



Lead Stories

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Winter wonderland: the recent U.S. blizzard in photos

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Mortar exchange kills thirteen in Somali capital

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Madagascar's leader, Andry Rajoelina, has named a high-ranking army officer as the country's new prime minister, and announced he is abandoning a power-sharing deal with the opposition.

Mr. Rajoelina's office announced Sunday that Colonel Camille Albert Vital would serve as the new prime minister, replacing Eugene Mangalaza, who was supposed to be prime minister under the deal. Previously he had been expected to make Cecile Manorohanta the new prime minister. He also abolished the posts of co-president.

In a nationally broadcast address, Colonel Vital said that organising elections and increasing security were his priorities. He called on the people of Madagascar, including political rivals, to work with his government.

Mr. Rajoelina took power in a coup last March. On Wednesday, he

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appeared on national television to announce that parliamentary elections would take place March 20 next year. He made no mention of presidential elections.

International mediators have brokered several power-sharing agreements in recent months, but all have been unsuccessful. The African Union and other regional bodies have refused to recognize Mr. Rajoelina's presidency.

Yemen rebels accuse Saudi forces of killing 54 people

The Yemeni rebels of the Shi'ite Zaidi group have accused Saudi armed forces of killing 54 people in air strikes on a town in northern Yemen. The group stated warplanes carried out the raids yesterday, destroying five houses in the town of Razeh in the mountainous Saada province. They added that women and children were among the dead.

There was no immediate comment from Saudi Arabia on the allegations, and, because the media and aid workers have limited access to the area, there has been no independent confirmation of the incident.

Saudi forces launched an offensive against the rebels, also known as Houthis, last month after the rebels killed two Saudi guards in a cross-border raid.

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Winter wonderland: the recent U.S. blizzard in photos

A recent blizzard that paralyzed parts of the U.S. East Coast Sunday has left many areas buried under feet of snow. When all was said and done, the storm, a severe nor'easter, had affected everywhere from North Carolina to New England and Nova Scotia in Canada. Among its effects were at least five fatalities, as well as large-scale traffic delays.

The storm originated in the Gulf of Mexico, as nor'easters usually do, and grew to be a powerful cyclone as it moved northeastward. Often described as the worst winter storm to strike the area in years, Long Island bore the brunt of the blizzard. There, crippling snow, amounting to as much as 24 inches, heavily disrupted travel. Cities like Philadelphia had one of their worst storms in recorded history.

Hundreds of thousands of residents were without power as the storm swept across the region. Some areas declared snow emergencies, and strongly encouraged people not to travel and to remain at home. In Virginia, the National Guard rescued several hundred motorists who became stranded due to the heavy snows. A twenty-mile traffic backup on Interstate 81 was also reported.

Macy's flagship store evacuated due to fire

Macy's flagship store in Herald Square, New York City, was evacuated due to a two-alarm fire on Sunday. The fire started in an escalator and smoke began to spread throughout the department store. Nobody was seriously injured, however thick smoke was present.

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The fire was reported at 16:00 EDT (21:00 UTC) and the store reopened at around 18:00 EDT (23:00 UTC) and will stay open until 18:00 EDT Christmas eve, according to Macy's spokesperson Elina Kazan.

"Real smoky, you could hardly breathe on the third floor [...] everybody had to wear masks." shopper Raysha Oliver said to the local CBS affiliate. Oliver also said that those without masks had to cover thier faces with cloths. Customers were still attempting to complete purchases "I got some already, but had to put the rest of it aside," Oliver said.

FDNY officials estimate that about 5000 customers were displaced during the fire, although some waited the two hours for the store to reopen. Shopper Stanley Rafal said "It's going to kill a lot of business." Macy's executive Patti Lee said that she could not estimate the financial toll which the fire took and that "We're just pleased no one was hurt".

Mortar exchange kills thirteen in Somali capital

Somali officials have said that an exchange of mortar fire today has killed at least fourteen people in the capital, Mogadishu. At least 28 other people were wounded in the shelling between Islamist insurgents and pro-government forces.

The incident apparently started after the insurgents started firing mortars at soldiers, who responded by throwing shells.

"Fourteen civilians died and 28 others were wounded on Saturday night and Sunday morning in mortar shell exchanges in Mogadishu. Most of

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these people died this morning after an exchange of heavy shelling," said the vice chairman of Mogadishu's Elman Peace and Human Rights Organization, Ali Yasin Gedi, to the Reuters news agency.

Islamist rebels are in control of large parts of the capital and southern Somalia after a nearly three-year insurgency; they have said they plan to overthrow Somalia's current government.

Somalia's weak transitional government is under growing pressure to take tough measures against rebels, especially the al-Shabab group. Fighting in the Horn of Africa country has killed about 19,000 civilians and displaced another 1.5 million since the beginning of 2007.

Commons Picture of the Day



Male Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) in the Spangener Heide, part of the nature reserve Cuxhavener Küstenheiden, northern Lower Saxony, Germany.

Wikipedia Featured Article

The **Battle of Tory Island** was a naval action of the French Revolutionary Wars, fought on 12 October 1798 between French and British squadrons off the northwest coast of Donegal in



Wikipedia Featured Article

Ireland. The last action of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, the Battle of Tory Island ended the final attempt by the French Navy to land substantial numbers of soldiers in Ireland during the war. In May 1798 the Society of United Irishmen, led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, precipitated an uprising against British rule in Ireland. At the urging of the rebels a small French force under General Humbert was landed at Killala, but by early September both this expedition and the rebellion had been defeated. Unaware of the defeat, on 16 September the French despatched reinforcements. However, having missed one invasion force, the Royal Navy was on alert for another, and when the squadron carrying the reinforcements left Brest they were soon spotted. After a long chase, the French were brought to battle in a bay off Donegal close to Tory Island. During the action the outnumbered French attempted to escape, but were run down and defeated piecemeal, with the British capturing four ships and scattering the survivors. Over the next two weeks, British frigate patrols scoured the passage back to Brest, capturing three more ships. Of the ten ships in the original French squadron, only two frigates and a schooner reached safety. British losses in the campaign were minimal. The battle marked the last attempt by the French Navy to launch an invasion of any part of the British Isles.

Christmas Countdown

3 days to go!

Quote of the Day

All of us encounter, at least once in our life, some individual who utters words that make us think forever. There are men whose phrases are oracles; who condense in one sentence the secrets of life; who blurt out an aphorism that forms a character or illustrates an existence.

~ Benjamin Disraeli ~

Word of the Day

frowst *v*
1. To enjoy a warm, stuffy room.

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This issue was compiled by Dendodge based articles written by Wikinews volunteers and published on en.wikinews.org on 21 December 2009

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