



Top Stories



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Featured story

Israel Journal: The Holy Land has an image problem

Wikinews reporter David Shankbone is currently, courtesy of the Israeli government and friends, visiting Israel. This is a first-hand account of his experiences about when he arrived to the country, what happend, and some interesting discussions that took place.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The "Mitchell Report" is released, naming a number of Major League Baseball players who are alleged to have used anabolic steroids or human growth hormone.
- Tropical Storm Olga causes floods and landslides in the Caribbean, killing at least 35 people.
- Two bombings in Algiers kill dozens of people, including 17 UN employees.
- A state of disaster is declared in South Korea's Taean county, after the country's worst ever oil spill.
- The Afghan National Army and the International Security Assistance Force launch an assault near Musa Qala in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, against Taliban insurgents.
- President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan declares an end to the six-week state of emergency.

BBC Radio 1 reverses "faggot" ruling hours after initial ban

BBC Radio 1 bosses have today reversed their decision to censor the word "faggot" from the 20 year old "Fairytale of New York" song by The Pogues. The initial censoring of the song caused controversy

recently as the song had been played for 20 years without censoring, and resulted in many people contacting the BBC saying the decision was "ridiculous". The ban was also ridiculed for the fact that it only applied to Radio 1 and not to Radio 2 or any other station on the BBC network.

The Radio 1 management made the initial decision saying "We are playing an edited version because some members of the audience might find it offensive" and thus the word faggot was disguised from "you scumbag, you maggot, you cheap lousy faggot". The word "slut" from the line "you're an old slut on junk" was also censored.

A further meeting was held today in which the management decided to stick by their initial decision, however at around 18.00 (UTC) a breaking news bulletin, from Andy Parfitt the controller of Radio 1, was read out during the Scott Mills show, saying that the decision was "wrong" and that the full song would be played un-edited in future.

Grand Central Railway launches direct train service linking London with north east England

Grand Central Railway have today launched a new train service between London King's Cross and Sunderland in the north east of England. The first service arrived in London shortly before 1030 UTC.

The company has been troubled with a variety of difficulties which have caused the launch to be cancelled on a number of occasions. More recently problems with acquiring rolling stock, the decision by the Office of Rail Regulation to allow the services was challenged by the then principal operator of East Coast Main Line services, GNER.

The new service calls at Sunderland, Hartlepool, Eaglescliffe, Northallerton, Thirsk, York, and terminates at London King's Cross.

Grand Central are operating an interim timetable of one return journey per day until more rolling stock becomes available, expected by the end of January, to permit the full timetable of three return journeys to begin.

The company is only one of a few "open access" operators in the United Kingdom which rather than bidding for a franchise and running a level of service set by government, Grand Central applied for access rights having identified a commercial opportunity.

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"We welcome President Musharraf's lifting of state of emergency and the revoking of the provisional constitutional order," Amadeu Altafaj Tardio, a spokesperson for the European Commissioner for Development & Humanitarian Aid told reporters at a briefing on Monday.

"It is essential for all restrictions on

fundamental rights and freedoms to be lifted in advance of the parliamentary elections," Tardio continued. "We thus appeal to the government to take further steps to enhance confidence in the political process."

Pakistan is scheduled to hold a general election on January 8, 2008.

Nick Clegg is new leader of UK Liberal Democrat party

Nick Clegg has came out first in the race to become the new leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, the third largest party in the United Kingdom.

Clegg congratulated Vincent Cable on his performance as acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, which he took after the resignation of Menzies Camp

He beat Chris Huhne in the party's election, although the number of votes was very close - Nick Clegg had just 511 more votes than Huhne.

During his acceptance speech he said "I want the Liberal Democrats to be the future of politics," and that he hoped his leadership of the Liberal Democrats would be about ambition and change. He also acknowledged that it was a close contest. His acceptance speech took place in a central London hotel.

In his speech he also criticized the Labour and Conservative parties by saying they were mutating in to one party and encouraged unsatisfied voters to vote for the Liberal Democrat's.

Before Clegg became a Member of the UK parliament, he had a variety of different roles on the Liberal Democrats, including a Liberal Democrat in the European Member of Parliament for the East Midlands.

He became an Member of Parliament (for Sheffield Hallam) in the UK General Election in May 2005 after quitting his job as an MP in 2002.

He was also made the spokesman for Trade and Industry spokesman for the European Liberal Democrat and Reform group as well as campaigning to end illegal logging.

Dad sells \$90 video game for \$9000 after catching son smoking pot

Newspapers and online sources today reported that a Canadian father sold a hard-to-find video game, which he bought for \$90, for \$9000 (Canadian), after finding his son smoking pot.

The father had bought Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock for Nintendo Wii, which cost him \$90, after scouring every store, to find it as a Christmas present for his son.

"He was relieved", according to what he wrote on eBay when selling the item, "that he had found 'the Holy Grail' of presents in time". However, when the man came home on Saturday, a bit early, he found his son smoking pot with two friends.

The man, a school teacher, said he sold the game to punish his son, and stop him from smoking. The game was sold on eBay for \$9000, over one-hundred times the original selling price of the game.

The boy, however, will not go without a present, as the man considered purchasing a Nintendo Wii game such as Barbie as the Island Princess or Dancing with the Stars.

According to the The Daily Telegraph, the purchaser was an Australian father.

The veracity of the winning bid has yet to be authenticated, so suspicions that the exchange may

not be finalised remain.

Brazilian-Argentine rocket successfully launched

After its start had been postponed four times due to bad weather conditions, a research rocket of type "VS-30" took off successfully on Sunday, 16 December from Brazil. During the mission, which lasted nine minutes and 25 seconds, the rocket reached a height of 150 kilometers according to Xinhua, but only 120 km according to Associated Press.

The joint project between Brazil and Argentina was in accordance with a contract from 1998, under which both states contributed with experiments that were transported into space as a workload. The rocket was launched at 9:15 am CET from the spaceport located in Boca do Inferno in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte. 122 kilometers from the launch site, the workload landed in the Atlantic Ocean. After its recovery, the evaluation of the experiments will take place in Buenos Aires.

Free speech restricted in New Zealand with passing of Bill, say opponents

The proposed amendments to the Electoral Finance Act have been passed into law, which critics call an attack on free speech. The law will come into effect on January 1, 2008 - the start of election year in New Zealand - after receiving royal assent by the Queen's representative in New Zealand, Governor-General Anand Satyanand.

Under the new law, individuals or groups of New Zealanders will face restrictions on what they can say for or against a political party. Once an organisation has spent over NZ\$12,000 (currently USD\$9,080) on a campaign, they

must register and then face what opponent John Boscawen describes as "draconian restrictions or requirements" including a limit of \$120,000 (\$USD 90,800). "At a time when political parties are free to spend millions and millions of dollars promoting their own views - both from their own money, and taxpayer's money.

On its third and final reading, the new Act had 63 votes for, 57 against. National Party, Māori, ACT, UnitedFuture and independent Taito Phillip Field voted against, with Labour, Greens, New Zealand First and Progressive voting for.

Justice Minister, Annette King, dismisses the claims by opponents who claim that free speech will be stifled. She says that it only restricts speech that has been paid for, not free speech.

Invercargill Mayor Tim Shadbolt faces a conviction under the new law because of a campaign he is spearheading against the Government over tertiary funding cuts. However, Mr Shadbolt says that he is not worried about possibly breaking the law, "Well I've been to jail twice before, I've spent five years in periodic detention centres, I've been arrested 33 times I'm not likely to be intimidated at this stage of my life."

National leader John Key said, "So Tim will be in breach of the law and there is every chance that he will go to jail for two years or face a fine of \$40,000...."

Russia makes first nuclear fuel shipments to Iran

Russia has made delivery of its first shipment of nuclear fuel to Iran's Bushehr facility, which is also being built by Russia. Both the Kremlin and the White House say that this should allow Iran to shut down its controversial uranium

enrichment program.

The Russian company, Atomstroieexport, said that the shipments began on Sunday. It was also confirmed by Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

"If the Russians are willing to do that, which I support, then the Iranians do not need to learn how to enrich," United States President George W. Bush said on Monday during a visit to Virginia. "If the Iranians accept that uranium for a civilian nuclear power plant, then there's no need for them to learn how to enrich."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia said in a statement: "We believe that qualitatively new conditions have been created which will allow Iran to take the steps which are demanded of it ... for the restoration of trust in the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program."

Russia says that Bushehr is being built under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, thus preventing it from being used for military purposes.

A senior Iranian official told Reuters that Iran will not stop enrichment under any circumstances, because it needs the nuclear fuel for other plants.

Israel Journal: The Holy Land has an image problem

Wikinews reporter David Shankbone is currently, courtesy of the Israeli government and friends, visiting Israel. This is a first-hand account of his experiences and may — as a result — not fully comply with Wikinews' neutrality policy. Please note this is a journalism experiment for Wikinews and put constructive criticism on the collaboration page.

This article mentions the

Wikimedia Foundation, one of its projects, or people related to it. Please note that Wikinews is a project of the Wikimedia Foundation.

At 70 miles per hour halfway to Kennedy Airport the scent of alcohol filled the back of the cab when the driver turned around and said, "There is no traffic. It is good. Quick." It was fitting. Up to that point I sat staring out the window thinking about all the warnings my family and friends gave me about taking care of my safety in Israel. Although I have traveled a good deal and never found a place I visited to be as it was depicted in the American media--Cuba is nothing like it is portrayed--the intonations to steer clear of pizza parlors and buses weighed on me. "Whatever you do, David, don't go to Gaza or take a bus! Don't. Go. To. Gaza," my mother said several times, "Just, you know, there's a war going on over there. If you see anyone praying to Allah and sweating, run!"

Until the cab driver turned around and smiled through his boozy breath, my mind had raced with thoughts of my life ending head bowed on Al-Jazeera, surrounded by gunmen forcing me to denounce my country. I thought about Gay Talese, desperate to go to Iraq, who told me he would tell "the bastards" to "go ahead, make my day" because he would die doing what he loved: working on a story. Strangely, I found solace in my drunken driver to distract me from these thoughts, and instead I thought about Carolyn Doran, the former Wikimedia COO who has caused a firestorm for the foundation when they hired her unaware that not only is she a quadruple-convicted drunk driver, but that she also shot a boyfriend.

My flight from Kennedy to Tel Aviv had the hallmarks of a caricatured

bad flight: Despite my request for an aisle, I found myself in a center seat. To my right was a morbidly obese woman in a purple beret breast-feeding her baby. In the seat to my left was another infant in a baby seat, and to his left was his mother holding yet a third baby in her lap. When I woke two of the babies were suspended from the wall in what looked like airplane baby crib trampolines. Surprisingly, it was one of the better 11 hour flights I have had. All three babies slept through the entire trip and when I woke from one nap I found myself lying against what felt like memory foam, but turned out to be the obese woman, whose largess had spilled over our hapless arm rest and into my seat. It was...not unpleasant.

Upon arrival at our hotel in Tel Aviv we were given exactly ten minutes to shower and change before we had to leave to have dinner with Dr. Yossi Vardi--the father of Israeli invention, as he is known. Jimmy Wales had introduced me to him over e-mail, and I had done my research on the man who funded and sold the ICQ network. On the bus over there Stacy Perman and David Saranga spoke about how Israel is trying to brand itself today. In particular, Perman, who writes for Businessweek, mentioned a spread in Maxim Magazine that Saranga, who is in charge of media relations for the Israeli consulate in New York, was responsible for arranging. Its theme was "The Women of the Israeli Army" and featured buxom, beautiful scantily-clad Israeli girls from the armed forces. It rubbed Perman the wrong way. "The spread seemed so Lowest Common Denominator to me. What was the thinking behind that?" asked Stacy.

Saranga had no apologies for appealing to the male libido in his never-ending drive to sell Israel.

“Look, I would love for Maxim’s 2.5 million readers to pick up that magazine and read about Israeli technology and our wonderful culture here. But in truth, they are not so interested in that. When we approached Maxim they asked why they should do it; after all, there are beautiful women every where. Why Israeli beautiful women? We said, ‘But Israel is the only army where women are actually fighting alongside the men.’ So they did it. Not with guns and ammunition, but just the...beautiful women of the Israeli army. When we tested how that piece worked, we found it was very, very successful.”

But what is success? The issue, Saranga explained, is Israel has an image problem. Saranga is one of the key people in the Israeli Foreign Ministry working to create a new brand name for the holy land. Indeed, one scheduled dinner for the journalists on this trip is hosted by Ido Aharoni, whose title is Head of Israel Brand Management Team. A country's brand name is what this trip is all about. More accurately, about rebranding.

When people think of Israel, Saranga explained, they think the same things my friends and family think: it is dangerous, it is a place where you may be blown up. It is difficult to find in the American media stories outside the narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian-Lebanese conflict. The effect, according to Saranga, has been that people do not want to come to Israel. It is too dangerous and even if safety is an issue, it does not look like a particularly fun place to go. According to the test research the Israeli government has conducted, people see Israel as a place that is deeply religious--it is, after all, a Jewish state--and outside of holy sites such as the Temple Mount and retracing the steps of Jesus Christ, the American secular thrill

seeker thinks there is little to do in Israel.

In reality, Israel is a multi-dimensional and pluralistic society with a large Arab—the majority of whom identify themselves as Palestinian—population in one of the most stable democracies in the Middle East. This trip, however, is mostly modeled to show the technology journalists what is by any measure one of the most thriving centers of innovation in the world. What we won't see is Israel's Arab side. When I suggested to Saranga that I would like to venture to the Jaffa Market, Tel Aviv's thriving Arab bazaar, he looked at me perplexed, “Why would you want to go there?!” When I replied that it would be a good place to look for things to buy people back home, he still did not see why I would choose to go there. It was only when I mentioned it would also be good for photography--another purpose for this trip--did he say, “Well, that's true. I suppose it has color.”

At dinner Dr. Yossi Vardi discussed the future of Israeli technology and pointed out that after California and Boston, Israel attracts the highest amount of venture capital incubator dollars in the world. After his speech, he turned to me with what the standard complaints I hear about Wikipedia; namely, that it is not always accurate and it is arbitrary in how it decides what is notable (in particular, the article on a product he is financing, Fring, has been deleted five times, he said, despite being a market leader). “How do you decide what is right and what is notable?” asked Vardi.

It was the same question raised by the Haaretz reporter when he interviewed me later that night for an article about my trip. With both Vardi and Haaretz I brought up the on-going Santa Claus battle on Wikipedia, in which I was heavily

involved. Several editors do not want us to point out that Santa Claus is not real (think of the children!) or, absent outright supporting the myth, that we should hide he is made up. The problem is that Wikipedia is not responsible for supporting cultural myths, but to explain them.

“But I believe in Santa Claus” replied Vardi. “Who are you to say he is not real?” It is a question that was raised in the Santa talk page discussion, and a difficult challenge to answer. And like the pro-Santa editors on the Santa Claus discussion, Vardi asked “What about God? Can you say that God does not exist?” But are Santa and God really the same beyond an academic philosophical discussion, I replied. God is typically taught to explain aspects of the world around us that we can not explain ourselves through our knowledge and technology. Santa, on the other hand, is a story parents know to be false. They tell their children to believe in something and then make an elaborate effort to support something they know is not true (milk and cookies consumed; gifts given by Santa; Father Christmas tracked on the Air Force website). Eventually, the time comes when parents reveal to their children that he never existed; it was them all along eating those cookies.

“But perception,” Dr. Vardi responded, “is reality. So who are you to say? It is the question of the tree falling in the woods and whether anyone hears it.” I responded that to take knowledge to such academic and philosophical realms is fine for spirited dinner conversation, but useless when trying to engage in practical pursuits. “After all, Dr. Vardi, how would you ever solve an engineering problem if all it takes for reality to be formed is to believe something to be true? You

must come across many people who believe fervently that products they are developing will be successful; do you invest based upon their beliefs? The question is always whether a tree falling makes a sound. The question is never framed as, 'Has the tree fallen?' It's a given."

Cnaan Liphshiz, the Haaretz reporter, relayed similar concerns about Wikipedia as Vardi, although less philosophical. Are we a reliable source of information? "The short answer is no," I said. He looked at me surprised "The problem with such a question is not whether Wikipedia is reliable, but is any one source of information reliable? Studies continually show that Wikipedia is reliable at redacting information and presenting what others say to be true. But are our sources right? No person should rely upon one source for anything. They should seek several sources to form an opinion. Does Wikipedia do a better job of presenting several opinions than The New York Times or Fox News? Yes, I believe they do."

My presence on this trip, I offered Haaretz, raised the interesting question that Web 2.0 presents: how did the Israeli foreign ministry decide on David Shankbone to report for Wikinews and Wikipedia on this trip? 25% of the answer lies in my accreditation with Wikinews and that I am able to be an original source of reporting. But 75% of the reason rests upon my contributions to Wikimedia projects, which made me stand out over other contributors. Between my photography and my interviews, I have done high profile projects on Wikipedia and its sister projects. So can other commoners like me take off to Israel when we make worthwhile contributions to high-profile Web 2.0 sites like Wikipedia? Maybe. The challenge for firms, governments and

organizations today is to figure out who amongst a morass of disparate and sometimes bizarre user names can actually produce substantive work. The answer is that those who want to contribute information to the public sphere need to expend time to find who out there in Web 2.0 is worth contacting, and whether people in Web 2.0 can even do anything for them. This is the same advice I gave the Rubenstein Public Relations company (who manages PR for the Tribeca Film Festival), which is how the Israelis found me.

On a trip like this, what are the Israelis' goals for Wikimedia? For David Saranga, it goes back to the rebranding of Israel. They simply want people to highlight aspects of their country that do not involve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence, we are here to look at Israel's technology sector in a head-spinning array of meetings. This made Wikipedia and Wikinews, influential sources of information that attempt to present the world as it is, an attractive option. "The fact is, there is so much going on in Israel today that nobody knows about because the media does not write stories about Israel outside of the conflict," said Saranga. The opportunity to have someone from the Internet's major encyclopedia visit the Weizmann Institute, the Technion and some of the holy sites was golden for them. Just don't go to the Arab parts and whatever you do, don't go to Gaza.

Wikinews in other Languages

French-

- Saut à ski : Morgensten survole la compétition
- Ski alpin : Première victoire de

Jean-Baptiste Grange en coupe du monde

- Droit en France : La Poste est déclarée responsable en matière de distribution des objets recommandés
- Championnat de France de Rugby Pro D2 2007-2008 : les résultats de la huitième journée
- Chypre va adopter l'euro comme monnaie officielle

Polish-

- Uroczystości z okazji 37. rocznicy Grudnia '70 przy Pomniku Ofiar Grudnia 1970 obok Stoczni Gdynia S.A.
- Lech Kaczyński spotkał się z przewodniczącym Prezydium Bośni i Hercegowiny
- Lech Kaczyński przyjął z rąk harcerzy Betlejemskie Światelko Pokoju
- Kempa: opublikować podsłuchy CBA

German-

- Chinas Wirtschaft stark überbewertet
- Ausnahmezustand in Pakistan aufgehoben
- Saudi-Arabien: König begnadigt „Qatif Girl“
- Landkreis Lüchow-Dannenberg: Wolf von Jägern erschossen

Have your say on whether this new feature should be kept at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/User_talk:Anonymous101

Italian-

- Al Zawahiri attacca Benedetto XVI: "Ha offeso l'Islam"

Have your say on whether this new feature should be kept at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/User_talk:Anonymous101

Spanish-

- Presidentes de Chile, Bolivia y Brasil firman acuerdo para la construcción de carretera interoceánica
- Dos sismos despertaron a la zona central de Chile
- Chipre se encuentra listo para introducir el euro como moneda oficial

Have your say on whether this new feature should be kept at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/User_talk:Anonymous101

Today in History

1865 – Slavery in the United States was abolished when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted.

1892 – The first performance of Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's fairy tale-ballet The Nutcracker was held at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

1966 – Epimetheus, one of the moons of Saturn, was discovered, but was mistaken as Janus. It took 12 years to determine that they are two distinct objects sharing the same orbit.

1987 – Programmer Larry Wall released the first version of the programming language Perl via

the comp.sources.misc newsgroup.

World News Quiz.

How many hectares of crops were destroyed during Tropical Storm Olga in the Caribbean?

Is it 3000, 4000, 5000 or 6000
Answer at

http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:World_News_Quiz

Have your say on whether this new feature should be kept at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/User_talk:Anonymous101

Quote of the day

I cannot be grasped in the here and now. For I reside just as much with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat closer to the heart of creation than usual. But not nearly close enough. ~

Paul Klee

Listen to quotes online at http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page

Word of the day

hymnody

- Composing, or singing of hymns or psalms.
- The hymns of a particular church or of a particular time

Listen to this word online at <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hymnody>

About Wikinews

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Wikipedia Current Events http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Current_events

Today in History http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Quote of the Day http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page

Word of the Day http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page

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