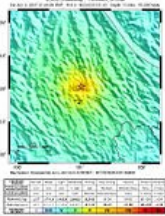




Top Stories

Earthquake in China kills three, injures hundreds



According to the United States Geological Survey, a magnitude 6.2 earthquake has struck in China, killing at least three people and injuring

hundreds. Among the two dead was a 5-year-old boy who had died after he was "crushed by falling debris." Other reports say that the magnitude was a 6.4.

World's defense chiefs meet in Singapore

The 6th Asia Security Conference, better known as the Shangri-La Dialogue, came to an end on



Sunday in Singapore, highlighted by a visit by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert

Gates and a senior Chinese defense official, Lt. Gen. Qisheng.

Featured story

Ancestors of humans learned to walk in trees, study says

Scientists from the United Kingdom and who spent one year watching orangutans have revealed in a study that humans may have learned to walk while still living in the trees, and that humans may not be that closely related to chimpanzees.



Wikipedia Current Events

- A Paramount Airlines helicopter crashes in Sierra Leone, killing 20-22 people, with reports of at least one survivor.
- 2007 North Lebanon conflict: Fighting has broken out between soldiers and Islamist militants at a second Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, security officials say.
- A 6.4 magnitude earthquake hits southern China near the Myanmar and Laos borders causing casualties.

Car slams into Washington, DC festival

A car plowed into a crowded street festival in Washington, DC Saturday night, injuring up to 40 people, including at least two police officers. The scene occurred in the Anacostia region of the city, during Unifest, an annual street festival sponsored by a local church.

The car, driven by 30-year-old Tonya Bell, of Oxon Hill, Maryland, had a 7-year-old child in the front seat, and was believed to have been traveling at speeds of up to 70 MPH when the incident occurred.

Bell has been charged with aggravated assault while armed for the incident; the child in the vehicle was unharmed. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty said the city would "do everything we can to make sure [the victims] get the best care." Witnesses say the car never

stopped, and describe the scene as crazy and chaotic.

Event goes, police, and others in the area attempted to stop the car, but say Bell was "doing this purposefully," and she was not going to stop.

Fenty commented that one of the bright spots of this incident was that those who were injured are now being stabilized. Before visiting one of the victims of the incident, a 4-year-old, he said "it looks like everyone is going to pull through."

World's defense chiefs meet in Singapore

The sixth Asia Security Conference, better known as the Shangri-La Dialogue, came to an end on Sunday in Singapore, highlighted by a visit by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and a senior Chinese defense official, Lt. Gen. Zhang Qisheng.

Named for its venue, the five-star Shangri-La Hotel Singapore, the annual meeting of top defense officials is organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a London-based think tank.

The big issue at the Shangri-La gathering focused on China and its military buildup. China has announced it will boost military spending by 17.8 percent in 2007 to 350.921 billion yuan (about US\$44.94 billion), the biggest increase in more than ten years. But U.S. defense officials have said

they believe actual spending is up to three times higher, and they have called on China to be more transparent.

"There's no question that the Chinese are building significant capacity," Gates said in Honolulu before he flew to Singapore. "Our concern is over their intent."

China's delegation was led by Zhang, the People's Liberation Army deputy chief of the general staff. In his address on Saturday, Zhang defended China's reported defense-spending figures.

"In China, defense budgeting must follow a set of highly strict legal procedures, and the published Chinese defense budget is true and authentic," he said, attributing the increase to inflation and logistical and welfare support of its troops. "Given the multiple security threats, geo-political environment, the size of the territory, and the per-capita expense, the Chinese defense expenditure is small by all judgments," Zhang added.

Zhang said there are plans in the works to open an emergency hotline with the U.S., and that a deal to do so would be finalized in September.

At the end of the conference, Gates termed U.S.-China relations thusly: "In terms of our bilateral relationship, I wouldn't describe it as a breakthrough but as a next step in a process of military-to-military conversations which we will continue in the future."

For other countries in Asia, it's China's powerful economy that causes more concern, said Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in an opening speech on Friday.

"Most Asian countries assess the challenge from China to be more economic than military," Lee said. He added that China's military build up is mainly a response to Taiwan, and he warned that if Taiwan seeks to further establish its independence, it could lead to "unintended and dangerous escalation of tensions between China and the U.S."

India, too, is flexing its military muscle, with Indian Defense Minister A. K. Antony giving a talk on Saturday, "China and India: Building International Stability."

"India is ready to play its role in the shaping of this new approach to collective security," Antony said. "Only a pluralistic security order working through a network of cooperative structures can have the legitimacy as well as the wherewithal to deal with the security challenges of the 21st century."

Other delegations included Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

Concern about Iran's nuclear program came up in comments by Gates on Saturday, saying stronger penalties are needed against Iran "not next year or the year after, but right now." Gates did not rule out military action to stop Iran's nuclear research, even if it wasn't the most attractive option. "Probably everybody in this room wants there to be a diplomatic solution to this problem," he said. "Having to take care of this problem militarily is in no one's interest."

On a tour of the Asia-Pacific region, Gates also worked to assure his counterparts in other

countries that the United States' involvement in Iraq would not undermine its role in Asia. "While we are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and the global war on terror, we have no intention of neglecting Asia," Gates said on Friday in Honolulu.

In particular, Gates said the U.S. is keen to develop better relations with Central Asian states, and he called on other countries in the region to reach out and help Afghanistan and its neighbors, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

"Integrating these newly independent states into the fold of the greater Asian family is in the interest of every country represented in this room. Of course, the degree that Central Asian states and Afghanistan choose to integrate into greater Asia is a decision for each of those sovereign countries. We will not assume to make decisions for them, but it is important that the welcome mat be out for them. The failure to do so could ultimately have devastating results," Gates said an address on Saturday at the Singapore meeting.

His remarks come as the U.S. is facing pressure in Kyrgyzstan over its Manas Air Base, which supports U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. The base has taken on strategic importance to the U.S. after it left Uzbekistan in 2005 after the U.S. criticized that country's human rights record. Gates visited the air base on Sunday.

Closer to home for the Singaporeans, there was talk about piracy in the Malacca Strait, and the need to develop better communication and cooperation

between the security forces of the concerned countries: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

With as much as 40 percent of the world's trade passing through the Malacca Strait, the U.S. is concerned, said U.S. Navy Admiral Timothy Keating, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command. "We have discussed enhancing maritime security throughout the region. It is a matter of significance and importance to us," Keating told the conference. "We are not satisfied with the current state but we are pleased with the progress we've made," he said, noting that their security cooperation has improved and there have been no recent major incidences of piracy in the Strait.

The issue of Myanmar and its military government came up during Prime Minister Lee's talk on Friday, with Lee saying the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, "ought not to be hostage with the problems with Myanmar."

ASEAN has come under pressure for its admission of Myanmar, which is ruled by a junta that has refused to cede to a democratically elected government. But ASEAN has a policy of non-engagement in internal conflicts of its members. "We will leave Myanmar to work itself out," Lee said.

Australian universities target second language "crisis"

A group of Australian universities have called for an effort to counter the falling numbers students learning a second language, calling the current situation a "crisis".

The group released a proposal on Friday that requires primary students to learn a second language upto the year ten and a

10 per cent bonus on university admission scores for those passing a second language subject in their final year at school.

Group of Eight universities executive director Michael Gallagher says recent figures show year 12 students graduating with a second language have dropped from 40 percent to 13 percent over the past four decades, and as low as 6 percent in some states.

Terming the decline in foreign language education a "crisis", Gallagher said that it was a problem "we can no longer afford to ignore".

The Group of Eight - University of Adelaide, Australian National University, University of Melbourne, Monash University, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, and the University of Western Australia is a lobby group for the tertiary institutions generally considered to be the most prestigious and research oriented in Australia.

A press release by the group said, "It is Australia's great unrecognised skills shortage, and the one most directly relevant to our competitiveness and security in an increasingly global environment."

A study paper released by the group found that the 66 languages offered by universities 10 year ago had dropped to 29 today. "Of the 29 languages still on offer at tertiary level, nine are offered at only one Australian university and only seven are well represented across the sector", it said.

Education Minister Julie Bishop said the Government supported languages teaching through its

\$112 million school languages program, delivered through the states to schools. Ms Bishop said while she agreed with the encouragement of teaching a second language in schools, higher standards in literacy is a "national priority".

Other universities have endorsed the plan - the University of Tasmania today called for immediate action to prevent Australia becoming a "monolingual nation".

Earthquake in China kills three, injures hundreds

According to the United States Geological Survey, a magnitude 6.2 earthquake has struck in China on Sunday, killing at least three people and injuring hundreds. Other reports say that the magnitude was a 6.4.

"The dead included a 4-year-old boy, who was sleeping with his mother when the earth-built walls of their house collapsed in the quake and buried him and half of the body of his mother," the Xinhua News Agency said. "The mother was rescued but the boy was killed."

"The earthquake has left two people dead, 15 seriously injured and 192 slightly hurt in (Ning'er) county. Some houses near the county collapsed and roads are destroyed. The communication network, and water and power supplies to the county, are also affected," Reuters quoted rescue officials as saying. Ning'er county is home to 190,000 people.

The epicenter was located approximately 220 km (135 miles) west of Gejiu, in the Yunnan province, and had a focus depth of approximately 10 km (6.2 miles).

The quake has reportedly hit the downtown region of Pu'er City, located in the southwest are of the Yunnan province near the border with Myanmar and Laos.

At least 120,000 residents were being asked to evacuate as officials say that many houses and buildings are not safe and could fall down.

At least 233 aftershocks have been felt since the quake occurred at 5:34 a.m. local time. Some aftershocks have been as large as a magnitude 5.1.

Communications in some areas have been cut off and houses have collapsed. Damage to the area is estimated at heavy, according to the USGS.

Tents - including 2000 from the Yunnan provincial government - as well as food and other supplies are on the way to the region. The Pu'er City government has provided one million yuan as emergency funding.

Free Paris Hilton protest panties

With photographers and media gathering for an appearance by Paris Hilton, who is sentenced to serve jail time, the fashion industry has joined the 'free or jail Paris Hilton debate.'

British company Mio Destino designed a line of prison-striped lingerie embroidered with the words 'Free Paris' in support of Hilton. A 'Jail Paris' embroidery was later added to the lingerie following intense demand.

The 45 day jail sentence is scheduled to begin on Tuesday at the Century Regional Detention Center in suburban Lynwood, Los Angeles County after Hilton was

convicted of driving recklessly for traveling at a speed of 70 miles per hour in a 35 miles per hour zone with no headlights after dark in February this year. The offense occurred while her driver's license was suspended after a driving under the influence conviction last November.

Hilton added her signature to an online petition, Free Paris Hilton, hosted by iPetitions, that appealed to California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for a pardon. The petition states that Hilton "didn't hurt or kill anyone, and she has learned her lesson. She is sincere, apologetic, and full of regret for her actions as she explained tearfully to the Judge handling her case in court yesterday. She is distraught and understandably afraid." The petition has garnered over 30,000 signatures.

A counter petition, again hosted by iPetitions, calling for Hilton's imprisonment received 87,715 signatures as of Sunday.

With good behavior while serving time, Hilton may be able to get out of jail in 23 days.

Space Shuttle Atlantis set for June 8 launch despite worker strike

After having its launch delayed three months due to damage caused by hail stones during a storm, Space Shuttle Atlantis has been given the green light by NASA to launch on June 8.

"NASA's senior managers have signed the Certification of Flight Readiness confirming that Space Shuttle Atlantis, her flight crew and payloads are fit to fly," said a statement posted on NASA's website.

Atlantis's main engines, orbital

maneuvering system and forward reaction control system was pressurized this past weekend and the crew's equipment has been put into stowage.

NASA plans to launch Atlantis despite a vote reached by the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers, IAMAW, a union that is representing 570 workers that work with the shuttle program, but according to a union spokeswoman, the strike is not going to affect the launching of Atlantis.

"The bottom line is, a strike would not affect the next launch or the next one after that," said IAMAW spokeswoman, Tracy Yates. The union voted down a contract because the workers believed that NASA's wage offer is "substandard."

Atlantis will deliver equipment to the International Space Station and to make repairs to it. Commanding Atlantis for its mission will be Rick Sturckow and Lee Archambault will serve as Atlantis' pilot. Mission Specialists James Reilly, Steven Swanson, John Olivas and Flight Engineer Clayton Anderson round out the crew to deliver the S3/S4 starboard truss segments, batteries and another pair of solar arrays to the space station.

Ancestors of humans learned to walk in trees, study says

ing in the trees, and that humans may not be that closely related to chimpanzees.

"An increasing number of people have been questioning this old 'up from the apes' idea" of how bipedalism evolved. As the forests became sparse, the strategy of our human ancestors was more or less

to abandon the canopies and come down to the ground, where they could use this bipedalism immediately to get around," said one University of Liverpool scientist who headed the study, Robin Crompton.

Museums and schools across the world have been teaching that humans evolved from an animal much like that of a chimpanzee and that humans started to walk along the forest floors, with their arms hanging, and knuckles scraping across the ground. It is also taught that those animals then began to walk upright once they adapted to living on the ground.

Orangutans were observed by researcher Susannah Thorpe of the University of Birmingham in Sumatra, Indonesia for one year. She documented that the orangutans would generally walk on their hands and feet, but when food was at a height that they could not reach, the orangutans would stand on their feet, extend upright, and grab the fruit or food item they want. This movement also allowed them to swing from the branches of trees more efficiently, without having to touch the forest floor.

"When they move to the skinniest branches, where the tastiest fruit grows, they stand stiffly straight-legged, like a person. It's energetically quite economical for orangutans to feed and move on these bendy branches using bipedalism," said Thorpe who also has over 3,000 different movements on film that show orangutans standing on their own 2 feet, upright, and reaching for objects.

"Our conclusion is that arboreal bipedalism had very strong

adaptive benefits. So, we don't need to explain how our ancestors could have gone from being quadrupedal to being bipedal," added Thorpe.

The researchers also compared evidence from the remains of Lucy, past climate conditions on the planet and fossils to the workings of orangutans, and all suggest that humans were living and swinging in the trees for a much longer period of time than previously thought. The study shows that humans may have learned to walk at least 24 million years ago, rather than 6 million years ago.

Some experts disagree with the study.

"The main evidence is that our closest living relatives are not orang-utans, they're chimps and gorillas, and since both climb trees and walk on their knuckles, it's most likely our ancestors did that too. One of the only anatomical features we share explicitly with chimps and gorillas is that we only have eight wrists bones, while almost all other primates have nine. In humans, chimps and gorillas, two bones have fused into one to stabilise the wrist, making it stronger for knuckle-walking. It's not a smoking gun, but it's the best evidence we have," said anthropologist at George Washington University, Brian Richmond.

Iran's interior minister backs temporary marriage

Iran's interior minister Hojatollah Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi has made a bold move by backing temporary marriages in accordance with some schools of thought in Islam particularly among Shiites.

Prostitution was banned in Iran

after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and any sort of sex outside of marriage even among consenting adults of opposite gender is a punishable under the law. Nevertheless, illegal prostitution persists in Iran; some prostitute have also become drug addicts and homeless.

One taxi driver who spoke to the Associated Press said he doesn't have enough money to get married and set up a home. "What should I do with my sexual needs?" he asked.

Iran's chair of the Expediency Council, Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, made the proposal for temporary marriage while he was the president; however, it was rejected by other clerics and did not gain momentum. It was proposed as an alternative to living in sin. Many couples constantly fear arrest by the moral police in Iran and some might have a temporary marriage.

Hojjat ul Islam Pour-Mohammadi has said, "We should expect violations and repercussions if we do not practically respond to young people's sexual needs. Islam has solutions for all human problems and temporary marriage is a solution to this kind of problem."

Pour-Mohammadi, who hails from Qom and has completed clerical studies, urged seminarians to study the matter carefully.

Today in History

1037 - Henry III became Holy Roman Emperor following the death of his father, Conrad II.

1615 - Forces under the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu took Osaka Castle in Japan.

1792 - Captain George Vancouver claimed Puget Sound for Great

Britain.

1967 - British Midland Airways Flight G-ALHG crashed near Stockport, Greater Manchester, United Kingdom, killing 72 passengers and crew.

1989 - The People's Liberation Army cracks down on the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing.

June 04 is Queen's Birthday in New Zealand (2007); Independence Day in Tonga.

Quote of the Day

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge — That myth is more potent than history.

I believe that dreams are more powerful than facts— That hope always triumphs over experience —

That laughter is the only cure for grief.

And I believe that love is stronger than death.

~ Robert Fulghum ~

Word of the Day

prestidigitation; n

1. A performance of or skill in performing magic or conjuring tricks with the hands; sleight of hand.
2. A show of skill or deceitful cleverness.

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