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PRINT EDITION

May 10, 2007

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Video released with demands for exchange of BBC correspondent

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Northern Ireland has home rule returned

After four years, the suspended Northern Ireland Assembly has taken over the direct governing of the part of the United Kingdom that since Ireland's independence in 1922 has been controversially disputed.

Featured story

Scientists to bring all species together in Encyclopedia of Life

Leading biologists announced that they are starting a new project to write the Encyclopedia of Life, a project that aims to bring resources on all 1.8 million species together.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf is re-elected as the Mayor of Tehran.
- Pope Benedict XVI arrives in Brazil on his first visit to Latin American to reaffirm Catholicism in the region.
- The first named storm of the 2007 Atlantic hurricane season,

Wikipedia Current Events

Subtropical Storm Andrea, forms just off the southeastern United States.

- Four people in the United Kingdom are arrested in connection with the 7 July 2005 London bombings.
- Dick Cheney, the Vice President of the United States, travels to Baghdad to encourage reconciliation amongst factions.
- At least 12 people die as a truck bomb explodes in Arbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.
- People in East Timor finish voting in the second round of the country's first presidential election since it gained independence from Indonesia in 2002.
- The United Kingdom Home Office is restructured with a new Ministry of Justice being formed to handle prisons, probation and the sentencing of offenders.
- An international genetic research program has identified a group of genes which may cause bipolar disorder.

Scientists to bring all species together in Encyclopedia of Life

Today, some of the leading biologists in the world announced that they are starting a new project to write the Encyclopedia of Life, a project that aims to bring resources on all 1.8 million species together.

The website will take the form of a wiki-like environment, but in

contrast to Wikimedia's project Wikispecies, only scientists will be allowed to edit. The information will be made freely available on the internet. "Sharing what we know, we can protect Earth's biodiversity and better conserve our natural heritage," said said Jonathan F. Fanton, President of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which has donated US\$10 million to the project. Another US\$2.5 million grant came from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

According to their press release, the website aims to become "a global beacon for biodiversity and conservation." The trailer video mentions that the work of classifying all species has barely begun, and that species are disappearing even before we glimpse at them.

The founding partners of the project include the Field Museum of Natural History, Harvard University, the Marine Biological Laboratory, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Biodiversity Heritage Library. The Missouri Botanical Garden later joined, and negotiations are ongoing with the Atlas of Living Australia. Other partners are the American Museum of Natural History (New York), Natural History Museum (London), New York Botanical Garden, and the Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew).

The institutional council is made up of a selection of international advisors, such as a representative of the Chinese Academy of

Sciences. Another member is Erik Möller of the Wikimedia Foundation Board of Trustees.

According to the press release, the species pages will become available in "all major languages". Initially the focus will be on animals, plants and fungi, but later this could be expanded to microbes. The goal is to document all 1.8 million species over the next 10 years, but the founders warn that it might take up to 4 years before the quality of the pages becomes acceptable. Today, Wikispecies has over 98,000 articles.

The website will partially draw information from existing databases, for example from Wikipedia, as can be seen on some of the demonstration pages. Using an indicator for the educational level of the user, novices and experts will be shown just the information that suits them. A system of filters could be used to allow identification of species: for example, if you've just caught a 6-inch-long fish with big teeth in the Amazon River, you could use the filter system to find out what species it might be.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library will scan tens of millions of pages to provide open access to the relevant scientific literature which it holds. The first 1.25 million pages have already been digitized in scanning centers in London, Boston, and Washington, D.C. .

Subtropical storm brews off eastern Florida, USA

According to the The National Hurricane Center (NHC), at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the first named tropical system of 2007 is forming off the eastern coast of Florida.

Subtropical storm Andrea is traveling west, and tropical storm warnings have been posted from Altamaha Sound, Georgia southward to Flagler Beach, Florida.

"A tropical storm watch has been issued along the southeast coast of the United States from Altamaha Sound, Georgia southward to Flagler Beach, Florida. A tropical storm watch means the tropical storm conditions are possible within the the watch area...generally within the next 36 hours," said a statement posted on the NHC's website at 11:00 a.m. eastern time [15:00 UTC].

At 2:00 p.m. [eastern time] Andrea's storm center was located 100 miles [160 kilometers] southeast of Savannah, Georgia and about 135 miles [220 kilometers] north, northeast of Daytona Beach, Florida.

Andrea has strengthened over the past 24 hours, and at 2:00 p.m. [eastern time], winds were "estimated at 45 miles per hour [75 kilometers/hour]," but little change in strength is forecast during the next 24 hours," added an NHC statement.

Officially, in the U.S., hurricane season does not start until June 1. The next advisory will be made at 5:00 p.m. [eastern time] according to the NHC.

Canadian television show to debut in French speaking countries

CBC Television's hit show *Little Mosque on the Prairie* is set to debut in France, Switzerland, and French-speaking African countries.

The show, which is owned by WestWind Pictures, is a comedy about a Muslim family living in

Canada's Prairies in a largely Muslim populated fictional town called *Mercy*, Saskatchewan. The show is mainly filmed in Ontario but some parts of it are filmed in Saskatchewan. It deals with day-to-day life between the North American culture and Muslim culture and has been featured around the world with reviews from *The New York Times* to the *The Daily Telegraph*.

French television company Canal+ Group will distribute the shows' first season in July to non-subscribers of Canal+, a channel which viewers must subscribe to watch. French voice-actors will dub the show in all three countries' local French dialect.

"*Little Mosque On The Prairie's* international success is a testament to the quality of Canadian talent and how it is embraced around the world," said Kirstine Layfield, executive director of network programming with CBC Television.

Mary Darling of Westwind Pictures said the show creates a good understanding between both cultures.

"When people came in the booth and sat down to talk to us, the first sentence wasn't: 'Hey, hilarious show, love the jokes, what a laugh.' Instead, it was viewed as a show that's needed beyond comic relief. People are looking at it to break down barriers, build bridges, create understanding, and find a voice for people who are unheard or unrepresented," Darling said.

Iraqi school children killed in US air strike

At least 7 school children are dead and 3 more injured after a United States military helicopter opened fire on a school in the Diyala province of Iraq. The helicopter was

supposed to be firing upon militants located near the school.

"A U.S. helicopter shelled Al-Saada primary school, killing seven students and injuring three. The Mindli hospital received seven bodies and three wounded of a primary school's students," said an unnamed hospital official in Iraq.

According to reports by Baghdad police, militants on the ground began to fire at the helicopter. The helicopter then returned fire, hitting the school in the process.

Lt. Col. Chris Garver, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Iraq said that an investigation was going to be conducted and that the incident is being taken seriously. Garver also said that the soldiers in the helicopter attempted to do whatever they could to avoid civilian deaths.

Video released with demands for exchange of BBC correspondent

The Arabic news television channel, Al-Jazeera has reported that it has received a tape apparently from the kidnapers of BBC Gaza Correspondent Alan Johnston, a citizen of the United Kingdom.

The film contains no pictures of Mr. Johnston, but it shows a picture of Johnston's BBC ID card. The tape includes demands for the release of Muslims held in British jails and also readings from the Koran.

Alan Johnston was kidnapped on March 12, 2007 and has been held for over 8 weeks, the longest time for any foreigner in the Gaza Strip. The tape was delivered to al-Jazeera in Gaza and was made by a group calling itself Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam).

In response to this video, the BBC

has said: "We are aware of the tape released by the Army of Islam concerning our Gaza correspondent, Alan Johnston. We have no comment on the demands made of the British government in the tape - we remain concerned for Alan's well-being and call for his immediate release"

The tape does, however, have a specific demand - the demand being the release of Abu Qatada, a Palestinian born Islamic cleric who is suspected of close links to al-Qaeda and is currently held by the UK government as a threat to national security.

Trial 'soon' for aid worker who facilitated release of Italian journalist in Afghanistan

An Afghan doctor, Rahmatullah Hanefi, who works for the Italian non-governmental organization (NGO), Emergency, will go on trial in Afghanistan for his alleged role in the March, 2007 slaying of Afghan interpreter and reporter, Adjmal Nashbandi.

Italian journalist, Daniele Mastrogiacomo, his driver and interpreter were kidnapped by the Taliban in Helmond Province, Afghanistan on March 5, 2007.

During the ensuing negotiations for Mastrogiacomo's release, his driver, Sayed Agha, was killed by their Taliban captors. Mastrogiacomo's interpreter, Adjmal Nashbandi, was later executed by the Taliban. The release of Mastrogiacomo was controversial and criticized at the time for the exchange of five Taliban prisoners in return. Hanefi mediated negotiations, reportedly, with the Taliban for the release of Mastrogiacomo.

Afghanistan's ambassador in Rome said Tuesday that Hanefi would be put on trial "soon". It was not revealed what the specific charges

against Hanefi are, but it has been suggested that the offence may be accessory to murder in the death of Nashbandi. "Hanefi's case will come to trial soon, maybe in a week, and a lawyer will be nominated to assist him," said Musa Maroufi, Afghanistan's ambassador to Italy. He added that "no execution will be carried out" against Hanefi.

In April, Emergency closed the three hospitals it operates in Afghanistan. The NGO has denied that Hanefi had anything to do with Nashbandi's death. In a news update on its U.S. website Monday, Emergency suggested that their international staff were forcibly removed from the hospitals by Afghan authorities.

"Continuing under a pretense of normalcy in this situation would provide services so inadequate as to endanger our patients," said Emergency in the news update. They have decided "to suspend all activity until conditions allowed for the return of... international staff" and suggested a clarification was required from the Afghan government "concerning intimidating threats" allegedly made by the government.

Emergency is pressing for the release of Hanefi.

Northern Ireland has home rule returned

After four years, the suspended Northern Ireland Assembly has taken over the direct governing of the part of the United Kingdom that since Ireland's independence in 1922 has been controversially disputed.

The Assembly, which was established as part of 1998's Good Friday Agreement, was suspended in 2002 over allegations of Republican spying. During that time

the entire province was ruled directly from London. Four years ago, few could have expected that Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley, the preacher known for the longest time in Northern Ireland politics as "Dr. No" and Sinn Féin deputy leader Martin McGuinness, who at one time was an IRA commander, would be sharing power together. However, with the addition of the Saint Andrews Agreement to which both Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) agreed, this became a reality.

Ian Paisley will take his post as First Minister of Northern Ireland and Martin McGuinness will serve as his deputy. The DUP receives four cabinet ministers which includes the deputy leader of the party, Peter Robinson, becoming the head of the Department of Finance and Personnel. Sinn Féin gets three. Meanwhile, the other, less-powerful unionist party, the Ulster Unionist Party receives two which includes UUP leader, Sir Reg Empey heading up the Department for Employment and Learning. Northern Ireland's other mainstream nationalist party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party will head the Department for Social Development.

"I believe we're starting on a road which will bring us back to peace and to prosperity." —Ian Paisley, First Minister of Northern Ireland

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said today's events could "make history anew" and to "escape the heavy chains of history". Blair said, "Look back and we see centuries pock-marked by conflict, hardship, even hatred, among the people of these islands."

Blair's predecessor, Sir John Major

said "The sight of people that were once totally antagonistic to one another sitting down to plan the future of Northern Ireland is very attractive," adding "I always believed from the outset that it was possible but that it would be difficult and that it would take a long time."

Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern thanked his British counterpart saying "For 10 tough years, he has spent more times dealing with the issues of the island of Ireland than any person ever could have asked any other person to do."

Mary McAleese, the President of Ireland said, "It truly is an extraordinary day in the history of Northern Ireland, the island of Ireland and indeed of relations between Ireland and Britain. You carry the hopes of everybody as you take forward now the mandate you have been given by the people."

Ian Paisley said of today's events "I believe we're starting on a road which will bring us back to peace and to prosperity."

His new deputy, McGuinness said that they've already taken joint decisions but in the context of not being power. He said, "All of that is going to change in the next couple of hours, and by midday today, we're going to be in charge, and we're going to be charged with the responsibility of governing in the interests of the people," adding, "I think we do so in the belief and the sure knowledge that we have the overwhelming support of all of the people of Ireland for what we're about to do."

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams said, "I think what today proves is that dialogue and perseverance and tenacity and persistence can bring

about results." He thanked everyone who helped make today possible and added, "It's a good day for Ireland, it's a good day for all of the people of this island."

Sir Reg Empey stated "The mission of the Ulster Unionist Party in the months and years ahead, as we rebuild and reform, is to demonstrate that unionism and politics in general is not about a sectarian power-grab."

Empey's predecessor, Lord David Trimble who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in bringing to peace Northern Ireland with John Hume, the former leader of SDLP said, "I see it as being the culmination, the final implementation of the agreement that was made on Good Friday in 1998."

Mark Durkan, the leader of the SDLP mentioned "What today shows is that when finally you have a government setting a deadline and setting terms and keeping to them, you can get somewhere," stating that Sinn Féin had underwritten on decommissioning while the DUP had underwritten on power-sharing. He also added that "It actually took people like the McCartney sisters to show governments how to set terms and hold terms in which the IRA had to move," in reference to the sisters of Robert McCartney, a Catholic man murdered by the Provisional IRA last year over what was a pub fight. "I don't want my grandchildren to go through what I went through." —Joan McCoubrey, Catholic resident of Belfast

David Ford, leader of the cross-communal Alliance Party said "We are here to make devolution work now, the DUP and Sinn Féin must convince local people that they can

work together; much progress has been made but the real work only begins now."

Massachusetts senator Edward Kennedy, who was in Belfast for the event said "A brighter day has dawned for the people of Northern Ireland, and it would not have been possible without the commitment and determination by all of Northern Ireland's political leaders to find a new way forward," and that "each of them is a profile in courage for our time and all time. Kennedy also said, "Northern Ireland has shown the world that peace is possible, even in the face of tragic history," he stated after attending ceremonies with the American delegation.

President of the United States George W. Bush released a statement saying "I commend the Assembly for your dedication to Northern Ireland and I applaud the people of this region for your desire to overcome a history of violence and division." He added that he commended Blair and Ahern for their leadership and vision and that the The United States will continue to support your efforts to further advance the peace process. Together we can build a more hopeful future for all."

70 year-old retiree Joan McCoubrey of Belfast, a Catholic who lost one of her brothers in 1971 said, "I don't want my grandchildren to go through what I went through."

However, 48 year-old Protestant homemaker Deborah Harbinson of Belfast said "There are still a lot of problems left to be tackled, there's still hidden violence and division and few job opportunities."

Atlantic Canada to investigate lotto winnings

The Atlantic Lottery Corporation

says it will team up with all four Atlantic Canada provinces for an investigation into Atlantic Canada's lottery system. The corporation will pay a total of \$300,000 for the investigation.

Nova Scotia is the first Atlantic province to fully investigate lottery sales. After several concerns, New Brunswick ombudsman, Bernard Richard, monitored their lottery for some time but no investigation was carried.

"People have to have confidence that our systems are fair, secure," said Megan Mullally, president of the Atlantic Lottery Corporation in Nova Scotia. "It references a number of aspects of ALC business, it talks about all aspects of our operations, and to date, most of our focus has been on issues arising from retailer wins."

The investigation is expected to be started late June.

Recently, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation was under investigation under allegations that lottery retailers stole prizes from consumers.

A customer could go into a variety store and ask the retailer to check their tickets for them. If a retailer saw a winning ticket they could tell the customer they didn't win and keep the prize to themselves. It was proven after Ontario man Robert 'Bob' Edmonds sued the corporation in 2001 for refusing to return his winnings, after a store woman clerk claimed that he did not win. Days after, the clerk and her husband claimed Edmonds' jackpot of \$250,000.

Warner Brothers ban movie previews in Canada

Due to a large amount of unauthorised movie recording in

Canada, Warner Brothers Canada has decided to put a ban for movie previews in the country.

According to their press release the ban will come into effect on June 8, 2007, when Ocean's Thirteen comes into theaters. It also states that an estimated 70% of their movies have been camcordered in Canada.

"We regret having to cancel our screenings in Canada but our Studio must take steps to protect not only our branded assets but our commitment to our filmmakers and to theaters all over the world," said Dan Fellman, President of Warner Bros. domestic distribution. "We've been working collaboratively with the exhibitors to encourage the government to put additional measures in place to deter and stop camcording."

Warner Bros. isn't the only company concerned about unauthorised movie recording. Twentieth Century Fox, last year, said they would ban film releases in Canada as a threat to consumers.

Warner Bros. says the lack of Canadian government legislation to make videotaping directly off theater screens illegal is the main source.

"Canada is the number one priority in terms of anti-camcording legislation," Darcy Antonellis, Senior Vice President of Warner Bros. Worldwide Anti-Piracy Operations. "Within the first week of a film's release, you can almost be certain that somewhere out there a Canadian copy will show up. Within the last 12 to 18 months we've seen a significant increase in terms of first-source proliferation that shows up on the Internet and subsequently shows up as hard goods elsewhere."

The press release said that Warner Bros. along with the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association (CMPDA) have teamed up together to make unauthorised movie recording in theaters illegal in all countries, including Canada.

This ban does not effect film critics, who have separate screening dates.

Life sentence handed down in Australian teen murder case

At age 16, two girls from Collie, near Perth, Australia, decided to find out if they would feel remorse if they killed someone. On June 18, 2006, the two girls, who cannot be named as they are under 18, strangled Eliza Jane Davis, 15, and buried her body under a house. They knew it was wrong, but it "felt right," they told police.

Today, a life sentence, with a minimum of 15 years to be served, was given in the case. "It was gruesome and merciless in the extreme," Judge Reynolds said.

Irish teenager wins abortion case

A 17-year old girl in Ireland has won the right to travel to United Kingdom where she intends to have an abortion. Doctors have said that the child she is carrying will not survive more than a couple of days after birth.

The Health Service Executive had issued an order stopping her. Abortion in Ireland is illegal except in certain cases. Many women get around the ban by travelling to the UK. The High Court ruled there is no constitutional or statutory grounds for preventing "Miss D," as the underage girl is known in court, from travelling to the UK.

US Embassy staff told to wear bullet proof vests

Due to a rising number of mortar

based attacks, the United States Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq has told its staff to wear bullet proof vests and helmets at all times while outside or in unprotected buildings, reports the Associated Press.

The Associated Press also reports that an unnamed embassy official confirmed the order. The order reportedly came down on May 3, a day after a mortar or rocket attack killed four contract workers in the Green Zone.

Today in History

1503 - Christopher Columbus and his crew became the first Europeans to visit the Cayman Islands.

1857 - The Sepoy Rebellion broke out in colonial India, threatening the rule of the British East India Company.

1869 - The First Transcontinental Railroad of North America was completed with a golden spike ceremony.

1924 - J. Edgar Hoover became director of the U.S. Bureau of Investigation.

1940 - Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of the United Kingdom resigned and formally recommended Winston Churchill as his successor.

May 10 is Mother's Day in various countries, Constitution Day in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Quote of the Day

Life is a tragedy for those who feel, and a comedy for those who think.
~ Jean de La Bruyère

Word of the Day

trifecta; n

1. The situation of having three major accomplishments or achievements in a sport, profession, or pastime.

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