



### Top Stories

#### Obama cabinet nominees withdraw over tax issues

On Tuesday, US President Barack



Obama saw two of his cabinet nominations withdraw from consideration after issues with their taxes became public knowledge. "I think I screwed up," Obama admitted in an interview with CNN, "And, I take responsibility for it and we're going to make sure we fix it so it doesn't happen again."

#### US Supreme Court judge Ginsburg undergoes surgery for pancreatic cancer

U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 75, underwent surgery for early pancreatic cancer today, and is likely to be hospitalised for ten days. The disease was spotted during a routine check-up.



### Wikipedia Current Events

USA Swimming suspends swimmer Michael Phelps from competition for three months following publication of a photo showing him taking marijuana.

•Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka's national cricket team becomes the highest wicket-taker in One Day Internationals with 503.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan agree to form a rapid reaction force based in the Federation.
- China declares a national emergency due to severe droughts throughout the country.
- Somali pirates release Ukraine's MV Faina following a US\$3.2-million ransom payment.
- The Bank of England reduces the base rate of interest to a new historic low of 1%.
- The number of Americans applying for first-time unemployment benefits reaches its highest level since October 1982.
- At least 10 people are killed in a Brazilian Federal Police raid in Rio de Janeiro.
- Extreme weather closes Ireland's Dublin Airport and disrupts flights for several hours.
- Businessman Kazutsugi Nami is arrested by Japanese police over a US\$1.4-billion investment scam.
- Three Malaysian Members of Parliament from the People's Alliance declare themselves independent and pledge support for the National Front.
- Zimbabwe's House of Assembly allows power-sharing between the African National Union – Patriotic Front and the Movement for Democratic Change.
- A suicide bomber kills 24 people

### Wikipedia Current Events

and injures at least 40 in Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan.

#### Bill Gates releases mosquitoes during conference for malaria awareness

Bill Gates, the founder of computer software company Microsoft tried to bring attention to malaria while speaking at the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference on Wednesday February 4 in Long Beach, California. He did so by releasing a "swarm" of mosquitoes from a jar, into the crowd.

"Malaria is spread by mosquitoes. I brought some. Here I'll let them roam around. There is no reason only poor people should be infected," said Gates as he opened the jar. After waiting a minute, Gates then stated that the mosquitoes were not infected with the disease.

"There is more money put into baldness drugs than into malaria. Now, baldness is a terrible thing and rich men are afflicted. That is why that priority has been set," said Gates jokingly.

The prank was first reported by Dave Morin, Facebook's manager, on the social networking and micro-blogging site Twitter. Morin stated that "Gates just released mosquito[e]s into the audience at TED and said: 'Not only poor people should experience this,'" followed by a smiley face.

Gates donated nearly US\$170

million to the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative in September 2008 to fund research to fight malaria, and develop a vaccine.

The TED conference, held annually, features, among other things, the latest in technology, science, and politics. People who have previously spoken at the conference include former United States president Bill Clinton, former vice president Al Gore, and Jimmy Wales, the founder of the Wikimedia Foundation.

### **Ukrainian ship MV Faina with cargo of tanks freed by pirates**

Pirates in Somalia have released the MV Faina, a Ukrainian ship carrying a cargo of 33 T-72 tanks, along with 20 of its crew of 21, the Russian captain having been killed by hypertension during the hijack.

A ransom of US\$3.2 million was paid for the ship's release, compared to the \$20 million previously demanded and also down from the initial request for \$35 million after the capture in September. By January 16 the ransom sought was \$5 million, with negotiations occurring directly between the pirates and the ship's owner. In October the pirates threatened to blow the ship up unless this was paid within days, and stated they were willing to die and take the crew with them, but this threat was never carried out.

The ransom came in on Wednesday, and after counting the money the pirates left the vessel on Thursday. One pirate, Segule Ali, said of the payment that "no huge amount has been paid, but something to cover our expenses."

"No huge amount has been paid, but something to cover our expenses —Somali pirate Segule Ali

The ownership of the cargo, which includes ammunition, rocket launchers, small arms and spare parts as well as tanks, is uncertain. Although the shipment was said to be for Kenya, as acknowledged by the Kenyan government, the pirates claim to have documents proving they were destined for Sudan, currently the subject of a United Nations arms embargo. Sudan denies this.

At one point, with the ship anchored off Harardhere, the pirates claimed they had put down an attempted revolt by the crew. However, the Faina's owner has expressed doubts about the veracity of this report, which originated with the pirates themselves.

The remaining crew are reported to be healthy by the Ukrainian Presidency and the ship is now heading to Mombasa under US Navy escort. There are 17 Ukrainians, two Russians and a Latvian on board.

### **Six indicted over jet crash at New Jersey's Teterboro Airport**

In the United States, six men linked to the defunct Florida company Platinum Jet Management have been charged in connection to the February 2, 2005 crash of a jet owned by the company at New Jersey's Teterboro Airport. The Bombardier Challenger CL-600's crash left twenty people hospitalised and prosecutors allege that regular breaches of federal law were to blame.

The business jet had been privately chartered for a flight to Chicago Midway Airport but failed to take off. Instead, the aircraft broke through a fence, crossed Route 46 and struck a warehouse, causing a fire. The plane clipped

two cars on the way across the road and the accident left eleven people onboard the aircraft and nine more on the ground hospitalised.

The National Transportation Safety Board investigated the accident and found that the flight crew had miscalculated the aircraft's centre of gravity and that overfilling the fuel tanks had moved it too far forward.

According to a federal indictment filed Wednesday, six men within the company were "routinely undertaking and concealing dangerous fueling and weight-distribution practices." Three co-founders of Platinum - Michael Brassington, 35, his brother Paul Brassington, 29, and Andre Budhan, 42, as well as maintenance director Brien McKenzie, also 42, have been arrested and pilot Francis Vieira, 59, and director of charters Joseph Singh, 37, are being sought.

The 23-count indictment says that Michael Brassington, McKenzie and Vieira regularly stated in paperwork that aircraft were operating at weights up to 1,000 pounds lighter than the true value in breach of Federal Aviation Administration laws. It also accuses Platinum of operating commercial charters for a year between November 2002 and November 2003 without a valid licence and filing such flights as noncommercial.

The document goes on to accuse Platinum of using pilots that lacked proper training; in particular John Kimberling, who flew the jet that crashed, was not adequately qualified to fly commercial flights, which have stricter regulations than noncommercial air operations. He has not been

charged himself at this time, but investigations continue. The Southern Ledger states the accused face charges of "conspiracy, fraud, endangering the safety of aircraft and making false statements to the National Transportation Safety Board."

### **US Supreme Court judge Ginsburg undergoes surgery for pancreatic cancer**

United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 75, has undergone surgery for early pancreatic cancer today. The disease was spotted during a routine check-up. She is likely to be hospitalised for ten days.

"Justice Ginsburg had no symptoms prior to the incidental discovery of the lesion during a routine annual checkup in late January at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland," the Supreme Court announced.

Ginsburg underwent surgery and had chemotherapy for colorectal cancer in 1999; her mother and husband also suffered from cancer.

She was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Bill Clinton in 1993, and is considered to be on the liberal wing of the nine-member court.

A spokesman for President Barack Obama said that Obama's thoughts and prayers are with Ginsburg.

According to the American Cancer Society, the one-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer is 24%, and the five-year survival rate is 5%.

### **ITV Wales drops local news sign language**

Members of the National Assembly

for Wales have condemned a decision by local broadcaster ITV Wales to drop sign language interpretation for the deaf.

South Wales Plaid Cymru AM Jocelyn Davies, a member of the Welsh Assembly Government, pointed out that the decision "means that deaf British Sign Language users in Wales will no longer have access to local news". Liberal Democrat AM Eleanor Burnham went further, saying it was "an outrageous decision which it seems has been taken without any consultation with deaf people at all, which is appalling".

ITV Wales announced that they were "discontinuing the signed 20 second headlines every weekday" after 23 years and that doing so would bring the Welsh local news programme Wales Tonight "in line with all other ITV regions". They added that "ITV will continue to meet its licence obligations for signing across its family of channels" and that the bulletin would keep its optional subtitling. The move apparently has the blessing of media regulator Ofcom.

The Wales Deaf Broadcasting Council said that it was a "severe blow" and that it was "very concerned that no consultation with the deaf community has taken place about this decision, neither by ITV Wales nor Ofcom".

Plaid's Adam Price said "I am... concerned about the very short notice given for implementation of this decision. I hope that this is not an attempt by ITV Wales to achieve a *fait accompli*".

ITV has been scaling back its public service broadcasting commitments recently, saying it wished to stop producing and airing local news at all. Ofcom has

already allowed the weekly amount of news on ITV Wales to fall from five hours and twenty minutes to four hours.

### **England's Football Association complains over missed goal**

The English Football Association (FA) has complained after broadcaster ITV cut away to an advertisement just before a winning goal in a match.

The match, an FA Cup Merseyside derby between Everton F.C. and Liverpool F.C., was in extra time after 118 minutes without a goal when ITV's automated advertisement server, designed for use only during ordinary programming, began playing out commercials. In this time, Everton's Dan Gosling scored the winning goal. In some regions the system returned to the match just before the goal, but viewers in the south of England saw only the celebrations after the goal.

Michael Grade, executive chairman of ITV, admitted to ITN that the broadcast had been a shambles and said that "yellow or red cards" would go to those responsible once it was established how it happened. ITV has received over 1,000 complaints. ITV has previously had issues with FA Cup coverage. The Histon F.C.—Leeds United A.F.C. game managed to include swearing from Leeds fans and scenes of a naked player, whilst heavy rain marred picture quality.

The FA's statement on this issue said "It is obviously very disappointing that viewers and fans did not see the only goal of last night's FA Cup replay between Everton and Liverpool. Clearly we are seeking a full explanation from ITV as to why this happened. It is important that lessons are learned

and that this does not happen again".

### **Strike ends at UK oil refinery UK rail firm cuts 180 jobs**

Workers at the UK's Lindsey Oil Refinery have voted to return to work.

The week-long strike at the refinery began over the issuing by French owners Total S.A. of a contract to an Italian company, who brought in Italian and Portuguese workers. The unofficial strike had led to similar unofficial sympathy strikes across the country.

The deal to end the strike will see around 100 jobs being offered to British workers. Additionally, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who had repeatedly criticized the strikers, has agreed to review laws governing foreign workers. Unions have warned that, while this action was now over, the country could see further action at other sites with larger numbers of foreign workers. Phil Whitehurst of the GMB union said "It was an excellent decision. We have now got the chance to go back to work but the fight does not stop here". Derek Simpson of the Unite union pointed to Staythorpe Power Station in Nottinghamshire as a potential source of problems. The site has Spanish contractors, although Unite said that they had no evidence the foreign workers there were undercutting UK staff.

Gordon Brown's agreement to look into laws on the free transfer of labour within the European Union came during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons. A review has been set up to look into the issue and he told the House, "When they have reached their conclusions we will look at what they have to say".

The Times points out that this may conflict with Business Secretary Lord Mandelson's statement on Sunday, where he said that "[i]t is not European law that has caused this problem for us". German politicians have called for a European-wide review, something opposed by the British and Polish governments and the European Commission.

### **MySpace removes 90,000 sex offenders**

On February 4, 2009 in an attempt to keep MySpace safe for young users, MySpace officials stated that they have removed 90,000 sex offender accounts from their website. The social networking site admitted this is double what they anticipated last year. MySpace previously thought the site had 40,000 offender accounts registered.

North Carolina attorney general Roy Cooper and Connecticut attorney general Richard Blumenthal stated that they encourage and seek more social networking sites like MySpace to become safer. After the MySpace team calculated the number of sex offenders on their website they submitted the numbers to both attorneys on Tuesday February 3.

"This shocking revelation, resulting from our subpoena, provides compelling proof that social networking sites remain rife with sexual predators," said Blumenthal.

Both attorneys work with Facebook and MySpace in an agreement to make their social networking websites safer, especially for young users. They have already made both websites safer by implementing dozens of safeguards and a special features

where users older than the age of 18 have limitations searching users less than 18 years of age.

### **UN demands return of aid seized by Hamas**

The United Nations relief agency United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is demanding that Hamas return food and blankets intended for Gaza Strip civilians in Palestine, which was seized by Hamas' Ministry of Social Affairs.

According to UNRWA, the supplies were seized on Tuesday by Hamas police. The 3,500 blankets and 406 parcels of food were intended to help 500 families affected by the recent Israel–Gaza conflict.

"UNRWA condemns in the strongest terms the confiscation of its aid supplies and has demanded that it is returned immediately," wrote UNRWA spokesperson Christopher Gunness in a press release.

"They were armed. They seized this. They took it by force," Gunness added, speaking to the press. He called the incident "absolutely unacceptable."

Meanwhile, The Palestinian Information Center, a Hamas-centric website, reported that Ismail Haniyeh's government denies the UNRWA allegations. Further, it says that the supplies were put in police custody after Hamas learned that they were only being distributed to Fatah supporters.

"UNRWA did not do what it said it would do, and began distributing its aid to groups that tie their activities to political activism," said Ahmad Kurd, the Hamas official in charge of the Ministry of Social

Affairs, to the Associated Press.

John Holmes, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said, "The United Nations cannot accept under any circumstances the diversion of aid by a party to a conflict."

"We are very concerned, but this is an isolated incident, we hope," said Alix de Mauny, of the European Commission, which is among the largest donors of aid money to the Palestinians. "We will react accordingly if this develops beyond an isolated incident."

However, Israel indicated that it believes that Hamas routinely seizes aid meant for civilians.

"We have said in the past that we know Hamas is stealing humanitarian aid and donations from international organizations," said Peter Lerner, an Israeli military spokesperson.

Gunness denied that assertion. "Does anyone really think that the Americans, who are our single largest donor, or the Europeans, who are our largest multination donor, would give us aid in the generous way they do if they thought that aid would go to terrorists?" he said.

### **Flight 1549 transcript released**

The United States Federal Aviation Administration has released a transcript of the conversations that went on between Flight 1549 and the control tower at La Guardia before the airplane crash landed in the Hudson river. All 155 passengers and crew survived and were rescued by a flotilla of boats.

The transcripts reveal that the pilot, Chesley Sullenberger, realised that both engines had been disabled by bird strike and

that the airplane was about to crash. Controllers attempted to clear runways at nearby airports but Sullenberger had to put down immediately, telling them "we're going to be in the Hudson".

### **UK house prices rise despite recession**

The average price of a house in the United Kingdom rose by 1.9% in January, according to a survey by the mortgage lender Halifax. This takes the average price to £163,966 - a rise, according to The Daily Mail, of £100 a day, although their headline and story do not agree on the figure.

Year-on-year figures show that prices fell 17.2% since January 2007, and 5.1% over the last three months. A similar survey by the Nationwide Building Society said that prices fell 1.3% in January. The Daily Mail says 1.2 million households now have "negative equity", where the mortgage on their property is more than the property is actually worth.

### **Bank of England cuts interest rate; European Central Bank waits**

The Bank of England, the UK's central bank, has cut interest rates to their lowest level since the bank was created in 1694. The new base rate is to be 1%, down half a percentage point.

Meanwhile, the European Central Bank, which governs rates in the the Eurozone, has left its rates unchanged at 2%, but has hinted that a half point cut is possible in the next review in a month's time.

### **U.S. new unemployment at 26-year high**

The U.S. Department of Labor says that initial jobless claims in the country have gone up 35,000 to a

seasonally adjusted 626,000. The figures for the last week of January are the highest since 1982. The four-week average, which removes anomalies like strikes and holidays, were up 39,000 to 582,250. America now has 4.788 million people unemployed and claiming welfare. Bloomberg believes that 7.5% of the working population will be unemployed in figures to be released tomorrow.

### **Today in History**

1819 – British official Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with Sultan Hussein Shah of Johor, establishing Singapore as a new trading post for the British East India Company.

1840 – The British and the Māori signed the Treaty of Waitangi, considered as the founding document of New Zealand.

1862 – Union forces earned one of their first important victories in the American Civil War at the Battle of Fort Henry in western Tennessee.

1934 – In an attempted coup d'état against the French Third Republic, far right leagues demonstrated on the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

1952 – Elizabeth II ascended to the thrones of the United Kingdom and six other British Commonwealth countries upon the death of her father, George VI.

1958 – British European Airways Flight 609, carrying the

Manchester United football club, a number of their fans and journalists covering the team, crashed while attempting to take off from Munich-Riem Airport in Munich, West Germany, killing eight players and 15 others. February 06 is Waitangi Day in New Zealand (1840)

**Quote of the Day**

One love,  
 One heart,  
 Let's get together  
 And feel alright.  
 ~ Bob Marley ~

**Word of the Day**

fortnight n

1. A period of fourteen nights; two weeks.

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