



### Top Stories

#### Six-Party talks to resume on North Korea's nuclear program

Six Party talks between China, Japan, the United States, Russia, South Korea and North Korea are set to resume talks in regards to North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

#### Same-sex marriage reaffirmed in Canada

The Canadian House of Commons has voted 175 to 123 to defeat a motion by the Conservative minority government to re-open the same-sex marriage debate.

### Featured story

#### Taco Bell pulls green onions from all U.S. and Canadian stores

Taco Bell restaurants decided Wednesday to remove green onions from all 5,800 of its continental U.S. stores and Canadian stores after a November 29 outbreak of E.coli. A number of people in the U.S. have sued Taco Bell following the E.coli outbreak.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- DNA testing confirms that blood with a high blood alcohol content did indeed belong to Henri Paul, the driver in the crash that killed Diana, Princess of Wales, Dodi al Fayed and Paul himself in 1997.
- The Senate of the United States passes legislation normalising trade with Vietnam, renewing tax

### Wikipedia Current Events

cuts and opening the Gulf of Mexico to new drilling for oil and gas fields. The legislation had earlier been passed by the United States House of Representatives and will now go to President of the United States George W. Bush for approval.

- 2006 Fijian coup d'état: Media reports that gunfire had been heard near military barracks in Suva have been dismissed as being mistaken identification of a game of cricket.
- A fire at a Russian drug treatment hospital kills 45 people with arson suspected.

#### Cuban leader Fidel Castro congratulates Hugo Chavez

Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, congratulated Hugo Chávez, on December 4, for the great electoral success in the elections held in Venezuela. Cuban leader underlined Venezuela's great experience of building socialism in Latin America and the support of poorest people of the continent to this politics.

#### Gallup poll: Islamophobia advanced in United States

Islamophobia seems to be alive and well in America according to recent polls by Gallup. Surveys this summer of more than 1,000 Americans showed that 39 percent were in favor of requiring Muslims in the United States, including American citizens, to carry special identification and about a quarter of those surveyed said they would

not want to live next door to a Muslim and a third thought that Muslims in the United States sympathized with al Qaeda, the extremist group behind the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

#### Listeners call for tattooing of Muslims in America, supporting comedy skit

When radio host Jerry Klein suggested that all Muslims in the United States should be identified with a crescent-shape tattoo, "the switchboard went from empty to totally jammed within minutes." Some callers agreed with Klein, one saying that, "Not only do you tattoo them in the middle of their forehead but you ship them out of this country ... they are here to kill us." Another caller added that America should, "set up encampments like during World War Two with the Japanese and Germans"

At the end of the show Klein revealed that that it had been staged as a hoax. "I can't believe any of you are sick enough to have agreed for one second with anything I said," he told his AM 630 WMAL audience which covers Washington, Northern Virginia and Maryland

"For me to suggest to tattoo marks on people's bodies, have them wear armbands, put a crescent moon on their driver's license on their passport or birth certificate is disgusting. It's beyond disgusting."

"Because basically what you just

did was show me how the German people allowed what happened to the Jews to happen ... We need to separate them, we need to tattoo their arms, we need to make them wear the yellow Star of David, we need to put them in concentration camps, we basically just need to kill them all because they are dangerous."

Council on American-Islamic Relations Communications Director Ibrahim Hooper commented:... *The public reaction to Mr. Klein's courageous parody should be a wake-up call for American religious and political leaders who remain silent in the face of growing anti-Muslim bigotry in our society. Americans of all faiths must come together to marginalize extremists and to challenge ethnic and religious bigotry.*

### **Radiation that killed ex-spy Alexander Litvinenko found in Germany**

Polonium 210, a radioactive substance that killed ex-spy Alexander Litvinenko, has been found inside two buildings located in Hamburg, Germany.

The radiation was found in the home of Dmitry Kovtun's ex-wife. Litvinenko and Kovtun meet together at a London, England pub on November 1, 2006. Kovtun is now being treated at a hospital in Germany for radiation exposure, but his condition is not known. No radiation was found at Kovtun's apartment.

The second location in Germany to test positive for radiation is an apartment belonging to the ex-mother in law of Kovtun. Her home is located in Pinneberg, Germany.

### **Six-Party talks to resume on North Korea's nuclear program**

Six Party talks between China, Japan, the United States, Russia, South Korea and North Korea are set to resume talks in regards to North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

"They [North Korea] have indicated they are interested in an end to what they call the U.S. 'hostile policy. We made very clear to them that we don't have a hostile policy to them. We have a hostile policy to their policies, including and especially their nuclear policies," said Christopher Hill, the assistant to the Secretary of State, according to the United Press International.

The talks are scheduled to begin on December 16, 2006 in Beijing, China, but no country involved in the talks have confirmed the reports.

### **Carter: Race relations in Palestine are worse than apartheid**

Ex-President Jimmy Carter has made an attempt to open the eyes of Americans to the plight of the Palestinians in his recent book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (ISBN 0-7432-8502-6). In this he compares the building of the barrier in the West Bank to the policy of apartheid (apartness) in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. There, the policy legalized the separation of races and ensured the domination of whites over all others.

Carter gave as examples of the ways in which the peoples of the territory are divided. He cited the concrete walls, fences and electronic devices erected by Israel to contain the Arab peoples. But he referred to another barrier caused by the ignorance of the

American populace and the absence of critical comment there about the behavior of those on both sides of the wall, the system of apartheid, the constant fear of terror and the failure to implement UN and US policy.

Carter, a Noble Laureate, claims that by using such a loaded term as "apartheid" he intended to provoke debate and deeper understanding of the problems in Palestine. He complains about a tremendous fear, even "intimidation" of individuals and the media in the United States that stifles information and discussion of Israel's conduct. There will be no peace until Israel abides by the UN resolutions, retires from Arab lands and ceases to oppress the Palestinians.

The book provoked a bitter response from an erstwhile colleague, Ken Stein, an Emory University professor, who said it was utterly biased and superficial, and contained unsupported allegations, "glaring omissions and simply invented segments".

Rep. Steve Israel, a New York Democrat, disagreeing with Carter's account, said that the Palestinians had no one to blame but themselves. Their leaders had no regard for the quality of life of their people and no ability to keep law and order. He said that the book was only one man's view, it did not reflect the opinion of the Democratic party.

Defending his work, Carter claims that it had been reviewed by staff at the Carter Centre. He had been a monitor at Palestinian elections in 2005 and 2006. He has made peace making in the Middle East his most important commitment.

The UK's Prime Minister Tony Blair

has expressed his intention to address the peace process in the Middle East by visiting the region in the near future.

### **Customer says Verizon confuses dollars and cents**

Blogger George Vaccaro is a customer from the US who apparently purchased wireless network connection from Verizon, thinking that he was getting a good deal. Instead, he says he was charged about 71 dollars instead of 71 cents: 100 times more than what his bill should have been at the rate quoted.

When he called the Verizon customer service, he said he also found out that several Verizon representatives think 0.002 cents is equal to 0.002 dollars. According to the phone conversation recording he posted to his blog, ... *when I called before entering Canada I spoke to a rep who quoted me a rate of ".002 cents per KB." ... the charge for my usage at .002 cents/KB is \$.71786 - or \$.72 rounding up to the nearest cent - 72 cents. That is what I was quoted and that is what I am therefore willing to pay.*

Vaccaro also posted on his blog the text of what he said was an e-mail reply from a Verizon Wireless customer service representative on December 8, stating: ... *I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience and confusion this has caused. Per the remarks in the account, I have found that the customer service representative provided the correct pricing information. However; due to the miscommunication, I am willing to credit half of the data charges which would be \$-36.00. Please reply to this email if you would like to accept this offer.*

### **African refugees allege forced labour by Turkish police**

A group of African refugees complained to the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly (HCA) Refugee Support Program that they were taken under custody and that they were forced to work for the Turkish police.

According to H.R.M., a 38 years old refugee from Democratic Republic of Congo who has been in Turkey for the last 16 months, on November 30th, when the Pope was visiting Hagia Sophia and Sultan Ahmed Mosque, he and his twelve roommates decided not to go outside because of the rumours that blacks were being taken under custody by the Turkish police. However, when he ended up having to go outside to buy food at 10pm, he was taken under custody and put on a police car. H.R.M. claims to find himself in Sultan Ahmed, where... *There were two empty trucks and many safety fences. They told us 'we will not arrest you if you pick these up'. I started picking up fences and put them to the first truck. When the first truck was full, I lined up those that were picked up by other in the trunk of the second truck.*

According to H.R.M.'s claims, this took about two hours, after which they were taken to a work site where they were made to empty the fences in the trucks. He tells: ...

*They told us to empty the fences there. I couldn't work because my hand was cut at Sultanahmet. They didn't force me to work. The work was done at 5am. They dropped us at Kumkapi. They gave us food once.*

He complains that he was treated like a slave by the Turkish police. He says: ...

*At Sultanahmet, I asked the police officer why only blacks were taken, he didn't answer. I felt myself like a slave. This happened once before in İzmir, where I was fired from a job because I asked them to give me my money.*

Özlem Dalkıran, a spokeswoman for HCA Refugees Support Program told that they were receiving many reports of collective false arrests and forced labor and that they will be reporting these to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The İstanbul Police Office released a press statement that said they "do not think any response to the allegations would be appropriate".

There are many illegal African immigrants in Istanbul seeking a way into Europe; which has led to conflicts with native Turks.

### **Taco Bell pulls green onions from all U.S. and Canadian stores**

Taco Bell restaurants decided Wednesday to remove green onions from all 5,800 of its continental U.S. stores after a November 29 outbreak of E.coli food poisonings caused the voluntary closing of 9 mid-Atlantic states stores and led health officials to investigate the chain's regional supplier. As many as 66 people reportedly became ill in New York City, Long Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

The E.coli outbreak also caused Taco Bell Canada to recall green onions from all 182 locations across Canada. Officials with the Canadian branch said Wednesday evening that they would take precaution by removing green onions from all stores in Canada after hearing of the outbreak in the U.S.

Jon Prinsell, president of Yum! Canada, which operates Taco Bell Canada commented:...

*As a precautionary voluntary measure, we have made the decision to take immediate action and remove green onions from all our restaurants in Canada until we know conclusively the root cause of the E. coli outbreak in the U.S. We are working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency throughout this investigation.*

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration are currently collecting samples of all non-meat items including cilantro, cheddar cheese, blended cheese, green onions, yellow onions, tomatoes, and lettuce.

A man from Pennsylvania became sick after eating at Taco Bell and sued the owner of Taco Bell headquarters in Irvine, California. Another one includes a 11-year-old boy who ate at Taco Bell, was hospitalized in New York, and also sued the owner.

Most of the E. coli related sicknesses occurred in the northeast USA. No related sickness have occurred in Canada.

Health officials investigating the source of the tainted green onions, also known as scallions, have traced the vegetable's food distribution chain to the Texas-based McLane Co., which in turn got them from Irwindale-based Ready Pac.

The scallions were grown by Boskovich Farms Inc. of Oxnard, California said Steve Dickstein, the marketing vice president for Ready Pac. At what point in the food distribution chain the scallions became tainted remains under investigation.

### **Egyptian Muslim theologians change course on female circumcision**

Egyptian Muslim theologians seek to change the Islamic position on female circumcision at a conference at Cairo's Al-Azhar University. The theologians decided that female circumcision is forbidden by Sura 95, Verse 4 of the Koran: "We have created man in our most perfect image."

It represents a major shift in the position of the Muslim religious community because many of the attending theologians are extremely powerful, including Mahmoud Hamdi Saksuk, the Egyptian minister for religious charities, and Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University.

A minority of liberal Muslim scholars had denounced the practice as early as 1998; however, hardliners continued to endorse the practice.

In 1994, the Egyptian Mufti Sheikh Jad Al-Hâqq 'Ali Jad Al-Hâqq issued a fatwa stating "Circumcision is mandatory for men and for women. If the people of any village decide to abandon it, the [village] imam must fight against them as if they had abandoned the call to prayer."

Al-Azhar University itself issued fatwas endorsing female genital mutilation in 1949, 1951 and 1981, which were only reversed by Dean Ahmend Talib in 2005.

The conference was organized and funded by the Target group of German adventurer Rüdiger Nehberg, who had travelled through Africa and collected video material on the practice. The Egyptian religious scholar and journalist Yusuf al-Qaradawi

criticized the foreign influence and stated that the conference was "biased and presumptuous"; however, he ultimately accepted its conclusions

### **US House of Representatives passes India nuclear bill**

The United States House of Representatives has passed the resolution seeking to implement the US-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation agreement. The bill was passed with a huge margin in which representatives voted 330 in favour of the agreement and 59 against the agreement.

The resolution, in the 109-page compromise bill, based on high marginal support of the House-Senate conferees, will be sent directly to the US Senate which is also expected to also pass it unanimously by a voice vote today, before the Congress goes into Christmas recess.

The deal offers India US nuclear technology in exchange for inspectors' access to Indian civilian reactors. The accord is hailed as historic by many of the representatives, but critics said that it will damage non-proliferation efforts.

Democrat congressman Tom Lantos said, "India is a state that should be at the very centre of our foreign policy and our attention." He added that a partnership with India would help in regulation of the peaceful and responsible spread of nuclear power.

Representative from Illinois, Henry John Hyde, who is the co-writer of the bill, argued that the conference report, titled "Henty J Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006", is a judicious balance of competing all priorities and

accommodates the concerns of administration. He added that President George Bush is expected to sign it into law in a White House ceremony on Monday, if the bill passed by Senate.

Representative from New York, Joseph Crowley, who was instrumental in pushing the bill, said, "With the final version of this legislation approved for this historic agreement between India and the United States to move forward, the Congress has provided realistic parameters for the benefit of both our nations. Now the ball falls into the President's and the Indian government's court to move forward, and ensure a positive relation between India and the United States well into this century."

Representative from California, Barbara Lee, who is from Democratic Party, opposed the bill and said that it would lead to problems by way of doing lasting damage to more than 30-years of non-proliferation policies.

The law will allow the nuclear cooperation between India and United States after more than 30 years. After the bill is passed, Indian government will have to conclude a bilateral agreement with US government and engage with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). India and IAEA have already concluded an agreement requiring the application of IAEA safeguards in perpetuity in accordance with IAEA standards, principles, and practices (including IAEA Board of Governors Document GOV/1621 (1973)) to India's civil nuclear facilities, materials, and programs, as discussed in the Section 104 (b) (2) of the bill.

Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, who is visiting India, anticipated a very successful and supportive bill. Supporters of the compromise bill, backed by the United States are quite confident that the bill would be acceptable to India.

### **Fiji loses rights to host World Netball Championships next year**

The International Federation of Netball Associations (IFNA) has stripped the rights from Fiji to host the World Netball Championships in 2007 because of the military coup that took place on December 5.

The Netball Championships were to take place between 10 July and 21 July, 2007 at Fiji's capital, Suva.

IFNA president, Molly Rhone, said: "It is deeply regretted that we have had to take this decision, recognising the hard work that has been done by the Organising Committee in preparing to host their first senior World Championships."

"We know that many supporters around the world were looking forward to this great sporting event in Fiji," Ms Rhone said.

Alisi Tabete, president of Fijian netball, said that today is a very sad day for sports and that they had wasted many years preparing to host the championships. "We had been working on this event from 1999 and right now I am trying to reason with myself as to why the championships has been lost and just thinking 'what if'."

"We have to think positive and am still thankful that we had been given a chance for the champs," Ms Tabete said.

The IFNA is yet to announce a replacement venue for the games. Ms Rhone said: "IFNA will now be working assiduously to find a new venue to host the Championships."

### **Rice offers to talk with Iran and Syria**

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters that she would be prepared to meet the Iranian foreign secretary, at any time and anywhere. But Iran must stop its uranium enrichment activities "so that they can't keep improving those enrichment capabilities while we talk."

She said that, if it suited their interests, both Iran and Syria would stabilize Iraq without having to be asked to do so by the United States. If they wanted compensation to do so, that would be another matter and she would have to ask what it was they wanted.

She reiterated her commitment to trying to heal the rift in Arab/Israeli relations in Palestine.

Interviewed by David Frost for Al Jazeera television, James Baker, with Lee Hamilton, joint author of the Iraq Study Report said that the President had been positive about the Report and that he had indicated willingness to talk with both Iran and Syria.

Massoud Barzani leader of the Kurdish region of Iraq and Iraq's President, Jalal Talabani, also a Kurd, agreed in the opinion that US Iraq Study Group report is "unrealistic and inappropriate". Mr Barzani was unconvinced by the idea of involving Iran and Syria in discussions aimed at pacifying Iraq. He complained that the Study Group had ignored the Kurds in the Northern region in

their investigations.

**Today in History**

1508 - The Papal States, France, Aragon and the Holy Roman Empire formed the League of Cambrai, an alliance against the Republic of Venice.

1868 - The first traffic lights were installed outside the Houses of Parliament in London.

1898 - The signing of the Treaty of Paris ended the Spanish-American War. Spain recognised the independence of Cuba and sold Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the United States for US\$20 million.

1901 - The first Nobel Prizes were awarded, on the anniversary of the 1896 death of their founder, Swedish chemist and industrialist Alfred Nobel.

1936 - Edward VIII signed his instrument of abdication, becoming the only British monarch to voluntarily relinquish the throne.

December 10 is Constitution Day in Thailand (1932); Human Rights Day (1948).

**Quote of the Day**

Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to my conscience, above all liberties.

~ John Milton in Areopagitica

**Word of the Day**

segue; v

1. To move smoothly from one state or subject to another.
2. (music) To make a smooth transition from one theme to another.

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