



Top Stories

Talks continue over UN resolution on Lebanon war



There has been more fighting between Israel and Hezbollah as attempts to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Lebanon continue.

Colombia's Uribe sworn in to second term as president



President Alvaro Uribe was sworn into his second term of office in the Colombian capital of Bogota, Monday. The event was attended by 11 heads of state, mostly from South America.

Featured story

Effort to end monkey-ing around on Delhi's subway



New Delhi authorities hope a fierce looking langur will solve the problem of mischievous

monkeys infiltrating the city's subway system. The langurs will be used to scare away their smaller cousins.

Wikipedia Current Events

• The Venezuelan opposition selects Manuel Rosales, governor of Zulia State, as its unity candidate for the December presidential election.

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- US Senator Joe Lieberman files papers to run as an independent candidate, saying it would be "irresponsible and inconsistent with my principles" to quit. Ned Lamont receives support from leaders of the Democratic Party.
- In Mexico, the partial recount of votes in the disputed 2006 presidential election held on July 2 begins amid escalating protests against alleged electoral irregularities in the close election.
- Chad and Sudan resume diplomatic relations as part of the Dakar accord. The heads of state of Chad, Sudan, and Libya embrace in front of a cheering crowd in N'Djamena.
- The Indian state of Kerala bans the sale and manufacture of soft drinks belonging to PepsiCo and The Coca-Cola Company due to the high levels of pesticide residue in the water used in these products.
- After killing two in the Philippines, Severe Tropical Storm Bopha makes landfall in Taiwan. Typhoon Saomai and Tropical Storm Maria also threaten to make landfall, on the Chinese mainland and Japan respectively.
- Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah says that the United States imposes Israeli demands through the United Nations draft resolution. He also backs a Lebanese army deployment to South Lebanon. He also vowed for South Lebanon to become a "graveyard" for

Wikipedia Current Events

- invading Israeli troops.
- Syrian-made missiles land in Haifa and in the West Bank.
- Palestinian and Lebanese officials claim Israeli gunboats shelled Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp near Sidon.

Hearing testimony; U.S. soldiers took turns raping 14 year old Iraqi girl before killing her

In testimony given before a U.S. military hearing, criminal investigator Benjamin Bierce narrated his account of how an incident involving five soldiers involved the serial rape of a 14 year old Iraqi girl prior to shooting her. The hearing will determine whether four current U.S. soldiers have to face a court martial hearing; an additional former soldier allegedly involved in the incident, Steven D. Green, was recently discharged from the military and has pleaded not guilty to rape and murder charges in federal court in Kentucky.

According to Bierce, a U.S. Special Agent investigating the incident, the brutal attack which saw Abeer Qassim al-Janabi slain and her parents and younger sister murdered was premeditated. Citing a sworn statement from Army Specialist James Barker, the five accused were said to have plotted the rape whilst drinking whisky and playing cards. According to Agent Bierce, Spc. Barker said that Pte. Spielman

grabbed the girl while Pte. Green seized her father and they then took them into the house and Sgt. Cortez and Spc. Barker followed them inside.

Pte. Green supposedly led the father, mother and younger sister into the bedroom and closed the door, while the teenage girl remained in the living room with the other Americans, Spc. Barker's statement said.

Sgt. Cortez then allegedly pushed the girl to the floor, pulled up her dress and tore off her underwear while she was struggling, Bierce said, again citing Spc. Barker's statement. Sgt. Cortez appeared to then rape Abeer and afterward, Spc. Barker tried to rape the girl, the statement said.

Then Pte. Green came out of the bedroom with an AK-47 rifle and announced: "They're all dead. I just killed them," according to Spc. Barker's statement.

Then Sgt. Cortez held Abeer down while Pte. Green raped the girl; according to Spc. Barker's statement. Pte. Green then picked up the AK-47 and shot Abeer once, waited, and then shot her a few more times, the U.S. official, Agent Bierce, said, quoting from Spc. Barker's statement.

Spc. Barker said that he then poured kerosene lamp fuel on the girl's body but Barker did not say who set it on fire.

Gary Griesmyer, another Special Agent, quoted Sgt. Cortez as telling him that the teenage girl was crying and talking in Arabic and that Spc. Barker told her to "shut up."

Private Justin Watt testified that Pte. Howard told him before the

incident that Pte. Green, Sgt. Cortez and Spc. Barker were planning to rape a girl, and Pte. Howard was going to be the lookout.

Watt testified that he heard Mr. Green say, "I want to kill and hurt a lot of Iraqis." Green has been discharged from the military and has pleaded not guilty in a federal court in Kentucky where he will stand trial; he will not be facing a court martial regardless of what occurs in the Baghdad hearing.

"If you have the power to make something right, you should do it. Investigation is not my job. But if something went down -- something terrible like that -- then it's my obligation to come forward," Watt said.

Watt also said life for some of the soldiers in the B Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, was horrible while they were manning a military post in nearby Yusufiyah. Some lived in a "dilapidated, abandoned water treatment facility" he said.

Pfc. Watt, who is identified as the whistle-blowing soldier who disclosed the attack during a counseling session, also said; "I feared for my safety at the TCP (traffic control point). It's like this, I find out that guys in my squad, guys I trusted with my life, are allegedly responsible for one of the most brutal rapes/murders I've ever seen. And everyone has a weapon and grenades."

Pfc. Justin Cross testified that deadly attacks by insurgents sapped morale and raised combat stress in the U.S. Army unit that included the soldiers accused of raping and murdering Abeer. He said that the "mentally draining" living conditions of the combat

unit was a factor.

"It drives you nuts. You feel like every step you might get blown up. You just hit a point where you're like, 'If I die today, I die.' You're just walking a death walk." Pfc. Cross told the hearing.

A article 32 hearing, like this, seeks to determine if a soldiers should face court martial. Its similar to that of a preliminary hearing or a grand jury proceeding in civilian law.

Coca-Cola and Pepsi face ban in Indian states

Kerala, a state in southern India, has banned the production and sale of both Coca-Cola and Pepsi due to high levels of pesticide residue discovered in the popular soft drinks.

It is the first state to impose a complete ban on the production and sale of the drinks, but another five areas have said they will introduce partial bans in hospitals, schools and colleges.

The decision to ban the products came after the Centre for Science and Environment said experiments done on the drinks' samples in twelve states in India showed very high amounts of pesticides. Kerala's communist government therefore introduced the ban, but after it was announced yesterday, the Indian Soft Drinks Manufacturers Association issued a statement saying: "Our products manufactured in India are absolutely safe and meet every safety standard set by food health and regulatory bodies in India and all over the world."

US base in Nuristan, Afghanistan attacked

According to reports citing U.S. forces in eastern Afghanistan, an

insurgent attack on the base at Kamdesh in Nuristan Province was successfully repelled, leaving dead approximately half of the 30 insurgents reported to have attacked the base.

Early Wednesday morning, the Kamdesh Provincial Reconstruction Team base was attacked from three directions by an estimated 30 insurgents with RPGs and small arms. The base, which houses hundreds of soldiers, returned fire with mortars and small arms. The base called for air support and jets dropped four 500-pound bombs, effectively ending the battle.

Lt. Joel Rees said "This is the first large, coordinated attack on our base since we arrived three weeks ago". He continued "When light broke, we found large crater holes from the RPG attack throughout the base and several tents had bullet holes." Maj. Tom Sutton described the two-hour battle as the most ferocious he had seen in the area.

According to the U.S. military, two of their soldiers and one Afghan policeman sustained minor injuries. They were treated at the scene and returned to duty.

The attackers are suspected to be Hezbi Islami, a militant group/political party that is said to have allied with Mullah Omar and the remnant Taliban.

Nuristan is one of the most remote regions of Afghanistan, located on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush mountains in the northeastern part of the country. Nuristan's security situation is so poor that no NGOs operate there. The base is part of the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

Arrests over phone-tap of British royal family

Three people have been arrested over allegations that they intercepted calls made by staff in Clarence House, Prince Charles's household. Clive Goodman, royal editor for the tabloid newspaper News of the World, is one of three men who were last night detained by police following a probe by Scotland Yard lasting several weeks. It is alleged they listened to numerous voice mail messages made by members of Britain's royal household.

All of the three men were questioned by police at Charing Cross police station in London, and police have confirmed this morning that a fifty year-old man has been released on bail. But a spokeswoman for the News International newspaper has said that Mr Goodman remains in custody with another unidentified man.

Scotland Yard had reportedly been told by staff at Clarence House that something suspicious was occurring. The Royal Protection Squad was therefore told to investigate the claims, and due to potential security implications, the anti-terrorist branch is also involved in the enquiry.

"Police launched an investigation after concerns were reported to the Met's Royalty Protection Department by members of the Royal Household at Clarence House," said a statement issued by Scotland Yard last night. "It is focused on alleged repeated security breaches within telephone networks over a significant period of time and the potential impact this may have around a number of individuals."

It has also emerged today that the

investigation will look at whether a number of celebrities and Members of Parliament have had their phones tapped. "Police continue to work with the telephone companies concerned and continue to have their full support in attempting to identify any other person whose telephone may have been intercepted," Scotland Yard's statement added.

This is not the first time that such phone hacking allegations surrounding the Royal Family have made the headlines. In 1993, a romantic call made late at night between Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall was made public, and in 1992, a tape featuring a conversation between Princess Diana and a close friend called James Gilbey was published.

British soldier dies in Afghanistan

The Ministry of Defence has confirmed tonight that a British soldier has been killed in Afghanistan. The soldier, from the Royal Logistic Corps in Kabul, died in a traffic accident in Camp Souter.

The next of kin have been informed, and they have requested a period of time to inform friends and family before his name is made public, a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence. The MoD also added that there was no insurgent involvement.

He is the fifth UK soldier to die this month in Afghanistan, and in total, eighteen British troops have died there since operations began.

Last Sunday, Private Andrew Barrie Cutts, from the Royal Logistics Corps, was killed by insurgents in the northern area of Helmand Province.

Lieberman loses to Lamont in Connecticut primary

Three-term US Senator Joe Lieberman has conceded defeat to challenger Ned Lamont in Tuesday's Democratic Party primary election in the U.S. state of Connecticut. With 98% of precincts reporting, the Associated Press reports that Lieberman has 48% of the vote compared to 52% for Lamont. The winner of the primary faces the Republican Party candidate in the November 7 general election but Lieberman confirmed tonight his intention to petition to run as an Independent against both the Democratic and Republican nominees. The polls closed at 8 p.m. local time (UTC-5).

The final result is highly anticipated due to the feud between Lieberman and Lamont. The major issue in the primary has been Lieberman's support for the US war in Iraq. Lieberman, who was Democrat Al Gore's running mate in the 2000 US presidential election, opposed criticizing US President George W. Bush during wartime and was famously kissed on the cheek by Bush following his 2005 State of the Union address. Lamont has challenged President Bush's handling of the Iraq conflict.

The campaign leading up to the election became increasingly acrimonious, with numerous "attack ads" used by both sides.

Because of the nature of the candidates and the marginality of the seat, the race has been seen by some as a "referendum" on the Democratic party or a "proxy vote" on the entire 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent war.

Colorado, Michigan, Missouri and Georgia also held primaries

Tuesday.

Fire at New Zealand hospital destroys laundry

A fire on Tuesday night at Southland Hospital, Invercargill has destroyed a two-storey building which was used for laundry and cleaning by the cleaning company AlSCO.

Junior doctors and interns were evacuated from the nearby hospital campus. A dangerous goods store nearby nearby was saved from the fire. The building was not close enough to the new main hospital building to cause any damage to it.

Morris Robertson, Fire Chief, said: "We managed to save a dangerous goods store near the fire but the laundry is a total loss."

Fire crews arrived at the scene at 9.30 p.m. (NZST) and Morris Robertson said that the building was well ablaze when they arrived. The first was so severe that they had to call in other firefighters to help, including volunteers. In total there was eight fire engines and 35 firefighters.

The fire was under control by 11.30 p.m. but the fire crews stayed overnight, just in case.

The cause of the first has not yet been determined.

Brothers found guilty of killing schoolboy

Two brothers have been found guilty of killing a ten year-old schoolboy. Damilola Taylor, who was born in Nigeria and had only been in the United Kingdom for a couple of months, was stabbed in the leg and died in the stairwell of a housing estate in Peckham in south London in 2000.

Eighteen year-old Danny Preddie and nineteen year-old Rickie Preddie, who live in Peckham, were convicted of manslaughter in a retrial at the Old Bailey this afternoon.

On hearing the verdict, Rickie Preddie started shouting and swearing. "You are corrupt. You are nothing," he told the judge, who then ordered prison officers surrounding the teenager to take him out of the court.

Outside the court, Damilola's father Richard Taylor said: "We, the family, feel nobody can ever return our son to us. But it is a great comfort that justice has finally been done for Damilola. We pray that his gentle soul can now rest in peace."

The head of homicide and serious crime at the Metropolitan Police's Specialist Crime Directorate, Commander Dave Johnston, said: "Today justice has finally been reached for Damilola. His violent death in 2000 sent shockwaves throughout London and beyond. For his family it was a very personal tragedy played out in a very public arena and I would like to acknowledge the courage and dignity with which Gloria and Richard Taylor have supported us throughout the police investigations."

The two brothers had been cleared earlier this year of murder and assault at an earlier trial.

They will be sentenced in two weeks' time.

Edinburgh Fringe festival begins

The 60th Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the "world's largest arts festival" opened on Sunday, August 6. It features more than

1,800 shows put on by 17,000 performers in 260 venues.

The Fringe now dominates the group of annual arts festivals that draw 750,000 visitors to Edinburgh every year, last year 1.3 million tickets were sold for Fringe shows. Anyone can register, pay a fee, find a venue and put on a show at the Fringe, famous for its quirky choice of venues - this year, they include a double-decker bus, a swimming pool, tree and a toilet; and "Hamlet" is being performed in a bouncy castle.

An estimated 160,000 people watched the Fringe Festival Cavalcade, a jamboree of more than 3000 marchers, which marks the launch of the Fringe.

Fringe director Gudgin urged audiences to be selective, saying that it would take five years, 11 months and 16 days to see all the shows back-to-back. The Festival is scheduled to end in August 28.

A recent Edinburgh City Council study concluded the Fringe brought more than £75m to the local economy each year. The festival's job openings included rickshaw drivers, show announcers to shouts details of the impending show and tell the audience when it is time to take their seats, and collectors to pick up flyers that people throw away.

Good opening

Several shows sold out in a strong opening weekend, including those by comedians Russell Brand, the "people's poet" Pam Ayres in his maiden Fringe venture and One Man Star Wars at the Underbelly. Comedians Jason Byrne, Simon Amstell and Danny Bhoj along with shows such as Best of the Fest and Ella Meets Marilyn starring Sally Lindsay and Rain

Pryor are expected to join the list.

The Assembly venue, with theatres on George Street and the 800 Assembly Hall on the Royal Mile, said it had sold 97,000 tickets by last Friday - more than the entire number it sold in 1999.

Religious satire prominent

Australian comic Wil Anderson lays into the Catholic Church, including a send up of the late Pope John Paul II. Breaking the Pope is about the infamous Magdalene laundries, religious-run workhouses for women in Ireland that existed until the mid-90s. "Mary and The Stripper" contrasts the tales of Mary Magdalene and a 21st-century stripper hooked on heroin.

Danish-Egyptian comedian Omar Marzouk performs a standup routine on the Prophet Mohammed cartoon controversy.

We Don't Know Shi'ite, uses vox pops in the streets of Britain to highlight ignorance about Islam. The play's director Joshua Blackstone said, "Britain could work so much better as a multi-ethnic society if people were more open-minded. We could put to rest the stereotypes if there is more understanding,"

Rev Donald Reid, a spokesman for the Festival of Spirituality and Peace, a religious gathering that runs alongside the Fringe, welcomed the focus on religion, calling it a reflection of an upsurge in the thirst for faith and spirituality.

"Artists are testing the boundaries of how far they can go ... But religion should be able to be commented on and its absurdities pointed out.", he said.

In Bible Babel Live! the Bible is

read, in English, Greek and Chinese, from start to finish in 80 hours over 10 days .

Speaking of the religious motif, the festival director Paul Gudgin said, "Clearly it's a very personal subject that artists and writers currently feel a particular need to explore,".

"It's either about what is happening with radical Islam or reflects interest and concern over the influence Evangelical Christians seem to be having in the United States," he told Reuters. Pointing to a "Da Vinci Syndrome", he said, "All of a sudden, these topics are of huge interest. What has surprised me is the breadth of shows on offer.".

The religious theme recieved further impetus from the Racial and Religious Hatred Act introduced in the UK, which sought to give all faiths equal protection, was condemned by comedians such as Rowan Atkinson who feared it would turn satire into a criminal offence.

Religion and politics mix

Jesus: The Guantanamo Years is a one-man show by Abie Philbin Bowman, is playing to sell-out houses. In the show, Bowman plays Jesus, a bearded Middle Eastern man arrested by U.S. immigration officials and sent to the Guantanamo detention center in Cuba after confessing he was ready to die as a martyr.

Bowman says comedy can be an effective weapon if used responsibly. "Being Irish and having grown up in the 1980s I have a sense of my own culture having been hijacked by terrorists and people assuming all Irish were terrorists," he said.

Petrol Jesus Nightmare, from the Traverse Theatre Company features two Israeli soldiers holed up under fire, an apocalyptic thriller about the violent consequences of faith has been seen as "prescient" of the ongoing Middle-east violence.

The Black Jew Dialogues and According to Jesus were other shows on offer. The Situation Comedy is a play from Israel about a suicide bombing written and performed by Robbie Gringras. According to Gringras, it was inspired by true events, including suicide bombings in Israel.

The Scotsman newspaper's theater critic Joyce McMillan called the Fringe "the most amazing barometer of world politics," The Fringe tackled terrorism last year, following the July 2005 London bombings.

In Breasts and Burgers, a surrealist spectacle adapted from a play by 20th-century avant-gardist Guillaume Apollinaire - the US flag is ripped apart onstage each night. Cecile Shea, the US consul in Scotland, has said the play could cause hurt to ordinary Americans.

Director Richard Franklin defended it as a comment on freedom of speech. "The most serious thing to come out of the war on terror is the excuse to create legislation against this freedom (of speech)" he told the Herald newspaper, "It is a symbolic thing and is intended as such."

An American tourist John McCabe visiting Edinburgh was unconvinced, saying "It seems the Stars and Stripes is an acceptable target in this liberal environment," and "I doubt the desecration of the Koran on stage would be tolerated.

Free speech is one thing, but where's the proportionality? I certainly would not go and see this play."

Controversy over Churchill's cigar
Actor Mel Smith, who plays Winston Churchill in Allegiance had to go without lighting the trademark cigar, as smoking in an enclosed public space is now a crime in Scotland. Officials threatened to close down the theater, the Assembly Rooms, if he lit up.

"I think it's absurd. In the context of an international festival like this, it's crazy. It's integral to the part of Churchill and it doesn't affect other people - it's just absurd.", William Burdett-Coutts, who runs the Assembly Rooms, said.

Funding woes
Organisers of the Show have called for more funding, both from public sources as well as from private businesses, to help the show.

Anthony Alderson, the director of The Pleasance, told The Scotsman newspaper that without further private sector funding the Fringe could start to shrink and lose its standing as the world's best festival. He feared that the current rate of expansion is unsustainable without further support from businesses. The Fringe director Paul Gudgin said last year that the Festival would need to make a string of cutbacks if it was to combat major losses.

The Fringe Society currently receives only £45,000 a year from the city council and £25,000 from the Scottish Arts Council.

Gudgin also called for an urgent Scottish Executive response to the

Thundering Hooves report into the future of Edinburgh's festivals, published this May. It pointed out that the festivals contribute £184 million a year to the Scottish economy and stressed the need for continued investment, long-term planning, and international promotion to beat off competition from other cities.

The Edinburgh City Council responded within a month with the announcement of a £1m fund for the various festivals. Some have argued that this money was already in the pipeline.

Fees go up

The Edinburgh City Council has announced increases in theatre licence fees, which venues must pay before holding a show. For venues with 200 seats or less, fees go up from £127 in 2005 to £440 this year, £620 next year and £800 in 2008. For venues seating more than a thousand, fees went up from £295 last year to £1,320 this year.

The Fringe Society, which represents the festivals managers and performers said it was "deeply concerned about the council's decision to make these sharp increases in theatre licence prices", adding that "particularly the smaller venues who will suffer,".

The Council said new laws meant the costs of its licensing scheme had to be recovered from venues. Councillor Jack O'Donnell, convener of the licensing regulatory committee, said the scheme had been operating at a deficit of £177,000.

Today in History

1792 - French Revolution: Insurrectionists in Paris stormed the Tuileries Palace, effectively

ending the French monarchy until it was restored in 1814.

1809 - History of Ecuador: After nearly three centuries of Spanish rule, the first cry for independence was heard in Quito.

1846 - Smithsonian Institution was chartered by the Congress of the United States.

1920 - Representatives of Sultan Mehmed VI signed the Treaty of Sevres, recognizing the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I.

1990 - The Magellan space probe reached Venus.

August 10 is Independence Day in Ecuador, International Biodiesel Day

Quote of the Day

"Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die."
~ Herbert Hoover

Word of the Day

not in Kansas anymore; phrase

1. No longer in quiet and comfortable surroundings.

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