



Top Stories



Italian PM Prodi loses confidence vote, resigns

Iraq removes Saddam references from flag



A design that removes references to Saddam's Ba'ath party has been

approved by parliament for temporary use.

Featured story

"Anonymous" releases statements outlining "War on Scientology"

An Internet group has released statements on YouTube and via a press release, outlining what they call a "War on Scientology". On Friday, the same group allegedly brought down Scientology's main website, scientology.org, which was available sporadically throughout the weekend.

Wikipedia Current Events

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi is forced to resign following a lost vote of confidence in the Senate.

Wikipedia Current Events

- United States presidential election, 2008: Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich withdraws his candidacy.
- An Australian girl spontaneously switches blood types and adopts her donor's immune system following a liver transplant in the first known case of its type.
- The Brazilian government passes legislation aimed at curbing Amazon deforestation.
- Jérôme Kerviel is blamed for worsening the January 2008 stock market downturn by allegedly losing €4.9 billion (\$7 billion) for French bank Société Générale.

Dennis Kucinich quits U.S. Presidential race

United States Congressman and 2008 presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich has decided to quit his bid for the presidency and Democratic nomination.

Kucinich noted in the Cleveland Plain-Dealer on a interview on Thursday, that the Cleveland local and former mayor of the city was "transitioning out of the Democratic Presidential primary race" to focus on a "new direction." This comes a month after his youngest brother, Perry Kucinich, who had paranoid schizophrenia, was found dead. Kucinich told the Plain-Dealer he'd make a longer statement on Friday.

Instead, Kucinich is going to focus

on his re-election bid to the United States House of Representatives because he is facing four other candidates in the Democratic primary for Ohio's 10th congressional district and has received criticism for spending more time on running for President than on the district which he has represented for the past 12 years.

Kucinich has said he will not endorse another Democrat in the primary. This was his second run for the presidency, his first was the 2004 presidential election.

Suicide bomb kills Iraqi police chief at site of previous attack

A suicide bomber killed a high-ranking police chief and two other police officers in Mosul, Iraq, at the site of an explosion that had killed at least 34 people and wounded at least 217 the day before.

Brig. Gen. Salah Mohammed al-Jubouri, the director of police for Ninawa Governorate, was inspecting the scene of Wednesday's blast when gunmen ambushed his convoy. As he was preparing to flee, the bomber, dressed as a police officer, walked up to al-Jubouri and detonated the bomb. al-Jubouri was rushed to a hospital, where he later died.

According to the United States military, a U.S. soldier, an Iraqi soldier, and three Iraqi police officers were wounded in the blast. The military believes that al-Qaeda was behind the attacks.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said, "This crime exposes the moral bankruptcy of the terrorists after a string of defeats at the hands of our armed forces."

In response to the attacks, authorities in Mosul banned all vehicle traffic and placed the downtown area under an indefinite curfew.

The search for victims of Wednesday's explosion continues, as Iraqi and American forces work to clear away the rubble from damaged buildings, including a three-story apartment block that had collapsed.

"Whole families have vanished. There are still people trapped under the rubble. The casualty toll may increase," said Hisham al-Hamdani, head of Nineveh's provincial council.

Italian PM Prodi loses confidence vote, resigns

Romano Prodi, the Prime Minister of Italy, resigned Thursday evening after losing a vote of confidence in the Senate by a vote of 161-156.

The vote comes in the wake of a growing crisis regarding corruption charges against Prodi's former Minister of Justice, Clemente Mastella. Prodi's fate was sealed when the UEDUR Populares, a smaller component of Prodi's ruling Olive Tree coalition, broke ranks and voted against him.

Prodi did win the confidence vote in the Chamber of Deputies, but was not expected to win the vote in the Senate. Some believed he would resign before the Senate vote and avoid the embarrassment of losing the majority approval of Parliament.

The President of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, must now decide whether to appoint a new Prime Minister or to dissolve Parliament and schedule new elections. Some want a reform of election rules before a new election is called. Recent opinion polls, indicate that Silvio Berlusconi would become Prime Minister once more if elections were held.

It was the current election rules, introduced by Berlusconi during his most recent stint as Prime Minister, that allowed Prodi to assume power after the 2006 parliamentary elections.

"Now we must go to vote. We will say what we want to do in the first 100 days of our government," said former prime minister and opposition leader Berlusconi, demanding elections.

In a speech prior to the vote, Prodi said, "Stopping the government's work is a luxury Italy cannot afford," and warned that Italy "cannot afford a power vacuum."

Asteroid to fly by Earth

On January 29, 2008, an asteroid that is between 500 and 2,000 feet in diameter will pass within 1.4 lunar distances (334,000 miles) of Earth according to NASA's Near Earth Object program (NEO). For a brief time the asteroid will be observable in dark and clear skies with amateur telescopes of 3 inch apertures or larger.

Asteroid 2007 TU24, discovered by the Catalina Sky Survey on October 11, 2007 is expected to reach a brightness magnitude of 10.3 on Jan. 29-30 before quickly becoming fainter as it moves further from Earth. To compare the asteroid's distance from Earth, the Moon is only 239,228 miles away from the planet.

It is estimated that nearly 7,000 asteroids of this size, both discovered and undiscovered are flying around space within a reasonable distance of Earth. An asteroid this big usually passes Earth about every five years or so. The average interval between actual Earth impacts for an object of this size would be about 37,000 years.

"If it [were to] hit in the ocean, which is more likely because two thirds of the Earth is ocean, it would create a tsunami, which would be devastating for the coastlines that happen to be nearby. It would be a huge local problem and the tsunami would be extraordinary if it hit in the ocean," said NEO manager Don Yeomans.

2007 TU24 will be the closest currently known approach by a potentially hazardous asteroid of this size or larger until 2027. Plans have been made for the Goldstone planetary radar to observe this object Jan 23-24 and for the Arecibo Observatory to observe it Jan 27-28 and then Feb 1-4. High resolution radar imaging is expected, which may permit later 3-D shape reconstruction.

Gaming executives gather for the 2008 Taipei Game Show

The 2008 Taipei Game Show, organized by the Taipei Computer Association (TCA), started at Taipei World Trade Center today and ends next Monday (January 28). World-class gaming experts, governmental officials, and companies from the digital content industry gathered there for trade opportunities and to experience exchanging in the gaming industry.

Before the opening of the 2008 Taiwan Digital Contents Forum,

Minister of Economic Affairs of the Republic of China Steve Ruey-long Chen, looked on a bright side of the gaming industry and said to executives and media: "We (the public) witnessed the grown up of gaming industry as digital content industry brought up value of production on retail and arcade games and indirectly brought up the population of gaming people in Taiwan."

Before that comment by Steve Chen, the 2008 Taiwanese Cyber-Gaming Competition was set up by the organizer and Industry Development Bureau of Ministry of Economic Affairs, supervisor of the "Digital Content Development Project in Taiwan". The organizer said he hopes this competition can market MIT (Made in Taiwan) games to the world and directly discover gaming talents and developers.

Not only did officials and executives come, but the TCA, Taipei Orphans Welfare Association, and Taiwan Gaming Industry Association also held special charity biddings to help orphan kids in Taiwan. At this special event, the TCA invited Shih-yuan Chou, Sean Hsing-an Chen, Chih-chung Chen, Wen-ting Tseng, and Hsueh-lin Li as the charity ambassadors.

Even with the weather on the down side in Taipei, nearly 10,000 people visited the show. According to the TCA, the peak number of visitors are expected to be on the weekend after several entertainers and sports-people made their stops at the show earlier.

"Bond 22" name revealed

The name for the newest James Bond film has been announced today. The 22nd film, previously known only as "Bond 22", will be

called "Quantum of Solace". EON Productions who are producing the film made the announcement today at Pinewood Studios, where production for the film has been under way since last year.

The name of the film was inspired by a short story (of the same name) from For Your Eyes Only by Bond creator, Ian Fleming.

The film will be the second for star Daniel Craig, who first starred in Casino Royale in 2006, taking over from Pierce Brosnan. Producer Michael G. Wilson has previously said that the film will continue "literally an hour after" Casino Royale's conclusion.

Pakistan army says scores of Islamic militants killed, captured

The Pakistani army says it killed 40 Islamic militants and arrested 30 during two days of fighting along its border with Afghanistan. The United States, meanwhile, has offered to train Pakistani security forces in their fight against the al-Qaeda-linked militants.

The fighting took place in South Waziristan province late Wednesday and Thursday. The army says security forces backed by helicopters attacked suspected hideouts of militants led by the country's most wanted man, Baitullah Mehsud.

In recent months, bomb attacks blamed on Mehsud's followers have claimed the lives of more than four hundred people throughout the country. Most of the violence has been aimed at the security forces, but both the United States and the Pakistani government blame Mehsud for the assassination last month of the opposition leader and former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto.

The army has retaliated with raids like the one this week, and can claim some battlefield success. The military said Thursday it had cleared three districts of militants, losing eight soldiers in the fighting.

But not everyone believes this is an effective way to deal with the insurgents.

The tribal region is a traditionally lawless and conservative region, whose inhabitants have been said to have never trusted the central Pakistani government. The region is also now home to scores of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters who fled Afghanistan after the U.S.-led invasion of that country in 2001.

Retired Lieutenant General Asad Durrani, the former chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence group, is now a noted political analyst. He says the army's increased activity in the tribal areas only exacerbates the problem.

"It increases the level of insurgency in that area and that is what has been happening for the last, about four years," said Durrani. "It is never a good thing, especially when you are using it [force] against your own people... This was the wrong approach."

Instead, Durrani says, the government should try to resolve the conflict through existing tribal structures, and mediation by influential figures trusted by both sides.

As fighting intensified in the region this week, Admiral William Fallon, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, proposed that U.S. troops help train the Pakistani security forces in their fight against the militants.

Durrani said that if the government agrees, it will anger many Pakistanis.

"It will make it worse...There is hardly anything anyone can teach us...The environments are different," he said. "The approach may be generally the same, but the environments are different. So only we, and with the involvement of the people there, can resolve it. There is no special training required."

The government has not yet replied to Admiral Fallon's offer.

Texas UFOs were actually jets, Air Force says

The strange lights seen by dozens of Stephenville, Texas residents on the night of January 8 are now believed to have been F-16 fighter jets, according to a statement released by the Air Force Reserve.

The press release states that ten F-16s from the Joint Reserve Base Naval Air Station in Fort Worth were on a training mission near Stephenville the night of the sightings. The planes were said to have been in the area from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, which is around the time residents reported seeing the lights.

Officials at the Air Force base initially stated that none of its aircraft were in the area that night, but now say they made a mistake in their reporting.

"In the interest of public awareness, Air Force Reserve Command Public Affairs realized an error was made regarding the reported training activity of military aircraft," the press release says.

Major Karl Lewis, an Air Force Reserve spokesman, says the error

resulted from an "internal communications oversight" at the reserve base. He had previously stated that the lights may have been an illusion caused by two commercial planes and the setting sun.

Lewis did not go into further details. "What we do down there falls under operational procedures that cannot be released because of operations security for our mission," he said.

The Mutual UFO Network, which investigated the town last weekend, isn't quite convinced. Kenneth Cherry, the Texas director of the network, said, "I find it curious that it took them two weeks to 'fess up. I think they're feeling the heat from the publicity."

Steve Hudgeons, also of the Mutual UFO Network, said, "If this is a military exercise then I would like to see them get back over there in another 24 hours and repeat that exercise so that we can see them duplicate it."

Italy's PM Prodi faces confidence vote

Romano Prodi, the President of the Council of Ministers of Italy (commonly referred to as Prime Minister), is facing votes of confidence in both houses of the Parliament of Italy.

The Chamber of Deputies voted on Wednesday. The Senate will vote on Thursday. Prodi called for the votes himself on Tuesday in an effort to keep his weakened coalition in government.

The vote in the Chamber of Deputies was won by Prodi. In the lower house, Prodi supporters still command a clear majority, in the form of Prodi's L'Unione, which

took power after the 2006 elections.

However, Thursday's vote in the Senate is expected to be very close. L'Unione has become destabilized due to the defection of UDEUR Populars, a somewhat small centrist party, but it can tip the balance of power. As a result, Prodi has come under pressure to resign before the vote. However, in 2007, Prodi survived a similar crisis, during which he pre-emptively resigned.

It is widely viewed that former-PM Silvio Berlusconi and his Casa delle Libertà, hope to force elections in Italy.

Berlusconi said that while he hopes for Prodi's resignation, he wants the government to remain until elections can be held: "I think that with the disappearance of the majority, the most logical thing would be that this government continues just for normal administration until the next elections, elections in the very near future."

Some allies of Prodi have suggested that he resign ahead of the Senate vote. This would be preferable to being forced to resign, if the Senate vote is lost.

Prodi met with Giorgio Napolitano, the President of the Italian Republic on Wednesday. Napolitano, as president, could accept a resignation, appoint a caretaker, and/or call elections.

"Anonymous" releases statements outlining "War on Scientology"

The Internet-based group "Anonymous" has released statements on YouTube and via a press release, outlining what they call a "War on Scientology".

Church of Scientology related websites, such as religiousfreedomwatch.org have been removed due to a suspected distributed denial-of-service-attack (DDoS) by a group calling themselves "Anonymous". On Friday, the same group allegedly brought down Scientology's main website, scientology.org, which was available sporadically throughout the weekend.

Several websites relating to the Church of Scientology have been slowed down, brought to a complete halt or seemingly removed from the Internet completely in an attack which seems to be continuous. The scientology.org site was back online briefly on Monday, and is currently loading slowly.

On Monday, the group released a video titled: "Message to Scientology" on YouTube concerning their intentions to attack the Church of Scientology. A robotic voice on the video begins with "Hello leaders of Scientology. We are Anonymous," and continues by explaining their motivations: "Over the years we have been watching you, your campaigns of misinformation, your suppression of dissent and your litigious nature. All of these things have caught our eye. With the leakage of your latest propaganda video into mainstream circulation the extent of your malign influence over those who have come to trust you as leaders has been made clear to us. Anonymous has therefore decided that your organisation should be destroyed." The message goes on to state that the group intends to "expel Scientology from the Internet". As of Wednesday, the video had been viewed 370,347 times, favorited 2,473 times, and is currently YouTube's top third video of the

day.

"if this video is any indication, it seems like the assailants mean business." —The Michigan Daily

The "Message to Scientology" video was highlighted as the "YouTube Video of the Week" by The Michigan Daily. Commenting on the video, the piece states "if this video is any indication, it seems like the assailants mean business". In a blog post on USA Today's website, Jess Zielinski wrote that it was "not a shock that hackers hold a grudge against Scientology," and in a followup post on another USA Today blog, Angela Gunn wrote that "those of us who remember ... the adventures of Operation Clambake are fascinated to see this kind of thing flare up again". Blogging for Wired magazine, Ryan Singel wrote about the incident in a piece on Wednesday titled "War Breaks Out Between Hackers and Scientology -- There Can Be Only One". Singel wrote that the Project Chanology wiki page "directs Anonymous members to download and use denial of service software, make prank calls, host Scientology documents the Church considers proprietary, and fax endless loops of black pages to the Church's fax machines to waste ink". According to Wired, "The Church of Scientology did not immediately respond to a call for comment".

The viewpoints expressed in the video are echoed on the "Project Chanology" website, an open source of information and direction for those within Anonymous, which talks of tactics such as blackfaxing and prank calling alongside other "real-life" methods of attack. The satirical website Encyclopedia Dramatica also has a similar page devoted to "Project Chanology".

"The so-called Church of Scientology actively misused copyright and trademark law in pursuit of its own agenda ... They attempted not only to subvert free speech, but to recklessly pervert justice to silence those who spoke out against them."

—"Anonymous" - Press Release

"Anonymous" released a statement on Monday in the form of a press release, "Internet Group Anonymous Declares "War on Scientology": "Anonymous" are fighting the Church of Scientology and the Religious Technology Center". In the statement, the group explained their goal as safeguarding the right to freedom of speech "A spokesperson said that the group's goals include bringing an end to the financial exploitation of Church members and protecting the right to free speech, a right which they claim was consistently violated by the Church of Scientology in pursuit of its opponents." The press release also claimed that the Church of Scientology misused copyright and trademark law in order to remove criticism from websites including Digg and YouTube. The statement goes on to assert that the attacks from the group "will continue until the Church of Scientology reacts, at which point they will change strategy".

The attack was reportedly motivated by the Church of Scientology's attempts to remove a promotional video featuring Scientologist Tom Cruise from YouTube. After the Church of Scientology lodged a copyright infringement complaint with YouTube, the site took down the video. The Tom Cruise video is still available on Gawker.com, which has stated it will not remove the video "It's newsworthy, and we will not be removing it."

"... a whole range of sites has turned the Church into a mockery by doing what mainstream celebrity-coverage outlets wouldn't dare" —Gawker.com

Gawker.com discussed the actions of the "Anonymous" group, in a post on Monday titled "Scientology vs. the Internet: Why Kids On The Internet Are Scientology's Most Powerful Enemy". Gawker.com briefly outlined actions of other anonymous users critical of Scientology, including actions taken in the past by users of YouTube, Digg, and YTMND "This isn't the only group of Internet users unafraid of the intimidating cult; a whole range of sites has turned the Church into a mockery by doing what mainstream celebrity-coverage outlets wouldn't dare."

A poster on the newsgroup alt.religion.scientology (a.r.s.) was critical of the actions by the "Anonymous" group. In a post titled "Open Letter to Anonymous" Jeff Jacobsen, webmaster of lisamcpherson.org, posting as "cultxpt" wrote that "It's understandable that people get upset over the things the Church of Scientology has done online and off", pointing out that the Church of Scientology had "tried to shut down a.r.s.", and "spam our newsgroup to this day". In 1999 "sporgery", a form of nonsensical spam tactic, was used as an attempt to disrupt discussion on the newsgroup. Previously in 1995 Helena Kobrin, an attorney for the Church of Scientology, attempted to remove the a.r.s. group from Usenet. Kobrin sent a rmgroup message which stated: "We have requested that the alt.religion.scientology newsgroup be removed from all sites". This later led to a declaration of war by the hacker group Cult of the Dead

Cow, and an increase in popularity of the a.r.s site. This initial conflict came to be known as "Scientology versus the Internet".

The post from Jacobsen went on to criticize the actions of the "Anonymous" group, stating: "We're supposed to be the good people," and stated that contrary to the Anonymous group's tactics, "Our weapons as critics are reason, evidence, argument, and free speech"

"Freedom of speech means we need to allow all to speak - including those we strongly disagree with." —Andreas Heldal-Lund, Operation Clambake

On Tuesday, the founder of Operation Clambake, a non-profit organization and website critical of Scientology based in Stavanger, Norway, released a statement about the attacks by "Anonymous". Andreas Heldal-Lund was critical of the "Anonymous" groups actions, stating: "The author of Operation Clambake does not condone such activity. Attacking Scientology like that will just make them play the religious persecution card. They will use it to defend their own counter actions when they try to shatter criticism and crush critics without mercy." Heldal-Lund went on to emphasize the right of all people and organizations to freedom of speech - including the Church of Scientology: "Freedom of speech means we need to allow all to speak - including those we strongly disagree with. I am of the opinion that the Church of Scientology is a criminal organisation and a cult which is designed by its delusional founder to abuse people. I am still committed to fight for their right to speak their opinion."

Today in History

1327 – Fourteen-year old Edward III became King of England, but the country was ruled by his mother Queen Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer.

1554 – Jesuit missionaries José de Anchieta and Manoel da Nóbrega established a mission at São Paulo dos Campos de Piratininga, which grew to become São Paulo, Brazil.

1924 – The first Winter Olympic Games opened at the foot of Mont Blanc in Chamonix, Haute-Savoie, France.

1971 – General Idi Amin Dada seized power in a military coup d'état from President Milton Obote, beginning eight years of military rule in Uganda.

1993 – Five people were shot outside the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, USA, resulting in two murders.

January 25 is Burns Night (Scots culture)

Quote of the Day

Of forty million people say a foolish thing it does not become a wise one, but the wise man is foolish to give them the lie.

~ W. Somerset Maugham

Word of the Day

prehensile adj

1. Able to take hold of and clasp objects; adapted for grasping especially by wrapping around an object.

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