenty years about 80 million more will follow.

Extrapolating the math is pretty easy. In about fifteen short years the entire budget (as it stands now) will need to go to social security, Medicare and the prescription drug benefit. This of course isn't going to happen. This is a huge issue because 80 million people are going to be voting to protect those programs. The media overlook the problem, because it is massive in scope. If we look through history it quickly becomes clear that this is the biggest financial challenge the nation has ever faced. But you can find discussion about the problem on the web.

WN Lastly, who are you endorsing for president and why?

EG: As a website, U4prez endorsed Ron Paul. This came from the members of the site. Personally, it's hard for me to visualize anyone running right now who has the vision and can put the problems facing the economy in to any kind of historical context. I can tell you this. There are five thousand members on U4prez, and just a handful of them fully support any of the current candidates. I'm starting to get a pretty strong indication that someone is going to make a real third party run. The

Democrats are going to come out of their convention divided that much is now obvious. But the media have overlooked the division within the Republican party over John McCain. Ross Perot made a huge impact on the election in 1992, and there was relative calm in the nation. 2008 may really be the year a third party candidate emerges at the last minute and wins the election. It's not likely, but neither is it a long-shot.

Scientists say that a 'global layer of water' exists on Saturn's moon Titan

NASA's Cassini spacecraft has discovered evidence that points to the existence of an underground ocean of water and ammonia on Saturn's moon Titan.

"We believe that about 100 kilometers (62 miles) beneath the ice and organic-rich surface is an internal ocean of liquid water mixed with ammonia," said Bryan Stiles of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

If the findings turn out to be true, this will be the fourth such moon in our solar system found to have some form of water on it.

Currently only three other moons, all from Jupiter, have been found to have known water sources. Ganymede, Callisto and Europa are so far the only known moons with a water source.

Members of the mission's science team used Cassini's Synthetic Aperture Radar to collect imaging data during 19 separate passes over Titan between October 2005 and May 2007. The radar can see through Titan's dense, methane-rich atmospheric haze, detailing never-before-seen surface features and establishing their locations on the moon's surface.

Using data from the radar's early observations, the scientists and radar engineers established the locations of 50 unique landmarks on Titan's surface. They then searched for these same lakes, canyons and mountains in the reams of data returned by Cassini in its later flybys of Titan. They found prominent surface features had shifted from their expected positions by up to 30 kilometers (19 miles). A systematic displacement of surface features would be difficult to explain unless the moon's icy crust was decoupled from its core by an internal ocean, making it easier for the crust to move.

Cassini scientists will not have long to wait before another go at Titan. On March 25, just prior to its closest approach at an altitude of 1,000 kilometers (620 miles), Cassini will employ its Ion and Neutral Mass Spectrometer to examine Titan's upper atmosphere. Immediately after closest approach, the spacecraft's Visual and Infrared Mapping Spectrometer will capture high-resolution images of Titan's southeast quadrant.

The study of Titan is a major goal of the Cassini-Huygens mission because it may preserve, in deep-freeze, many of the chemical compounds that preceded life on Earth. Titan is the only moon in the solar system that possesses a dense atmosphere. The moon's atmosphere is 1.5 times denser than Earth's. Titan is the largest of Saturn's moons, bigger than the planet Mercury.

Zinaida Greceanii nominated Moldovan Prime Minister

President Vladimir Voronin of Moldova today signed a decree nominating Zinaida Greceanii as

prime minister. Under the constitution, Ms Greceanii has 15 days from the date of the decree to submit her government's program and a list of executive members to parliament. 52 of the 101 MPs must endorse her proposals.

Zinaida Greceanii was born in 1956 and graduated from the Chisinau-based Financial and Economic College and the Moldovan State University, specialising in economics. Since 1994, she has held various posts at the Finance Ministry. Ms Greceanii began in the office of the deputy head of the budget's elaboration and analysis general directorate. She was the department's minister from 2002 till 2005, when, by presidential decree, she was made deputy prime minister.

Israel to install missile defense systems on airliners

Israel has announced plans to begin fitting missile defense systems to airliners within weeks.

The systems will emit flares designed to confuse the guidance systems on heat-seeking missiles, and greatest priority will go to adding the equipment - already in use with the Israeli air force - on aircraft that fly to destinations deemed high-risk, such as Asia and Africa.

The plans were initiated in 2002 after a failed attempt by Islamic insurgents to shoot down an Israeli airliner during takeoff from Mombassa in Kenya with shoulder mounted missile launchers. Israel immediatly began seeking ways to protect its commercial aviation fleet.

Testing was initiated shortly afterwards, but plans were shelved

while arguments as in to who would pay were ongoing - either the government or El Al and Arkia. Hezbollah has recently threatened action against Israel in response to a car bomb assassination of terrorist Imad Mughniyeh, prompting the government to agree to pay the costs. Despite no claim of responsibility, Hezbollah and its backers in Iran blame the attack on Israel.

Singapore, the United States and other nations are considering similar measures. As well as flares, some proposed systems use lasers to jam heat-seeking equipment.

Major US presidential candidates have passport files breached

Just hours after firing two contract employees and disciplining a third for inappropriately examining the passport file of Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Sen. Hillary Clinton that her passport file was also breached in 2007. Sen. John McCain, the Republican candidate for president, also had his file breached — this time by one of the same individuals who had examined Obama's records.

Both Clinton and McCain were informed that their files were improperly accessed, according to their Senate offices, after Rice called to apologize to Barack Obama for the incident hours before.

"I told him I was sorry and I told him that I myself would be very disturbed if anyone had looked at my passport file and that, therefore, I will stay on top of this," Rice said. "We are going to do an investigation through the inspector general. None of us want us to have a situation where any

American's passport file is accessed in an unauthorized way."

According to Assistant Secretary of State, Sean McCormack, at least one breach occurred during a training session, with a contract employee brought in to deal with a large backlog of passport applications.

"We do feel that the system worked, but the system isn't perfect," McCormack said

Pilot killed as Su-25 military jet explodes near Vladivostok

A Sukhoi Su-25 military jet has exploded in midair near Vladivostok, Russia, killing the pilot. The Russian Air Force said the plane was 140km (90 miles) from the port city on the Pacific coast.

The plane, a single seat twinjet used to support ground forces, was on a training mission when the explosion occurred. Russia has grounded all their Su-25s while the crash is investigated by order of the air force's commander. The investigation will be conducted by a special commission of the Ministry of Defence.

Colonel Alexander Drobyshevsky, spokesman for the Air Force, said "Today, on March 20 at 3:33 Moscow time (0:33 GMT), a Su-25 aircraft crashed during a training flight near the Chernigovka airbase, 143 kilometers from Vladivostok." The crash site is in mountainous terrain, and the Far Eastern Union of Air Force and Air Defense's investigational commission has flown in and is on-site.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that immediatly prior to the crash the pilot reported an engine fire, followed by a loss of contact.

Interfax reports that an anonymous source involved with the investigation said "The head of flight control reported that he saw a flash under the fuselage of the strike plane. More than likely one of the weapons exploded."

Drobyshevsky offered an alternative explanation. "According to preliminary reports, the plane developed technical problems during live firing exercises," he said.

Bones of 'small-bodied humans' found in Micronesian cave

Another population of small humans has been reported, this time in caves in Micronesia.

Lee Berger, Steven Churchill, Bonita De Klerk and Rhonda Quinn, a team of paleontologists and anthropologists from South Africa and the United States document a group of "small-bodied humans" found in the " in limestone caves in the rock islands of Palau, Micronesia." The report, in a recent edition of the open access journal, PLoS ONE (2008 3:3) argues that these small people may "represent a congenitally abnormal individual drawn from a small-bodied island population of Homo Sapiens." The term for this condition is Insular Dwarfism described in Foster's Rule. Different radio carbon samples at the site date between 3000 and 4500 calendar years before the present, with the 3000 year old dates being judged the most reliable.

The authors argue, "Based on the evidence from Palau, we [Berger et al] hypothesize that reduction in the size of the face and chin, large dental size and other features noted here may in some cases be correlates of extreme body size

reduction in H. sapiens."

Unlike the 2004 find of the Flores dwarf human population (dated from 95,000 to 13,000 years ago), known as Homo floresiensis and nicknamed hobbits, researchers do not consider this population to be a separate hominid population. They also suggest that this more recent population casts some doubt on H. floresiensis being a separate species, and that this

"These features when seen in Flores may be best explained as correlates of small body size in an island adaptation, regardless of taxonomic affinity...[This] Palauan sample supports at least the possibility that the Flores hominins are simply an island adapted population of H. sapiens, perhaps with some individuals expressing congenital abnormalities."

In support of this, Berger et al also argued that although the dwarf humans appeared to have many features in commons with Homo sapiens, there seems to be many features that are not usually associated with Homo sapiens.

Senator Obama's passport records breached in January 2008

Two low-level United States Department of State employees have been dismissed and a third employee disciplined over accessing the passport files of Senator Barack Obama "without a need to do so."

According to Assistant Secretary of State, Sean McCormack, on three separate incidents which occurred separately on January 9, February 21 and March 14, contract employees of the department's Bureau of Consular Affairs tasked with data entry accessed Obama's file. The breach seems like

"imprudent curiosity" among the contract workers, and that senior management at the State Department was not aware of the incidents until Thursday afternoon

"A monitoring system was tripped when an employee accessed the records of a high-profile individual, When the monitoring system is tripped, we immediately seek an explanation for the records access. If the explanation is not satisfactory, the supervisor is notified."

Obama's campaign is asking for a complete investigation to find out who looked at Obama's passport file and why, and why the State Department did not reveal details of the security breach until now.

"This is an outrageous breach of security and privacy, even from an administration that has shown little regard for either over the last eight years. Our government's duty is to protect the private information of the American people, not use it for political purposes. This is a serious matter that merits a complete investigation, and we demand to know who looked at Senator Obama's passport file, for what purpose, and why it took so long for them to reveal this security breach," said Obama campaign spokesman Bill Burton in a statement to the media.

A similar data breach took place in 1992 when State Department officials looked up data on presidential candidate Bill Clinton, in an attempt to find out information from the late 1960s, amid unfounded political campaign rumors that Mr. Clinton had sought to renounce his citizenship to dodge the draft during the Vietnam War while a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford.

That incident triggered a three-year investigation by a special prosecutor, who found that no laws were violated but officials exercised poor judgment. The 1992 search of Mr. Clinton's passport records was part of an effort to speed up Freedom of Information Act requests.

Republic of Molossia announces international summit

On March 18, President Kevin Baugh of the Republic of Molossia, a micronation located in Nevada, announced that his country would hold its first ever international summit this June.

Grand Prince Christopher I and Princess Erin of the Principality of Vikesland, another micronation located in Canada, will be attending.

Besides the meeting itself, which is scheduled to take place in Molossia's capital city, Espera, President Baugh is to give them a tour of his country as well as the surrounding areas. He is looking forward to the event and hopes that it may "open the way to future visits between Molossia and the other small nations of the world."

The Republic of Molossia and Principality of Vikesland are not recognized by any major countries or international organizations. However, both are by other micronations.

Earlier this month, Wikinews held an interview with President Baugh.

Large 7.2 earthquake strikes China

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude 7.2 has struck the

Xinjiang region of China. The Earthquake Administration of China has reported the quake to be a 7.3 magnitude.

The quake struck at 6:33 a.m. (local time) and its epicenter was located 228 kilometers (142 miles) southeast of Hotan and 780 k.m. (485 miles) east, northeast of Islamabad, Pakistan. The depth was recorded at 37.2 k.m. (23.1 miles).

According to USGS geophysicist Dale Grant, this is the largest quake on record to hit the region. The largest quake on record occurred in China in 1556 in Shaanxi and had a magnitude of at least 8.0, killing over 830,000 people.

Aftershocks with magnitudes of 5.5 and under began to occur just over an hour later in the same region.

As of 2006, the reported population of Hotan was 114,000. The region is sparsely populated and so far there are reports of only some damage, but no injuries or deaths. However, the USGS states that damage could be "moderate to heavy." The quake struck near the Tarim Basin which is home to about 1/3 of China's oil reserve supply.

Today in History

238 – Because of his advanced age, both Gordian I and his son Gordian II were proclaimed Roman Emperors.

1622 – The Powhatan Confederacy under Chief Opchanacanough killed almost 350 English settlers around Jamestown, a third of the Colony of Virginia's population.

1765 – The Parliament of Great Britain passed the Stamp Act, adding fuel to the growing separatist movement in the

Thirteen Colonies in British North America.

1784 – The Emerald Buddha of Thailand was installed at the Wat Phra Kaew on the grounds of the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

1849 – First Italian War of Independence: After capturing the fortress town of Mortara, forces led by Austrian General Joseph Radetzky von Radetz routed Sardinian troops at the Battle of Novara.

1963 – Please Please Me, the first album recorded by The Beatles, was released

March 22 is Holi in Hinduism and Holy Saturday in Western Christianity (2008); World Day for Water.

Quote of the Day

Music and silence... combine strongly because music is done with silence, and silence is full of music. ~ Marcel Marceau

Word of the Day

epiphany n

1. A manifestation or appearance of a divine or superhuman being.
2. An illuminating realization or discovery, often resulting in a personal feeling of elation, awe, or wonder.

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