



Top Stories

77 names added to slain journalist memorial in Washington, D.C.

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Shipwreck off coast of Libya; hundreds of African migrants feared dead

The International Organisation for Migration stated that over 200 Arab and African migrants are feared drowned after three boats, bound for Europe, sank in the Mediterranean in separate incidents.

Eurovision '04 winner Ruslana discusses her paths as singer, spokesmodel, stateswoman and source of inspiration

From singer to goodwill ambassador to one of the public faces of a bloodless revolution, Eurovision 2004 winner Ruslana has achieved much in her 15-year career. She talks to Wikinews about the many twists and turns in her life.

U.S. Congress considers lifting Cuba travel ban

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"Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act", a bill that would lift the travel restrictions that have prevented U.S. citizens from visiting Cuba since the early 1960s.

Wikipedia Current Events

Likud Party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu is inaugurated as Prime Minister of Israel.

•Floods on New South Wales' North Coast in Australia cause an emergency evacuation of Coffs Harbour.

•The Taliban's Students' Movement claims responsibility for an attack on a police academy in Lahore, Pakistan.

•Seven Somali pirates are captured after mistakenly attacking the German Navy's FGS Spessart in the Gulf of Aden.

UN agency condemns new Afghan "Shia family law"

An act signed into law by Afghan President Hamid Karzai last month dramatically rolled back the rights of women in that country, according to human rights groups and a United Nations report on the bill by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The Afghan government has not provided a copy of the text of the Shia Family Law to the UN or to other outside groups requesting it, citing "technical problems", however, the UN and opposition politicians say that the bill contains numerous provisions restricting

the rights of women, such as giving their husbands priority in court; requiring the husband's permission to leave the house, obtain education or employment, or to see a doctor; and reserving the custody of children to male relatives.

In its most controversial provision, though, the law's Article 132 requires wives to submit to their husbands' sexual demands, and says that a husband can expect sex with his wife once in every four days except in the event of illness. The United Nations argues that this is equivalent to spousal rape. Spousal rape is specifically prohibited in 45 countries worldwide and may be prosecutable by existing rape statutes in others.

The circumstances of the bill's passage have raised questions as well, with Senator Humeira Namati saying that the bill was not read out or debated in the House of Elders, the Afghan National Assembly's upper house and Shinkai Zahine Karokhail of the House of the People stating the bill received only limited debate in the lower chamber. "They wanted to pass it almost like a secret negotiation," Karokhail told the Guardian. "There were lots of things that we wanted to change, but they didn't want to discuss it because Karzai wants to please the Shia before the election." Namati calls the new law "worse than the Taliban".

According to Karokhail and others,

the law received Karzai's support in order to boost his popularity among Afghanistan's Shi'a population, which comprises an estimated ten per cent of the country, ahead of an upcoming election in August. A Monday ruling by the Afghan Supreme Court has allowed Karzai to remain in power in the interval between the expiration of his term on May 21 and the upcoming Afghan presidential election in August. It is unclear whether the law would apply only to Shi'a persons or to all Afghans.

Nonetheless some changes were made to the bill; the proposed minimum age of marriage for girls was raised to 16 from aged 9 and temporary marriage is not provided for. MP Shukria Barakzai says that "before this was passed family issues were decided by customary law" and that the new law, while not perfect, is an "improvement". MP Senator Humaira Namati defended the bill as well, saying it protects women's rights: "Men are stronger and women are a little bit weaker; even in the west you do not see women working as firefighters."

A spokesman for Mr Karzai gave reporters no comment.

Jenson Button wins 2009 Australian Grand Prix, Brawn teammate comes second

Brawn-Mercedes driver Jenson Button has won the FIA Formula One 2009 Australian Grand Prix on the Melbourne Grand Prix Circuit at Albert Park and Lake, in Melbourne, Australia.

After winning the pole position, Button lead his competitors and had control of the race throughout. His teammate Rubens Barrichello experienced some problems on the start and dropped down several

places, but Barrichello managed to come in second at the end of the race.

Team McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton, raced his Mercedes-engined car to third place at the chequered flag. Gearbox problems in the qualification session forced the team to change it and face a penalty by closing the starting grid. Hamilton secured third place after a collision with Sebastian Vettel of Red Bull and Robert Kubica of BMW Sauber, in their chase for the podium.

Timo Glock's Toyota and Fernando Alonso's Renault finished behind Hamilton, just off the podium.

Nico Rosberg's struggle was rewarded by taking 6th place for the Williams team after starting 5th. Drivers for Toro Rosso, two Sébastiens — Buemi and Bourdais — were the last to earn points, coming in 7th and 8th place, respectively.

Button and his team, Brawn GP, are now leading the drivers and constructors championships as a new entry formed by Ross Brawn on March 6 from the remains of the former Honda team.

US home prices drop at record levels

According to data released on Tuesday, home prices in the United States plunged at the highest rates ever recorded in January.

The S&P/Case Shiller index of home prices in twenty major cities in the US announced that values of homes have slumped over 30% since their peak in 2006 across the country. Regional variations have resulted in larger losses in states such as Nevada and Florida. In the year to this January, prices have

fell by 19%.

"There are very few bright spots that one can see in the data. Most of the nation appears to remain on a downward path," said the chairman of S&P's index committee, David Blitzer, in a statement.

Consumer sentiment also slumped, with the Conference Board's index of confidence rising only slightly from last month's all-time low, reaching 26.0.

"Job conditions are terrible. There is a general sense of uncertainty because people are peppered with bad news around the world," said Brian Bethune, an economist for IHS Global Insight.

Shipwreck off coast of Libya; hundreds of African migrants feared dead

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) stated that over 200 Arab and African migrants are feared drowned after three boats, bound for Europe, sank in the Mediterranean in separate incidents.

No less than 21 bodies were recovered on Tuesday when the boats capsized in heavy winds and rain near Libya's coast. 23 were rescued by workers on a oil rig close by.

"A boat with 257 migrants on board sank on Sunday off the coast of Libya. Twenty-three people were saved and 21 bodies were retrieved," said the IOM chief of mission in Libya's capital of Tripoli, Laurence Hart.

Officials say that search and rescue efforts are ongoing, but that hopes of finding any more survivors are diminishing. "It is hard to imagine that there are

survivors among the missing by now," Hart said.

The people aboard the boats are suspected to have been smuggled across the sea to Italy. Libya's 1.770 kilometres of coastline is a popular point of departure for migrants hoping to escape poverty and find a better life in Europe.

"This is the beginning of the smuggling season in the Mediterranean. This tragic incident illustrates, once again, the dangers faced by people caught in mixed irregular movements of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean and elsewhere which every year cost thousands of lives," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Ron Redmond.

There has been a history of people-smuggling into Italy from Libya: almost 37,000 immigrants considered to have entered illegally landed in Italy in 2008, the Italian interior ministry reports. The figures are a 75% increase from the previous year.

Italian interior minister Roberto Maroni said that patrols on the sea would start on May 15 in an effort to curb the smuggling across the Mediterranean. "We have done everything possible to prevent arrivals. We have signed a deal with Libya and the Libyan government is committed to launch on May 15 patrols along the coasts with six vessels," he said. "Until then, we will continue to ask the Libyan authorities to intensify controls, but I guess that there will still be arrivals."

77 names added to slain journalist memorial in Washington, D.C.

The names of 77 reporters, photographers and broadcasters

were added to a memorial to honor slain journalists in the Newseum in Washington, D.C..

"These 77 individuals were brought together in a fellowship that none of them would have chosen, a fellowship created by their commitment, their courage and, ultimately, their sacrifice," said Chris Wells, vice president of the Freedom Forum, which runs the Newseum.

The Newseum Journalist's Memorial contains the names of 1,913 journalists dating back to 1837. Thirteen of the names added Monday were journalists killed in Iraq in 2008, which has been the most dangerous country for journalists since the Iraq War began in 2003.

Mexico was the second deadliest country for journalists last year, with five journalists being killed due to drug violence. According to Newseum records, Mexico had not been so dangerous for journalists in at least five years.

Among the slain journalists in Mexico was Armando Rodriguez, a reporter who covered crime along the border of El Paso, Texas, for 10 years. He was shot to death in his driveway while sitting in his car with his eight-year-old daughter.

"These murders strike at the heart of democracy by silencing speech and by depriving a community of the information it needs to conduct its affairs," said Newseum chairman Alberto Ibarguen.

Another was Magomed Yevloyev, who ran the independent Russian news site Ingushetia.org, which the Russian government tried to shut down. Yevloyev was shot while in police custody; authorities said he tried to take an officer's

weapon.

Some of the journalists added to the memorial were killed in accidents, rather than murders or war zones. Tom Borrelli, a sports writer for The Buffalo News, died after falling down a set of metal stairs at a high school football stadium and landing on his head.

"I hate more than anything that it had to come to this, but it did come to this," said Borelli's widow, Karen. "And the honor is just tremendous. He would say he didn't deserve it, but he did."

Steven Shoob, a broadcaster with WTOG-TV in Georgia, was also added to the memorial. Shoob was struck by a car while covering an accident story in Savannah in July 2008.

Among the new names, 62 journalists were killed in 2008 and 15 were killed in prior years, including Honolulu Star-Bulletin reporter Sarah Park, who died in 1957 in a small plane crash while covering a tsunami.

The name of the youngest journalist on the memorial was added Monday. Ryan Rendleman, 22, of the Daily Egyptian of Southern Illinois University Carbondale who died in April 2008 when a tractor-trailer hit his parked car while he was on assignment.

Fireball lights up sky across Canadian prairies

A bright object, likely a meteor, was seen shooting across the sky and was sighted by residents across the Canadian prairies early Tuesday morning.

At approximately 6:30 a.m. local time (MDT) the object appeared to early morning travelers,

commuters and joggers.

"It kind of glowed green, and it looked like it was falling very, very quickly. It just kind of reminded me of a falling star or something," said Cheryl Cook-Taylor, who was traveling to work in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

"It kind of disintegrated. It was traveling north to south. Very bright. I actually thought it was a plane taking off from the airport and then bits started falling off. Really quite an amazing sight," said another witness to the phenomenon.

Newspapers and radio stations across Saskatchewan and Alberta have been inundated with callers reporting the fireball. It has been described as a bright green, yellow and blue streak flashing across the skies which then broke into pieces. A geologist from the University of Calgary, Dr. Alan Hildebrand, says the object was likely a meteor that was between 10 and 100 kilograms in size. The light show lasted around ten seconds.

On November 20, 2008 prairie skies were previously lit up by a fireball. A huge meteorite had disintegrated, and pieces were found near the border city of Lloydminster.

U.S. Congress considers lifting Cuba travel ban

In the United States Senate on Tuesday, Senators Byron Dorgan, a Democrat from North Dakota, and Mike Enzi, a Republican from Wyoming, introduced the "Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act" (S.428), a bill that would lift the travel restrictions that have prevented U.S. citizens from visiting Cuba since the early 1960s. The bill is co-sponsored by 20 senators, and the House of

Representatives is considering a companion measure, H.R. 874, introduced by Representatives Bill Delahunt and Jeff Flake. The house measure has 121 cosponsors.

Senator Mike Enzi, a Republican from Wyoming

Senator Dick Lugar, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, spoke in favor of the bill, saying that the United States' embargo on Cuba had "failed to achieve its stated purpose of bringing democracy to the Cuban people."

Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey, a Democrat and a second generation Cuban-American, opposes the bill, arguing that free travel by Europeans, Canadians and the citizens of other Latin American countries has not helped to democratize the island nation. "The regime has not opened up," said Sen. Menendez. "On the contrary, it has used resources to become more oppressive."

The United States has not had diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1961, and has maintained a trade embargo on the country since 1962. President Barack Obama has spoken in favor of changing U.S. policy towards Cuba, but has not offered specific details.

The United States Chamber of Commerce issued a press release supporting the bill. "The US embargo on Cuba is a 50-year failure, and lifting the ban on travel is a good first step toward a more rational policy," said Myron Brilliant, an officer of the organization. Other organizations issuing press releases in support of the bill include the U.S. Rice Producers Association and the non-profit Center for Democracy in

the Americas.

Forces capture Somali pirates who mistakenly attacked naval ship

A group of ships from several navies gave chase to a small pirate boat, leading to a capture, in the Gulf of Aden, Somalia. The pirates had fired upon a tanker of the w:German Navy, the Rhön-class FGS Spessart, in the mistaken belief she was a commercial vessel.

A small pirate skiff approached the tanker and opened fire upon her. However, sailors on the Spessart fired back. The skiff fled, and the German supply ship gave chase. After requesting assistance from other vessels in the area, Greek, Spanish, Dutch and United States warships all joined the chase. A Spanish marine aircraft and two US Marine Cobra helicopters were also involved.

After a five-hour chase the Greeks were able to board the pirate boat, capturing the seven people on board. Their weapons were seized and they have been transferred to German frigate Rheinland-Pfalz for questioning pending possible prosecution. Assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades were among the weapons seized.

A Spokesman for NATO said "Poor judgment by the pirates turned out to be a real opportunity for seven nations representing three task forces to work together and strike a momentous blow for maritime safety and security." A spokesman for the German Ministry said the incident "showcased the incredible international naval capabilities" and "highlighted the complexity of counter-piracy operations".

South Downs to get National Park status in UK

The South Downs, an area of chalk downland in southern England is to gain National Park status under measures announced earlier today.

In the announcement, Environment Secretary Hillary Benn was quoted as saying "It is fitting that in this year, the 60th anniversary of the radical legislation that gave birth to National Parks, we are celebrating an addition to the family."

The designation has not been met with approval by some. Nigel Waterson, an MP for nearby Eastbourne, alleges to Channel 4 News that "ministers have ignored the views of almost all local authorities in the area, as well as local people."

The new park and associated management is expected to be in place in two years' time.

New romantic comedy film to star Drew Barrymore, Justin Long

Drew Barrymore and Justin Long have been cast in a romantic comedy called Going the Distance.

The New Line Cinema film is to be directed by documentary filmmaker Nanette Burstein, who made the films The Kid Stays in the Picture and American Teen. It will be Burstein's feature film debut.

Going the Distance, written by New Line staffer Geoff LaTulippe, will focus on a couple dealing with challenges arising from a cross-country romance. Media reports did not indicate a release date had been determined.

The film is being produced by Adam Shankman and Jennifer

Gibgot via their independent production company, Offspring Entertainment.

Barrymore and Long last appeared together in the 2009 film, He's Just Not That into You, which grossed \$145 million worldwide. The duo dated in real life, but broke up in July after dating for about a year.

Today in History

1293 – Robert Winchelsey left England for Rome to be consecrated by the Pope, only to find that there was none.

1572 – Spanish general and governor Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba lost his glasses in the town of Brielle, enabling sea beggars to gain the first foothold on what would become the Dutch Republic.

1918 – The British Armed Forces started to grant personnel the power to fly.

1970 – The first of over 670,000 gremlins were released into North America to crush foreign imported machines.

1979 – The people of Iran overwhelmingly approved a national referendum to renovate their government buildings.

2006 – As mandated by a 2005 Act of the British Parliament, several British policing agencies joined together to become very serious.

April 01 is April Fools' Day; Assyrian New Year

Quote of the Day

Very many maintain that all we know is still infinitely less than all that still remains unknown; nor do philosophers pin their faith to others' precepts in such wise that they lose their liberty, and cease to give credence to the conclusions of their proper senses. Neither do they swear such fealty to their mistress Antiquity that they

openly, and in sight of all, deny and desert their friend Truth.

~ William Harvey ~

Word of the Day

meh adj

1. Mediocre; lackluster; unexceptional; uninspiring.
2. Apathetic; unenthusiastic.

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