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Top Stories

Man arrested in India after mid-air hijack threat on domestic flight

An Indian man has been arrested after threatening to hijack the domestic flight on which he was traveling on February 1. The flight was traveling between New Delhi and Goa in India. The IndiGo Airlines Airbus A320 was coming in to land at the time.

Credit: Kprateek88 CC-BY-SA

Shoe thrown at Chinese PM during speech at Cambridge University in the UK

An unnamed 27-year-old man has been arrested and charged with "public order offenses" after he threw a shoe at the Chinese prime minister, Wen Jiabao while he was giving a speech at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom on Monday February 2. The speech was related to China's and the world economy titled See China in the Light of Her Development.

Credit: World Economic Forum CC-BY-SA

Automobile sales in the United States down sharply

Sales of automobiles in the United States fell as much as 35% in January, compared to the same month a year ago, as manufacturers reported their January sales. Chrysler was hardest hit among the domestically owned manufacturers with a plunge of 55%, while General Motors reported a 49% drop in sales.

Top Stories

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Wikipedia Current Events

An Israel Defense Force investigation concludes that the attack on Izzeldin Abuelaish was reasonable.

•The United Nations backtracks on a claim that a deadly Israeli Defense Force strike hit a Gaza school.

•Hamas police storm a United Nations warehouse in Gaza and seize blankets and food intended for Palestinian civilians.

•The United States Treasury moves to broaden its debt ranging options to raise the trillions of dollars needed to cope with the current recession.

•Fitch Ratings downgrades Russia's long-term foreign and local currency ratings to BBB and places its outlook on negative.

•Panasonic Corp. announces plans to shut down 27 plants throughout the world and slash 15,000 jobs due to a slump in demand for its electronic products resulting from the worldwide recession.

•Icelandic retail group Baugur has applied to a district court in Reykjavik to enter into a moratorium process.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Unemployment in Ireland sees the highest monthly increase in 40 years, with 1,500 people being laid off daily.

•Samira Ahmed Jassim, who allegedly recruited more than 80 suicide bombers, is arrested in Iraq.

Report: Man tries to hang himself on an American Airlines flight

According to the newly formed BNO News Agency, an unnamed man tried to hang himself on an American Airlines flight which took off from Cibao International Airport in the Dominican Republic and was traveling to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City located in the state of New York.

American Airlines flight 834 was en-route to New York when the pilot reported that there was a medical emergency on board the plane. BNO says that a man had attempted to hang himself while the plane was in mid-flight. When the plane landed, the man was taken off the plane by emergency services who were on standby at JFK Airport.

Despite the report, American Airlines previously refused to comment on the incident because of the passengers privacy, but an unnamed official said that they had heard about the incident, "but [believed] it is not true." The airline later stated to BNO that "the passenger did not try to

commit suicide, however the passenger did have a medical condition that prompted our crew to call the tower and request assistance." Even though the airline insists there was no suicide attempt, BNO states that the FBI was called and put on standby at the airport along with emergency services. Their involvement in the situation is not yet known, but BNO says the FBI is investigating.

On February 10, 2006, a man died after hanging himself in a bathroom aboard a United Airlines flight traveling from Washington, D.C. to Los Angeles, California. The plane was diverted to Denver, Colorado. Gerald Georgettis, 56, had earlier in the week driven his sports utility vehicle through the showroom of a car dealership in Miami, Florida. He then soaked it with gasoline and set it on fire. The incident caused over US$1,000,000 in damages.

UK television presenter sacked after "golliwog" comment

The BBC has sacked Carol Thatcher after she compared a black tennis player to a golliwog doll.

Thatcher, daughter of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was dropped from the primetime BBC One magazine programme The One Show after she made the remark after the show in the studio green room. The BBC has declined to name the tennis player in question.

The BBC said that it had hoped for an unconditional apology from the 55-year-old journalist and I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here winner after staff reported that the remark to management, but a spokesman said "We're no longer going to be working with her on The One Show" when the apology did not appear.

Thatcher's spokesman said that she "never intended any racist comment", adding that "[s]he made a light aside about this tennis player and his similarity to the golliwog on the jam pot when she was growing up. There's no way, obviously, that she would condone any racist comment - we would refute that entirely. It would not be in her nature to do anything like that". He said that "[s]he has summarily apologised".

The BBC said that remarks of this type were "wholly unacceptable". Former Conservative cabinet minister Lord Tebbit said "It does seem very odd that Jonathan Ross can be back broadcasting having made obscene, insulting remarks on the air, and Carol Thatcher, who said something which is allegedly highly offensive but which I rather doubt was meant to be so, in private, should be banned in this way," adding, "It is probably a bit of a way for the BBC to get back at Carol's mother". The AFP news agency reports that Thatcher will still work with the BBC on other projects.

The Corporation has suffered scandals in the last few years, such as the recent Russell Brand-Jonathan Ross episode, which saw the two presenters making obscene phone calls to actor Andrew Sachs.

Regulator bans UK video-on-demand service

The United Kingdom's Competition Commission has decided not to allow a video-on-demand (VOD) service backed by the country's major broadcasters.

Kangaroo would have provided BBC, ITV and Channel 4 (C4) television programmes for download and streaming to UK internet users from a single interface. At present, each broadcaster has its own system. The Commission said that free-to-view Kangaroo would prevent other VOD providers entering the market because the three broadcasters control the vast majority of original programming in the UK.

Commission chairman Peter Freeman said "Without this venture, BBC Worldwide [the BBC's commercial arm], ITV and Channel 4 would be close competitors of each other. We thought that viewers would benefit from better VOD services if the parties... competed with each other".

The Kangaroo consortium issued a statement saying that "the real losers from this decision are British consumers. This is a disproportionate remedy and a missed opportunity in the further development of British broadcasting". Michael Grade, executive chairman at ITV plc, told The Guardian "We are surprised by this decision because we believed that the Kangaroo joint venture, competing in a crowded online world against dominant global brands, was an attractive UK consumer proposition, free at the point of use".

The Times says that Kangaroo had been expected to gain approval, albeit with provisos including BBC and C4 programmes being made available elsewhere.

The broadcasters already have their own existing internet download or streaming services with different funding models. The BBC iPlayer is free to use and carries no advertising; C4's 4oD charges 99p to rent a programme

for 48 hours; and the ITV Player is supported by advertising.

Stanford physicists print smallest-ever letters 'SU' at subatomic level of 1.5 nanometres tall

A new historic physics record has been set by scientists for exceedingly small writing, opening a new door to computing's future. Stanford University physicists have claimed to have written the letters "SU" at sub-atomic size.

Graduate students Christopher Moon, Laila Mattos, Brian Foster and Gabriel Zeltzer, under the direction of assistant professor of physics Hari Manoharan, have produced the world's smallest lettering, which is approximately 1.5 nanometres tall, using a molecular projector, called Scanning Tunneling Microscope (STM) to push individual carbon monoxide molecules on a copper or silver sheet surface, based on interference of electron energy states.

A nanometre (Greek: νάνος, nanos, dwarf; μετρώ, metró, count) is a unit of length in the metric system, equal to one billionth of a metre (i.e., 10-9 m or one millionth of a millimetre), and also equals ten Ångström, an internationally recognized non-SI unit of length. It is often associated with the field of nanotechnology.

"We miniaturised their size so drastically that we ended up with the smallest writing in history," said Manoharan. "S" and "U," the two letters in honor of their employer have been reduced so tiny in nanoimprint that if used to print out 32 volumes of an Encyclopedia, 2,000 times, the contents would easily fit on a pinhead.

In the world of downsizing, nanoscribes Manoharan and Moon have proven that information, if reduced in size smaller than an atom, can be stored in more compact form than previously thought. In computing jargon, small sizing results to greater speed and better computer data storage.

"Writing really small has a long history. We wondered: What are the limits? How far can you go? Because materials are made of atoms, it was always believed that if you continue scaling down, you'd end up at that fundamental limit. You'd hit a wall," said Manoharan.

In writing the letters, the Stanford team utilized an electron's unique feature of "pinball table for electrons" — its ability to bounce between different quantum states. In the vibration-proof basement lab of Stanford's Varian Physics Building, the physicists used a Scanning tunneling microscope in encoding the "S" and "U" within the patterns formed by the electron's activity, called wave function, arranging carbon monoxide molecules in a very specific pattern on a copper or silver sheet surface.

"Imagine [the copper as] a very shallow pool of water into which we put some rocks [the carbon monoxide molecules]. The water waves scatter and interfere off the rocks, making well defined standing wave patterns," Manoharan noted. If the "rocks" are placed just right, then the shapes of the waves will form any letters in the alphabet, the researchers said. They used the quantum properties of electrons, rather than photons, as their source of illumination.

According to the study, the atoms were ordered in a circular fashion, with a hole in the middle. A flow of electrons was thereafter fired at the copper support, which resulted into a ripple effect in between the existing atoms. These were pushed aside, and a holographic projection of the letters "SU" became visible in the space between them. "What we did is show that the atom is not the limit — that you can go below that," Manoharan said.

"It's difficult to properly express the size of their stacked S and U, but the equivalent would be 0.3 nanometres. This is sufficiently small that you could copy out the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the head of a pin not just once, but thousands of times over," Manoharan and his nanohologram collaborator Christopher Moon explained.

The team has also shown the salient features of the holographic principle, a property of quantum gravity theories which resolves the black hole information paradox within string theory. They stacked "S" and the "U" - two layers, or pages, of information — within the hologram.

The team stressed their discovery was concentrating electrons in space, in essence, a wire, hoping such a structure could be used to wire together a super-fast quantum computer in the future. In essence, "these electron patterns can act as holograms, that pack information into subatomic spaces, which could one day lead to unlimited information storage," the study states.

The "Conclusion" of the Stanford article goes as follows:According to theory, a quantum state can encode any amount of information (at zero temperature), requiring

only sufficiently high bandwidth and time in which to read it out. In practice, only recently has progress been made towards encoding several bits into the shapes of bosonic single-photon wave functions, which has applications in quantum key distribution. We have experimentally demonstrated that 35 bits can be permanently encoded into a time-independent fermionic state, and that two such states can be simultaneously prepared in the same area of space. We have simulated hundreds of stacked pairs of random 7 times 5-pixel arrays as well as various ideas for pathological bit patterns, and in every case the information was theoretically encodable. In all experimental attempts, extending down to the subatomic regime, the encoding was successful and the data were retrieved at 100% fidelity. We believe the limitations on bit size are approxlambda/4, but surprisingly the information density can be significantly boosted by using higher-energy electrons and stacking multiple pages holographically. Determining the full theoretical and practical limits of this technique—the trade-offs between information content (the number of pages and bits per page), contrast (the number of measurements required per bit to overcome noise), and the number of atoms in the hologram—will involve further work.
—Quantum holographic encoding in a two-dimensional electron gas, Christopher R. Moon, Laila S. Mattos, Brian K. Foster, Gabriel Zeltzer & Hari C. Manoharan

The team is not the first to design or print small letters, as attempts have been made since as early as 1960. In December 1959, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, who delivered his now-legendary lecture entitled "There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom," promised new opportunities for those who "thought small."

Feynman was an American physicist known for the path integral formulation of quantum mechanics, the theory of quantum electrodynamics and the physics of the superfluidity of supercooled liquid helium, as well as work in particle physics (he proposed the parton model).

Feynman offered two challenges at the annual meeting of the American Physical Society, held that year in Caltech, offering a $1000 prize to the first person to solve each of them. Both challenges involved nanotechnology, and the first prize was won by William McLellan, who solved the first. The first problem required someone to build a working electric motor that would fit inside a cube 1/64 inches on each side. McLellan achieved this feat by November 1960 with his 250-microgram 2000-rpm motor consisting of 13 separate parts.

In 1985, the prize for the second challenge was claimed by Stanford Tom Newman, who, working with electrical engineering professor Fabian Pease, used electron lithography. He wrote or engraved the first page of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities, at the required scale, on the head of a pin, with a beam of electrons. The main problem he had before he could claim the prize was finding the text after he had written it; the head of the pin was a huge empty space compared with the text inscribed on it. Such small print could only be read with an electron microscope.

In 1989, however, Stanford lost its record, when Donald Eigler and Erhard Schweizer, scientists at IBM's Almaden Research Center in San Jose were the first to position or manipulate 35 individual atoms of xenon one at a time to form the letters I, B and M using a STM. The atoms were pushed on the surface of the nickel to create letters 5nm tall.

In 1991, Japanese researchers managed to chisel 1.5 nm-tall characters onto a molybdenum disulphide crystal, using the same STM method. Hitachi, at that time, set the record for the smallest microscopic calligraphy ever designed. The Stanford effort failed to surpass the feat, but it, however, introduced a novel technique. Having equaled Hitachi's record, the Stanford team went a step further. They used a holographic variation on the IBM technique, for instead of fixing the letters onto a support, the new method created them holographically.

In the scientific breakthrough, the Stanford team has now claimed they have written the smallest letters ever - assembled from subatomic-sized bits as small as 0.3 nanometers, or roughly one third of a billionth of a meter. The new super-mini letters created are 40 times smaller than the original effort and more than four times smaller than the IBM initials, states the paper Quantum holographic encoding in a two-dimensional electron gas, published online in the journal Nature Nanotechnology. The new sub-atomic size letters are around a third of the size of the atomic ones created by Eigler and Schweizer at IBM.

A subatomic particle is an elementary or composite particle smaller than an atom. Particle

physics and nuclear physics are concerned with the study of these particles, their interactions, and non-atomic matter. Subatomic particles include the atomic constituents electrons, protons, and neutrons. Protons and neutrons are composite particles, consisting of quarks.

"Everyone can look around and see the growing amount of information we deal with on a daily basis. All that knowledge is out there. For society to move forward, we need a better way to process it, and store it more densely," Manoharan said. "Although these projections are stable — they'll last as long as none of the carbon dioxide molecules move — this technique is unlikely to revolutionize storage, as it's currently a bit too challenging to determine and create the appropriate pattern of molecules to create a desired hologram," the authors cautioned. Nevertheless, they suggest that "the practical limits of both the technique and the data density it enables merit further research."

In 2000, it was Hari Manoharan, Christopher Lutz and Donald Eigler who first experimentally observed quantum mirage at the IBM Almaden Research Center in San Jose, California. In physics, a quantum mirage is a peculiar result in quantum chaos. Their study in a paper published in Nature, states they demonstrated that the Kondo resonance signature of a magnetic adatom located at one focus of an elliptically shaped quantum corral could be projected to, and made large at the other focus of the corral.

North Queensland Fury sign former Liverpool great Fowler

Australian A-League football (soccer) club North Queensland Fury announced the signing of former Liverpool FC striker Robbie Fowler for their debut season. Fowler will be their marquee player —meaning his wages fall outside the salary cap—as announced at a press conference held by their owner and chairman, Don Matheson. Fowler signed with the club on a two-season deal, for undisclosed terms, which will see him at the Fury until at least the end of the 2010-2011 season.

North Queensland, who will start their competitive history in the 2009-10 A-League season beginning later this year, have had trouble securing a marquee player, after Brazilian Cássio withdrew from negotiations at the last minute to re-sign with Adelaide United. Jade North asked for a release from his freshly-signed North Queensland contract to pursue a future with Incheon United after only five weeks.

Fowler, who was nicknamed "God" by Liverpool fans following his amazing feats for the Merseyside club—128 goals in 266 matches across two periods with the club—left English Premier League club Blackburn Rovers in December and was a free agent. He has been capped 26 times for England at senior level, most recently at the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and is the fourth-highest goal-scorer in the 17-season history of the Premier League.

The 33-year-old was announced as in talks with the club in mid-January, and met with Matheson and inaugural Fury manager Ian Ferguson in Townsville for an inspection before flying back to England on January 22 to discuss the move with his family. "I had nothing but good things to tell my family about the football side of things and the lifestyle opportunities North Queensland can offer us," Fowler was quoted as saying.

The signing is a huge boost for the club, who will enter the A-League later this calendar year along with fellow expansion club Gold Coast United, also based in Queensland. Gold Coast, who have secured current Socceroos midfielder Jason Čulina as their marquee player, are largely viewed as the more glamorous of the two, however owner Matheson said this signing went a long way to redressing that.

"Robbie is a legitimate international super star of the game and there's no doubt he will give us every chance of winning," Matheson said.

Obama cabinet nominees withdraw over tax issues

On Tuesday, United States President Barack Obama saw two of his cabinet nominations withdraw from consideration after issues with their taxes became public knowledge.

"Tom Daschle, official portrait I think I screwed up."—President Barack Obama

Former Senator Tom Daschle from South Dakota withdrew after it was revealed he failed to pay US$128,203 in taxes. He has since made the payment including a $11,964 interest payment. Obama had nominated him as the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Nancy Killefer, whom Obama had appointed to the newly created position of Chief Performance Officer, withdrew her nomination because she had failed to pay payroll taxes on a household

employee.

"I think I screwed up," Obama said 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."

Last week, Timothy F. Geithner survived his nomination and was confirmed as Secretary of the Treasury, even though it was revealed that he had failed to pay $34,000 in taxes on income earned while working for the International Monetary Fund.

Australian teenager sentenced to three months in jail for graffiti

On January 11, 2009, an 18-year-old teenager was arrested for writing her nickname, "2shie", on a wall in a café near Hyde Park, Sydney, Australia. After the arrest, the teenager, Cheyene Back, pleaded guilty to intentionally or recklessly damaging property.

Cheyene Back had been captured on a closed-circuit security camera at the "Hyde Park Cafe" on Macquarie Street, when she and friends wrote on the wall. Robert Napoli, a co-defendant, has had his case adjourned. They were arrested by police outside the café.

File photo from 2006 of graffiti on a wall.

On Tuesday, Magistrate Ian McRae sentenced Back to three months in jail for her offences, even though Back is a first-time offender in the eyes of the court. Back, who is from Daceyville, immediately lodged an appeal and is free on unconditional bail until the appeal is heard.

The owner of the café, Song Wang, is seeking A$200 in compensation for the damages, however, she does not believe the jail sentence is appropriate.

"Give them more education, provide more education, and let them do some community service," she said. Nevertheless, Back and her friends are habitual offenders, according to Wang.

"This group did came [sic] to my cafe every week around Wednesday or Thursday, once a week," she said. "One day the girl made [graffiti] just inside the toilet and all over the walls and smashed my mirror. They even got on the roof, I don't know how they did that, it was all over."

"You know it was really frustrating when she did it, but the whole group did it, not just her," Wang said. "I think it's a little bit harsh ... Maybe she can do some community work or something, such as letting her clean all the graffiti off, let her know how hard the work is she makes [sic]."

New South Wales Premier Nathan Rees welcomed the jail term. He says everywhere he goes, graffiti is a problem.

"This sends a message that it's not something that the community regards as a frivolous offence," Rees said. "It is something that affects not only the aesthetic but people's sense of safety around the place if they see graffiti around and they think there is other anti-social behaviour going with it. I think a three-month jail term is absolutely appropriate."

Professor Chris Cunneen, a criminologist at the University of New South Wales says the jail sentence does not match the scale of the crime.

"In the adult courts, a normal sort of penalty in relation to that offence would be a fine of some sort and some form of restitution for the property owner," Cunneen said.

According to anti-vandalism group "Graffiti Hurts", graffiti costs Australian taxpayers A$500 million each year.

Today in History

1862 – Domnitor Alexander John Cuza merged his two principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, to form the United Principalities (now Romania).
1885 – Leopold II of Belgium established the Congo Free State as his personal possession in Africa through his organization Association Internationale Africaine and his private army, the Force Publique.
1924 – Hourly Greenwich Time Signals from the Royal Greenwich Observatory were first broadcast by the BBC.
1958 – A hydrogen bomb now known as the Tybee Bomb disappeared off the shores of Tybee Island, Georgia after it was jettisoned during a practice exercise when the bomber carrying it collided in midair with a fighter plane.
2004 – The Revolutionary Artibonite Resistance Front captured Gonaïves, Haiti, starting the 2004 Haitian rebellion against the government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.
February 05 is Constitution Day in Mexico; Sapporo Snow Festival in Japan begins (2009)

Quote of the Day

All progress has resulted from people who took unpopular positions. All change is the result of a change in the contemporary state of mind. Don't be afraid of being out of tune with your environment, and above all pray

God that you are not afraid to live, to live hard and fast. To my way of thinking it is not the years in your life but the life in your years that count in the long run. You'll have more fun, you'll do more and you'll get more, you'll give more satisfaction the more you know, the more you have worked, and the more you have lived. For yours is a great adventure at a stirring time in the annals of men. ~ Adlai Stevenson

Word of the Day

mollycoddle v

1. To be overprotective and indulgent toward; to pamper.

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