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The recent wildfires in Los Angeles, California have burned more than 42,000 acres (17,000 hectares) of land. Nearly 1,000 homes were destroyed, and more than 10,000 residents were evacuated. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa expressed concerns that Los Angeles was on the verge of a blackout, and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared the situation a state of emergency.



Credit: Edward Vielmetti - CC-BY 2.0

Grenade attack on Thai protesters kills one, injures at least 20

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others. Thursday morning's attack on protesters occupying the Prime Minister's offices is the third since August.

Negotiations for hijacked Saudi oil tanker begin

Vela International Marine, the Saudi Arabian company that owns the MV Sirius Star oil tanker which was captured by pirates on November 15, has begun negotiations with the Somali pirates. The Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal said that talks had begun, but he did not say whether a ransom would be paid.

Wikipedia Current Events

United States Attorney General Michael Mukasey collapses while giving a speech to the Federalist Society in Washington, D.C.

•The Swedish Parliament ratifies the Treaty of Lisbon.

•NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter discovers evidence of enormous underground deposits of water ice on Mars. One such deposit, under Hellas Planitia, is estimated to be the size of Los Angeles.

•Executives of the top three U.S. automakers – Ford Motor Company, General Motors, and Chrysler – testify before Congress for a bailout package.

•French automaker PSA Peugeot Citroën announces plans to cut 2,700 jobs due to falling demand

Wikipedia Current Events

in Europe.

•The International Monetary Fund approves a \$2.1 billion loan to Iceland to help alleviate its financial crisis. The approval marks the first time that a Western European nation has secured an IMF loan since the United Kingdom in 1976. Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark lend Iceland an additional €1.66 billion.

•At least one person is dead and twenty injured after a bomb is thrown into a People's Alliance for Democracy protest compound in Bangkok, Thailand.

•The Russian Navy will deploy more warships in the Gulf of Aden to curb piracy.

•The Indian Navy receives permission from the Somalian government to enter its territorial waters in pursuit of pirates.

•Five Guantánamo Bay detainees who successfully argued in the Supreme Court case of Boumediene v. Bush are ordered freed by a federal district court in Washington.

UN to deploy over 3000 more troops to Congo

The United Nations Security Council has announced that it intends to send up to 3,085 more peacekeeping troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite a commitment from rebel forces to reduce their fighting.

The UN stated that the troops will

be deployed immediately, and kept in the Congo for at least the rest of 2008.

Depending on the security situation in the country, the troops may be kept in the country past the end of this year.

The move was made as part of UN Security Council resolution 1843, and was recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon.

The resolution states that this "temporary increase in personnel aims at enabling MONUC to reinforce its capacity to protect civilians, to reconfigure its structure and forces and to optimize their deployment."

The resolution also made some other comments in relation to the Congo. The resolution also aimed to work at "reiterating its condemnation of the resurgence of violence in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and demanding all parties to immediately respect a ceasefire."

The document also welcomed "the appointment of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo by the Secretary-General as his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region.

Negotiations for hijacked Saudi oil tanker begin

Vela International Marine, the Saudi Arabian company that owns the MV Sirius Star oil tanker which was captured by pirates on November 15, have begun negotiations with the Somali pirates.

The Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal said that talks had begun, but he did not say whether a

ransom would be paid. Vela International Marine, which is owned by state-owned Saudi Aramco, would only say it is "working toward [the crew's] safe and speedy return."

"We do not like to negotiate with pirates, terrorists or hijackers," said Saud al Faisal in Rome, after speaking with Franco Frattini, the Foreign Minister of Italy.

Dubai-based television network Al Jazeera broadcast an audiotape of a man who said he was with the pirates. He identified himself as Farah Abd Jameh.

"Negotiators are located on board the ship and on land. Once they have agreed on the ransom, it will be taken in cash to the oil tanker. We assure the safety of the ship that carries the ransom. We will mechanically count the money and we have machines that can detect fake money," the man said. He did not mention any specific amounts for the ransom.

"We do not like to negotiate with pirates, terrorists or hijackers" —Saud al Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia

The British Foreign Office released a statement Wednesday which identified two of the crew as chief engineer Peter French and second officer James Grady. The rest of the 25-man crew are from Croatia (1), Poland (2), Philippines (19) and Saudi Arabia (1). They are all reported to be safe.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that the Royal Navy was coordinating a European response.

Dominique Montecer, the director of operations at GEOS Group, a corporate risk management firm, cast doubt on a military response.

"Everything is possible but it would take extraordinary means and organization, and the risk of an ecological disaster is very high. They are sitting on a bomb," Montecer said.

"It's certainly a very complex environment to work in — a Liberian-flagged vessel, owned by a Saudi company, in Somali waters, with so many different nationalities on board," said Lt. Nate Christensen of the United States Navy when asked about the possibility of taking back the Sirius Star by force.

"Shipping companies are already making decisions not to go through the Gulf of Aden, and making the decision to take the much longer route around the south of Africa," said Peter Hinchcliffe, marine director of the International Chamber of Shipping. "And with the increase in intensity of attacks, that is something that is going to be much more frequent. It's adding let's say an average of two weeks to the passage time."

Since the capture of the Sirius Star, pirates in the Gulf of Aden have taken at least three other ships. These include a Chinese ship carrying wheat, a Greek bulk carrier, and a Thai fishing vessel.

The International Maritime Bureau reports that Somali pirates currently hold 14 ships along with an estimated 250 crew members. Since January, there have been over 30 hijackings in the area, while another 60 ships have been attacked.

Among the ships still held, is the Ukrainian cargo ship MV Faina, which has a cargo of 33 Russian T-72 battle tanks, as well as other weapons. The Faina was hijacked

on September 25.

Meanwhile, the Indian Navy has reported that it encountered and destroyed what it called a pirate "mother ship" on Tuesday. India dispatched frigate INS Tabar last month to protect its merchant shipping in the Gulf of Aden. The pirate vessel reportedly threatened the Indian frigate after it was hailed.

Several NATO members, as well as Russia, India and Malaysia have all sent warships to the region to protect merchant shipping in the area. The Combined Task Force 150, formed as a multinational coalition in the War on Terrorism, was restructured in 2006 to aid in anti-piracy efforts.

Grenade attack on Thai protesters kills one, injures at least 20

A grenade attack on People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protesters occupying Thailand's Government house compound has killed a 48-year-old man. Media reports indicate that the blast injured between 20 and 29 others. This is the third attack on protesters sieging the Prime Minister's offices since August.

The grenade attack took place in the early hours of this morning, 03:30 local time (20:30 UTC). PAD security details have prevented police from examining the crime scene. Local police commander, Somchai Chueyklin told AFP they were waiting for forensic officials and permission from the protesters to enter the Government House compound.

One of the key leaders of the PAD, Sondhi Limthongkul, has accused the government of being behind the attack. Following meetings in the wake of the explosion, the

anti-government protesters have announced plans for a protest and march this Sunday aimed at toppling the government and preventing amendment of the country's constitution. The PAD view the government of the People's Power Party as a continuation of the "Thaksin regime" that was deposed by a bloodless military coup on September 19, 2006. Plans by the government of PM Somchai Wongsawat to amend the constitution are seen as part of an effort to rehabilitate the fugitive ex-premier, Thaksin Shinawatra.

The blast comes just one day after a six-day 'cease-fire' came to an end following ceremonies for the cremation of the King's sister, Galyani Vadhana, who died of cancer earlier this year. Last Friday's lavish ceremony was one of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's few public appearances this year. At 80 years of age, the revered monarch is the world's longest serving head of state.

NTSB continues investigation of near-collision in Pennsylvania, United States

The United States National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has issued an update in its investigation of a serious runway incursion in Pennsylvania in September. A regional jet with sixty people on board aborted takeoff and swerved to avoid a light plane, missing it by an estimated ten feet.

The event occurred at Allentown's Lehigh Valley International Airport. A Canadair CRJ-700 operated by Mesa Airlines as Flight 7138 received clearance for takeoff but aborted the maneuver at 120 knots (138 mph), skidding around a Cessna 172R that had just landed and was still taxiing on the

runway. The crew of the Mesa Air regional jet estimated the distance between the two aircraft as 10 feet when they passed.

The Mesa Air crew decided to abandon the flight. They returned the aircraft for inspection, but no damage was found. The incident occurred in the night.

The NTSB also released a photo of the tire marks left by the jet after the incident, showing a violent swerve occurred. A detailed timeline has been released, as below:

7:29:28 - Cessna contacts Allentown tower while about 8 miles east of the airport.
7:33:30 - Cessna, in landing pattern for runway, is cleared to land on runway 6.
7:34:50 - Mesa Air regional jet contacts tower and reports ready for takeoff and holding short of runway 6. Controller

instructs pilot to hold short of runway 6 for landing traffic.
7:36:15 - Cessna crosses threshold of runway 6 and lands.
7:36:27 - Mesa Air instructed by tower controller to taxi into position on runway 6 and hold.
7:36:36 - Tower controller asks pilot of Cessna where he intends to park. Following pilot response, controller provides taxi directions, instructing pilot to exit runway at taxiway A4.
7:37:11 - Mesa Air cleared for takeoff. 7:37:18 to 7:37:32 - Controller turns attention to an inbound aircraft and issues landing instructions.
7:37:34 - Cessna pilot informs tower controller that he had missed the A4 taxiway and asks for permission to exit at taxiway B.
7:37:42 - Controller replies, "...no delay, turn immediately," which Cessna pilot acknowledges.
7:38:16 - Mesa Air radios tower

controller: "We got it, tower - we're going to need to go back to the gate." Following the incident, both aircraft taxied to parking.

The NTSB has interviewed both pilots from the jet's four-person crew, the Cessna's pilot, the air traffic controllers on duty and the Federal Aviation Administration control tower managers. The investigation continues.

Los Angeles wildfires are nearly contained

The recent wildfires in Los Angeles, California have burned more than 42,000 acres (17,000 hectares) of land. Nearly 1,000 homes were destroyed, and more than 10,000 residents were evacuated.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa expressed concerns that Los Angeles was on the verge of a blackout, and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared the situation a state of emergency. In terms of property damage, this fire is the worst since the Bel Air fire in 1961. Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky stated, "Whether you live in a mobile home park or you live in an estate, when you lose your home it's devastating."

In Montecito, a census-designated place in Santa Barbara County, the homes of many celebrities including Steven Spielberg, Steve Martin, Eric Schmidt, and Rob Lowe, have been destroyed. This massive fire has caused millions of dollars of damage and 13 injuries. Rob Lowe declared that "it was just like Armageddon."

According to one official, the fire started when ten students lit a bonfire on a ridge but failed to extinguish it. Although Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown believes that "this fire was the

result of carelessness, not criminal intent," the county district attorney will still have to review the case.

Santa Ana winds with gusts up to 70 mph exacerbated the Montecito fire, which destroyed over 100 buildings and damaged many others, including Westmont College. The college's 1000 students were forced to take shelter in the gymnasium.

A spokesman for the college, Scott Craig, described the scene: "I saw flames about 100 feet high in the air shooting up with the wind just howling. Now when the wind howls and you've got palm trees and eucalyptus trees that are literally exploding with their hot oil, you've got these big, red hot embers that are flying through the sky and are catching anything on fire."

Officials now report that firefighters are making some progress. Of the three major fires, the Montecito Tea Fire is 95% contained; the Sayre Fire, 70%; and the Triangle Complex Fire, 75%. Officials have lifted the evacuation order for Chino Hills as well.

Today in History

1272 – Edward I became King of England, succeeding his father Henry III who died five days earlier.

1783 – Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier and François Laurent d'Arlandes made the first successful untethered flight by humans in a hot air balloon, which was constructed by the Montgolfier brothers.

1894 – First Sino-Japanese War: Advanced elements of the First Division of the Japanese Second Army killed an estimated 20,000 Chinese servicemen and civilians in the coastal city of Lüshunkou.

1920 – Irish War of Independence: On Bloody Sunday in Dublin, the Irish Republican Army killed more than a dozen British intelligence officers known as the Cairo Gang, and the Auxiliaries of the Royal Irish Constabulary opened fire on players and spectators at a Gaelic football match in Croke Park.

1977 – "God Defend New Zealand" became New Zealand's second national anthem, on equal standing with "God Save the Queen", which had been the traditional one since 1840. November 21 is World Hello Day; World Television Day; Armed Forces Day in Bangladesh

Quote of the Day

If your object is to secure liberty, you must learn to do without authority and compulsion. If you intend to live in peace and harmony with your fellow-men, you and they should cultivate brotherhood and respect for each other. If you want to work together with them for your mutual benefit, you must practice cooperation. The social revolution means much more than the reorganization of conditions only: it means the establishment of new human values and social relationships, a changed attitude of man to man, as of one free and independent to his equal; it means a different spirit in individual and collective life, and that spirit cannot be born overnight. It is a spirit to be cultivated, to be nurtured and reared, as the most delicate flower it is, for indeed it is the flower of a new and beautiful existence. ~ Alexander Berkman

Word of the Day

heteronym n

- (linguistics) A word having the same spelling as another, but a different pronunciation and meaning.
- (literature) A fictitious

character created by an author for the purpose of writing in a different style.

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