



Top Stories

Syrian Interior Minister dead from apparent suicide

The Syrian Interior Minister, Ghazi Kanaan, has committed suicide - according to the official Syrian News Agency SANA. Kanaan had been under investigation two weeks earlier by a United Nations team probing the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

Moderate earthquake hits Indonesia

An earthquake with a magnitude of 6.0 has hit the Northern Sumatra region of Indonesia. No news yet on casualties or damage.

Featured story

African Union hostages freed by Darfur rebels

Forces from the Sudanese rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), have assisted in liberating 38 African Union (AU) personnel that were taken hostage on Sunday. The kidnapped—which consisted of the original 18 hostages, and later a 20 man rescue team—were released on Monday. Initially, two hostages remained but were freed following a reported shootout with the kidnappers.

Wikipedia Current Events

• Syria's interior minister, Ghazi Kanaan, who was head of the country's military intelligence in neighboring Lebanon for nearly 20 years, has committed suicide.

Wikipedia Current Events

• CNN reports that the Louisiana attorney general is investigating the possibility that mercy killings of critically ill patients by staff medical professionals at Memorial Medical Center in New Orleans occurred during Hurricane Katrina.

• German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder resigns. He criticizes the United States for its response to Hurricane Katrina and "Anglo-saxon economic policies," while stressing the importance of Franco-Germanic ties.

• At least 30 people die following an insurgent suicide bomb attack in Talafar, North Western Iraq, the second such attack in as many days.

• The People's Republic of China launches the manned Shenzhou 6 spacecraft. Fei Junlong and Nie Haisheng will spend five days in orbit in their Shenzhou spacecraft.

• Iraq's Constitutional referendum: the prospects of the proposed Iraqi constitution being approved in Saturday's referendum are boosted by a deal struck with a major Sunni Arab party, the Iraqi Islamic Party.

China successfully launches Shenzhou VI manned rocket

BBC News is reporting that the People's Republic of China has successfully launched its second manned space flight, Shenzhou VI.

The mission is more ambitious than the previous Shenzhou V, which made China only the third nation to launch a manned space mission. Shenzhou VI will carry two taikonauts (Chinese astronauts), Nie Haisheng and Fei Junlong, compared to the previous mission which only carried a single taikonaut, Yang Liwei. The newest taikonauts will also stay in orbit longer, five days compared to the 21 hour, 14 orbit flight of Shenzhou V.



Scale model of Shenzhou spacecraft

The director of the Chinese Space Crew Training program, Chen Shanguang, explained to the media that the country would send a woman to Space within five years. "Women are more patient compared with male astronauts, their psychological qualities are more stable and they face isolation better" according to Chen.

US Homeland Security Department doubts credibility of New York subway threat

The US news agency CNN is reporting that the recent New York subway terrorist threat this past weekend was based on "false information." The original tip lead to the arrest of three men in Iraq with suspected ties to the plot;

however, under interrogation which included lie detector tests, investigators discovered they had no knowledge of any planned terror attacks on the New York subway system.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was skeptical of the threat since it was first announced last week. More recently, Russ Knocke, a spokesman for the DHS, said "The intelligence community has been able to determine that there are very serious doubts about the credibility of this specific threat."

Responding to the new comments from the DHS, New York City Mayor Bloomberg replied, "We've got to take every threat seriously and that is what we are going to do." Even before the new questions about the tip's accuracy, Mayor Bloomberg was already defending his decision to increase security and promised that the measures will remain in place for at least the near future. Mayor Bloomberg explained that, while he did not believe he made a mistake in calling for increased security, "If I'm going to make a mistake you can rest assured it is on the side of being cautious." New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly agreed, adding, "We did exactly the right thing."

Microsoft and Yahoo team up to make IM clients compatible

Microsoft and Yahoo have agreed to make their instant messaging programs, Yahoo Messenger and MSN Messenger, work together. Instant messaging, or IM as it commonly known, is becoming an increasingly popular communication service, mainly because of the speed of communication which almost

equals regular conversation.

This move, announced on Wednesday, would mainly focus on earlier forms of instant messaging, like sending text messages to other people via the internet. This arrangement is expected to start around June 2006.

The agreement will allow the companies to compete against the popular AOL Instant Messenger service (AOL), and Google Talk, Google's relatively new instant messaging service that was opened to the public in beta form in September. The companies said that this relationship is the fruit of many years of negotiation.

Until now, AOL has been able to move and develop the IM market at its own pace, due to its widespread use within the United States. With this arrangement in place, this freedom might end. The number of users of the Yahoo! and Microsoft services combined will rival the number of AOL's customers.

Microsoft had previously held talks with AOL over possible partnerships in the instant messaging field. However, the status of these negotiations is unknown.

Iraq Sunni party embraces constitution

A last minute constitutional deal has been struck that brings some Sunni political leaders into the political mainstream and reduced fears that Iraq was descending into civil war. The Iraqi Islamic Party, decided on Tuesday to support the new constitution; according to a party source, "Some of our demands were met so the party has endorsed the

constitution and is urging people to vote 'Yes'." Iraq's parliament moved immediately to ratify the changes just days before the nationwide constitutional referendum on October 15th.

Until today, an ongoing bombing campaign by Sunni extremists aimed at derailing the referendum led many outside observers to believe that Iraq's fragile new democracy was falling prey to sectarian violence. A suicide bomber today killed another 30 Iraqis at an army recruiting center. The Bush administration welcomed the news of a breakthrough; State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the agreement, "Shows, frankly, that the political process in Iraq is working."

Other Sunni political groups have maintained their opposition to the constitution and are urging either a boycott or a "No" vote on Saturday, arguing that the charter could break up the state and hand too much power to Shi'ites and Kurds.

Syrian Interior Minister dead from apparent suicide

The Syrian Interior Minister, Ghazi Kanaan, has committed suicide—according to the official Syrian News Agency SANA. The suicide has caused much controversy, as some Middle Eastern analysts suggest he may have been executed as a sacrificial lamb.

Kanaan had been under investigation two weeks earlier by a United Nations team probing the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri. The assassination of Hariri took place on February 14, 2005 when explosives equivalent to around 1000 kg of TNT were detonated as

his motorcade drove past the St. George Hotel in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told CNN that he was not aware of any evidence suggesting Hariri's death was not suicide. "If indeed there is a Syrian national implicated in it, he would be considered a traitor and most severely punished," the President said.

"The minister of interior died in his office this afternoon after committing suicide, and the authorities are investigating the incident," the SANA report stated. It is reported that the suicide was carried out by shooting himself in the mouth.

Earlier in the day, Kanaan went on Lebanese radio station, Voice of Lebanon, denying that he showed the U.N. investigators cheques paid to him by the late Hariri. Kanaan was Syria's most powerful intelligence chief in Lebanon, which was ruled by Syria until its military withdrawal earlier this year. He returned to Damascus in 2002 as political intelligence chief and joined the cabinet in 2004.

The UN report on Hariri's assassination is expected to be out at the end of October. The UN investigator, Detlev Mehlis, questioned senior Syrian officials in Damascus during a visit at the end of September. The United States froze Kanaan's assets in the country during July saying he had aided terrorism in Lebanon.

Some parties have suggested that Kanaan's death was arranged to protect others involved in the assassination of Hariri, thus preempting action against others as a result of the pending UN report.

Singapore Exam Board sets mathematically-impossible question

The Exam Board of Singapore handled many complaints about the incorrectly-written math question on an end-of-the-year examination.

The Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) are taken nationwide and determine what secondary school students enter. The secondary schools are ranked by the average score of the students. Based on this system, Singaporeans commonly determine how 'smart' a student is based on what school they got into.

"This is ridiculous," said a secondary student.

Question 13 of the Math exam required students to calculate the area of triangle C based on the area of triangle A and B. The dimensions of the rectangle of which the triangles were in and the triangles themselves are inconsistent. Based on these calculations, it is mathematically impossible to draw that diagram.

All students have been given two marks regardless of their answer. However, some parents and students in top schools remain unsatisfied.

"I do not think it is fair because those who got it correct, actually it will still be the same with the others. They don't deserve it and maybe we do," said one student. "A lot of people might have spent a lot of time on that question and not have time to check on the other questions but then everyone gets two marks. 89 is an A1, 91 is an A star so there is quite a lot of difference."

Other students were happy with the compensation. "I'm very very happy that they are giving us two marks."

The Exam Board stated that it had carried out at least 5 rounds of checks by experienced examiners. It also assured parents and students all exams would be thoroughly checked to be error-free in the future.

Heating bills, oil price rise predicted

A US government report was issued Wednesday predicting the rise of heating bills due to colder temperatures and impacts Hurricanes Rita and Katrina had on the nation's energy production.

Local forecasters predict that most of the US will have a warmer-than-expected winter this year. However, households that heat their homes by gas can expect to pay 29.8% more in heating bills. In the case of colder-than-expected weather, an increase of 66% in household heating costs is likely. In typical weather, prices will rise about 47.6%. Households that use electricity can expect a rise of about 5% from last year. NOAA's 2005-2006 U.S. Winter Outlook calls for warmer-than-normal temperatures across much of the central and western United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. The Midwest, the Southern Californian coast and the East Coast have equal chances of warmer, cooler or near-normal temperatures this winter.

Around one third of the US crude oil and one fifth of the natural gas outputs in Mexico still remain closed due to hurricane-related damage. Seven oil refineries remain offline.

The Energy Information Administration predicts that the price of oil will rise to around \$64 per barrel (42 gallons or 158.97 litres) in 2006, with \$58 being the average for this year.

Bad weather makes life tougher for quake survivors

While Aid starts to pour in to the worst hit areas of South Asia Earthquake that has killed more than 30,000 people, bad weather is hampering the relief efforts with snow falling on the peaks of the earthquake-devastated areas of Pakistan.

The measure of human suffering can't just be measured in the death toll, which officially stands at 23,000, but also in the 4 million who have been made homeless, hungry and cold with 1 million in acute need, facing certain death without outside assistance. In Indian-ruled Kashmir, authorities say at least 1,300 people are known to have died, but officials fear the number will rise.

ABC Australia reports of a man in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, who has been cut from aid, saying "I find that we are alone now. We have nothing. We are finished."

Choppers are the main lifeline of support; trucks are unable to deliver relief supplies due to looting and general mayhem on the ground. The more snow, the less able aid agencies are to make their way to those in the direst need.

Jan Vandemoortele, U.N. Resident Coordinator for Pakistan, said key roads into the quake zone have been reopened, as 30 countries including Australia, France, Japan, Jordan, China, Russia, Iran, Syria

and the US provide assistance in the form of money, doctors, tents, blankets, and disaster relief teams.

United Nations officials are warning of a growing threat of measles, cholera, and diarrhea outbreaks among the millions of survivors.

There have been no reports of epidemic outbreaks so far, but the area's health infrastructure has completely collapsed, Vandemoortele said.

Bali nine lawyer challenges police on legality of drug case

The lawyer for one of the members of the so called Bali Nine is claiming he will challenge the legality of the indictment against his client.

Adnan Wirawan, the lawyer of Martin Stephens from Wollongong, says his client has been unfairly accused as being the ring leader of an alleged conspiracy to smuggle drugs: "He's a human suitcase... he was being told what to do."

Stephens appeared in Denpasar District Court on Wednesday. The prosecution claimed that Stephens and Renae Lawrence, from Newcastle, had their hotel and trip to Bali paid for by the accused mastermind, Andrew Chan.

Stephens' mother, Michelle, was in court for her son's first appearance and says she will support him throughout his trial: "I'm here to support my son, and I love him and I believe in him. And that's all I can say."

Thomas Schelling and Robert Aumann win Nobel Prize in Economics

Thomas Schelling and Robert Aumann won the Nobel Prize in Economics "for having enhanced our understanding of conflict and cooperation through game-theory analysis".

This is the third time Israeli scientists win the Nobel Prize, after Daniel Cahanman won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2003, and Avraham Hershko and Arahon Ciechanover won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2004.

Yahoo launches new Podcast Search

Yahoo! announced in its blog Sunday the beginning of a public beta test of its new Podcast search service. The new service makes it easier for people to find and listen to podcasts.

Podcasts are short downloadable audio shows, very similar to a radio show. Podcasts are most commonly downloaded to portable mp3 players such as the iPod for which they are named, but they can be listened to on a computer or burned to a CD as well.

"Yahoo Podcasts offers a comprehensive directory of podcast series and individual shows from across the web, complete with detailed search results, most popular and highest-rated lists, editorial picks, and a full collection of tools you can use. These community tools include ratings, reviews, and the ability to tag audio content, or view the tags that other people add," Lee Ott wrote in the Yahoo blog.

Yahoo! is the first the large web company to offer a podcast search

services. Podcast search is currently offered by several smaller websites including Podcast.net, Blinkx, and Odeo.

"This is something we've been working on for a while, it's a great way for people to find, listen to, and consume podcasts as they grow more popular." said Yahoo! spokesperson Meagan Busath.

Thai PM sues newspaper for 500 million baht

The Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, has filed criminal and civil suits against Manager Media Group plc, the publisher of a Thai-language daily newspaper, Phujadkarn (Manager). At issue is the publishing of a sermon by the well-respected Buddhist monk Luangta Maha Bua that compared the Thai Prime minister to Phra Devadhat, the Thai Buddhist equivalent of the devil.

Mr Sinawatra's lawyer, Noppadol Meewanna, filed the two lawsuits on the Prime Minister's behalf, citing the newspaper, manager Saowalak Theeranuchanyon, and editor Khunthong Loseriwanit as defendants. This civil suit demands 500 million baht (approx. 12 million US dollars or 10 million euros). The associated criminal case seeks to have charges of libel brought against the defendants. The complaint argues that the defendants should have edited the sermon text to remove potentially libellous sections.

Deputy Prime Minister, Wissanu Krean-gam, stated that there was no active policy of persecuting the media and that Mr Sinawatra was acting in a personal capacity in bringing these cases.

The criminal case is due to be reviewed on November 18, when it

will be decided if there are grounds for taking it to trial. If the court finds against the defendants they face a maximum penalty of up to two years in prison and up to 200,000 baht (approx. 5,000 US dollars or 4,000 euros) in fines.

Australian senator Barnaby Joyce crosses floor

Canberra, Australia – Barnaby Joyce, an Australian National Party member of Parliament crossed the floor in the Australian Senate October 11 over legislation proposed to permit mergers without the agreement of the competition watchdog body, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. He has not, however, changed his party membership.

The question over the proposed changes was put at 9.26pm when Joyce crossed the floor to vote against them. The vote was tied with 32 for and 32 against and thus the question was not carried by the government (the President of the Australian Senate does not hold the casting vote as in the Australian House of Representatives).

The Australian Liberal Party/National Party coalition of which Joyce is a member holds a narrow majority of one seat in the Senate and Joyce has stated that he has chosen to exercise his vote in support of the promises made to his electorate prior to the election, rather than be obedient to the directions of the party executive. This is the first time Joyce, a recently elected senator, has crossed the floor in the Senate, and Joyce has suggested that this may not be the last.

African Union hostages freed by Darfur rebels



Darfur refugees

Forces from the Sudanese rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), have assisted in liberating 38 African Union (AU) personnel that were taken hostage on Sunday. The kidnapped—which consisted of the original 18 hostages, and later a 20 man rescue team—were released on Monday. Initially, two hostages remained but were freed following a reported shootout with the kidnapers.

A splinter group of JEM was blamed for the attack, but Mohamed Saleh, the head of the dissident faction, has denied the allegations.

Saleh was the military head of JEM when it signed a ceasefire agreement in April, but later split with the group's leadership. It is said that he now commands "thousands" of troops in the Darfur region, and is looking for a seat at the ongoing peace talks. He accused the AU of taking sides, and stated that he will not honour the ceasefire.

While speaking with Reuters, Saleh said, "We want the AU to leave, and we have warned them not to travel to our areas. We don't know and don't care what is happening to the AU, they are part of the conflict now."

Violence in the region has continued to rise. According to BBC correspondent Jonah Fisher, hostilities toward AU peacekeepers are becoming more common. It has been noted that aid agencies are refusing to travel with African Union personnel, stating that the mere presence of the peacekeepers may draw fire.

Kofi Annan, at a press conference in Geneva, responded to the rising violence by suggesting aid to the region may be partially suspended. "Both rebels and government must understand that, if these incidents continue, it will impede humanitarian assistance and delivery."

This weekend marked the first time the African Union has suffered casualties in the region. Three personnel were killed in attacks believed to be perpetrated by the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA). Despite the violence, the SLA, JEM, and the AU have promised to continue the peace talks which are being held in Abuja.

Today in History

54: Claudius was fatally poisoned by his wife Agrippina the younger, making her seventeen-year-old son Nero the next Roman Emperor.

1307: Thousands of members of the Knights Templar (pictured) were simultaneously arrested by agents of Phillip the Fair and subsequently tortured into "admitting" heresy.

1812: War of 1812: British troops and Mohawk warriors repelled an American invasion from across the Niagara River in the Battle of Queenston Heights.

1843: The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, the oldest continually-operating Jewish service organization in the world, was founded in New York City.

1943: World War II: With a new government led by General Pietro Badoglio, parts of Italy switched sides to the Allies and declared war on the Axis Powers.

October 13 is a Festival dedicated to Fontus (Roman Empire)

Quote of the Day

"Tragedy blows through your life like a tornado, uprooting everything, creating chaos. You wait for the dust to settle, and then you choose. You can live in the wreckage and pretend it's still the mansion you remember. Or you can crawl from the rubble and slowly rebuild." ~ Kristen Bell, as "Veronica Mars"

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