



Top Stories

Virgin Train crashes in England

A Virgin Train, travelling from Euston to Glasgow, has derailed and crashed in Cumbria, England. Virgin Trains have confirmed 1 fatality, an 84-year-old lady from Glasgow.

U.S. apologizes for detention of Iraqi lawmaker's son

The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, apologized today to Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the largest political party in the Iraqi Council of Representatives, for the detention of his son.

Featured story

UN Security Council approves African Union peace keepers for Somalia

The U.N. Security Council has approved the deployment in Somalia of a multinational peace keeping force lead by the African Union, for a period of six months.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Pirates hijack a cargo ship, the MV Rozen, shortly after delivering food aid to Somalia for the United Nations. This ship escaped previous hijack attempts.
- Israeli forces carry out a raid across parts of the West Bank town of Nablus.
- President Jalal Talabani has been flown to Jordan for medical treatment after falling ill.
- A suicide bomber kills at least 40

Wikipedia Current Events

people at a campus of Mustansiriya University in Baghdad.

- Prime Minister of East Timor Jose Ramos Horta announces that he will be running to become the next President of East Timor.
- Iran successfully launches its first rocket into space.
- Voters in Senegal go to the polls to elect the next President of Senegal with incumbent Abdoulaye Wade facing a range of challengers including two former Prime Ministers: Moustapha Niasse and Idrissa Seck.
- The 79th Academy Awards is held in the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles, California

Iranian TV station announces first space rocket launch

The Voice of America (VOA) marked its 65th anniversary Saturday amid plans to cancel radio broadcasts to many countries where press freedom is under attack. These program cuts are resisted by many former and current VOA journalists who see them as a dangerous departure from VOA's mission to support press freedom worldwide. The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) - bipartisan body managing VOA and other U.S. international broadcasts - plans to expand news coverage to the Middle East, North Korea and Latin America by eliminating or reducing programs to Russia, Tibet, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and a number of other media-at-risk

countries. Acting with apparent approval from the White House, the BBG also want to eliminate VOA's flagship English radio broadcast News Now.

Former and current VOA journalists who have criticized the BBG's plans as a betrayal of VOA's support for media freedom are circulating two online petitions asking the U.S. Congress to stop the proposed program cuts.

One of the petitions specifically opposes the planned elimination of VOA Uzbek radio broadcasts by pointing out that Uzbekistan's ruler Islam Karimov has effectively silenced political opposition and eliminated or forced underground nearly all independent media outlets.

"his lack of consistency sends a terrible signal to defenders of freedom and courageous journalists around the world."
—FreeMediaOnline.org

This is the second time the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) - bipartisan body in charge of U.S. international broadcasts - is trying to eliminate VOA radio programs to Uzbekistan. The BBG had stopped VOA Uzbek radio programs once before, in August 2004, but the pressure from the U.S. Congress and human rights groups forced the BBG to resume them in June 2005.

This year the BBG is again trying to end VOA radio presence in Uzbekistan and in a number of

other countries. In addition to VOA Uzbek radio programs, the BBG is planning to eliminate or reduce U.S. taxpayer-funded broadcasts to Kazakhstan, Russia, Tibet and China -- countries whose regimes were declared by the Paris-based nongovernmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as major violators of media freedom and freedom of expression. Uzbekistan's leader Islam Karimov, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Kazakhstan's authoritarian ruler Nursultan Nazarbayev and China's leader Hu Jintao have been all called by Reporters Without Borders "Predators of Press Freedom."

The second online petition initiated by a former VOA Associate Director Ted Lipien focuses on the BBG plans to eliminate VOA Russian radio broadcasts. The petition asks the U.S. Congress to reject the proposed cuts and demand from the White House and the BBG a consistent U.S. international broadcasting strategy in support of freedom.

FreeMediaOnline.org, a California-based nonprofit group founded to support freedom of the press worldwide, described these proposed cuts and reductions in U.S. international broadcasting as nothing less than a "gift to dictators and suppressors of press freedom." FreeMediaOnline.org believes that "this lack of consistency sends a terrible signal to defenders of freedom and courageous journalists around the world. Some of them, like independent Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, paid with their lives for exposing human rights violations. To make their voices heard, they have relied on VOA Russian radio programs which the White House and the BBG plan to eliminate."

According to the BBG, some program cuts are necessary to fund expansion of U.S. broadcasts to Iran and to other major Muslim countries and regions. Critics such as FreeMediaOnline.org activists have pointed out, however, that there are many other noncritical programs within the U.S. international broadcasting bureaucracy controlled by the BBG. They maintain that reducing these support programs instead could easily pay for new programming to the Middle East and for the much needed enhancement and modernization of programs and program delivery to countries like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and China.

VOA first broadcast on shortwave to Nazi Germany February 24, 1942, just weeks after the United States entered World War Two. In that broadcast, news announcer William Harlan Hale told listeners, "The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth."

VOA Director Dan Austin says although the technology of broadcasting may have changed in the intervening years, the Voice of America's adherence to its core mission remains the same. He says the agency will continue to honestly and accurately report the news. Austin did not address the issue of the program cuts demanded by the BBG and how they might affect VOA's mission. He was appointed to his position as VOA Director by the BBG.

VOA journalists resist plans to restrict mission in support of media freedom

In Iran, the state-controlled T.V. station has announced that the country for the first time test-fired a space rocket, with scientific equipment aboard. "The first space

rocket has been successfully launched into space," the station's website reported. The rocket was later reported not be designed to reach an orbit. Iran claims it reached an altitude of 94 miles and then parachuted home. No images have been released, and no other reports have confirmed the launch.

The announcement comes at a time of international tension over Iran's nuclear program. In a speech today, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad compared his country's nuclear program with a train with no brakes and no reverse gear. Manouchehr Mohammadi, a deputy foreign minister, said the country had prepared itself for a standoff over its nuclear activities. Diplomats said that if Iran would possess advanced missile capabilities it would be of concern to the nations who believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons, something Iran denies.

The head of the Iranian space center, Mohsen Bahrami, was quoted saying that the scientific material on board came from the science and from the defence ministry. He also said that the test was in line with international regulations on the matter. Although the news would mean a significant breakthrough for Iran's missile technology, the story was only mentioned during one T.V. broadcast, and not at all by other official Iranian media.

Iran has said in the past it wants more satellites to increase its cellular phone and internet capabilities. It also said it hopes to become a center for science and technology in the region.

Since 2005, Iran already has one satellite in space, Sinah-1, which was launched in Russia with a Russian rocket. The rocket was

described as serving telecommunication and research purposes. Soon after the 2005 launch, Iran announced they would develop their own launcher. Yesterday, the Iranian Defence Minister spoke of Iran's plans for their own satellite launcher, and disclosed his country's desire to join the club of countries with a space program.

Today in History

1266 - King Manfred of Sicily was killed at the Battle of Benevento, fighting Angevin forces led by Charles, the Count of Anjou.
 1815 - The Hundred Days: Napoleon Bonaparte escaped from exile in Elba.
 1935 - In Daventry, England, Robert Watson-Watt first demonstrated the use of radar.
 1991 - WorldWideWeb, the world's first web browser, was introduced.
 1993 - A bomb-laden van rented by Ramzi Yousef exploded in the underground garage of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing six and injuring more than one thousand people.
 February 26 is Liberation Day in Kuwait (1991); Savior's Day in the Nation of Islam.

Quote of the Day

To put everything in balance is good, to put everything in harmony is better.
 ~ Victor Hugo

Word of the Day

rhetorical; adj

1. Part of or similar to rhetoric; pertaining to the use of language as a means to persuade.

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