



Top Stories

Kidnappers of BBC reporter Alan Johnston deny that he will be released

In a video broadcast on al-Jazeera and made by the Army of Islam, a militant group which claims responsibility for kidnapping BBC News reporter Alan Johnston, has denied that a deal has been reached with Hamas that would secure his release.

31 children rescued as UK police shut down global paedophile ring

Police in the UK have shut down a global internet paedophile ring in a ten month operation that involved 700 suspects in 35 different countries. 31 children have been rescued.

Featured story

Cockpit voice recorder retrieved from wreck of Kenya Airways Flight 507

A search team in Cameroon has found the cockpit voice recorder from the May 5 wreckage of Kenya Airways Flight 507.

Wikipedia Current Events

- North Korea is reported to have test-fired a short-range missile towards the Sea of Japan.
- Two armed robbers are holding several people hostage in a Crédit Lyonnais bank in Paris.
- Cadbury Schweppes announces plans to axe around 7,800 jobs from its workforce, closing as many as 10 manufacturing sites worldwide.
- The United States military launches Operation Arrowhead Ripper, what they claim is a major offensive against al-Qaeda, around the city of Baqubah in the Diyala province of Iraq with approximately 10,000 troops involved.
- The Al-Khilani Mosque is bombed, killing 78.
- Fiji's interim government agrees in principle to elections in 2009 following a Pacific Islands Forum assessment and calls for assistance from the European Union and Pacific nations like Australia for funding.
- A candidate in the forthcoming Papua New Guinea election is charged with attempted murder of the Deputy Prime Minister Don Polye.

Failings identified in response to Iranian seizure of Royal Navy personnel

Two inquiries into the seizure of Royal Navy personnel by Iran in March 2007 have found that the capture was not a result of "a

single failure or any particular individual's human error, but rather of an unfortunate accumulation of factors" and that there was a "collective failure of judgement" in allowing those involved to receive payment for discussing the event with the media.

The first report, by Lieutenant General Sir Rob Fulton, looked at "operational circumstances, consequences, and implications of the detention of the personnel". The second, by Tony Hall, former BBC Director of News and now Chief Executive of the Royal Opera House, examined the Ministry of Defence's handling of the media attention in relation to the incident and has been published on the MOD website. The report by General Fulton is not available to the public, as it is classified because it deals with operational issues.

General Fulton identified weaknesses in training, communications and the handling of intelligence and suggested improvements in training for boarding operations.

The Hall report found that the poor judgement in allowing members of the armed forces to talk to the media was not the failure of a single individual, but Defence Secretary Des Browne accepted this as his responsibility, and has apologised for this error. He said that personnel would not be allowed to sell their stories in future.

In a statement to Parliament, Des Browne said that the Ministry of Defence were committed to implementing the recommendations made in the reports and that he expects "the great majority to be implemented by the end of this year".

Caterpillars force temporary closure of Wisconsin state park

A park in the U.S. state of Wisconsin has been closed, due to being over-run by gypsy moth caterpillars.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced the unprecedented move yesterday, with officials saying they would temporarily close Rocky Arbor State Park near Wisconsin Dells due to an infestation of gypsy moth larvae.

The larvae are present at the park in such large numbers that, according to a report by the Wisconsin State Journal, camping there would "apparently be a squishy, nightmarish experience."

Mark Guthmiller, DNR gypsy moth suppression coordinator said that "there are also health and safety considerations that prompted our action," explaining that there was a significant risk of people having severe allergic reactions to the caterpillars. There were also concerns that the caterpillars might be accidentally transported out of the park on park user's vehicles to areas where the moths have as yet failed to establish themselves. Guthmiller also commented that related sanitation issues" would also "significantly detract from the quality park camping experience."

Andrea Diss-Torrance, another gypsy moth coordinator for the

DNR, said of the infestation: "It's very severe - it's as severe as I have ever seen."

The closure, which will run until at least June 27, is thought to affect around 95 campground reservations at the site, which covers 255 acres. State officials have been attempting to arrange alternatives for campers at nearby parks, or, failing this being acceptable, are offering refunds. The park will be closed until after the caterpillars have completed pupation - the period in their life cycle in which they transform into moths.

The gypsy moth is a pest in the U.S., having been introduced in the 19th-century in a failed attempt to try to breed a hardy variant of silkworm. The moths can strip the leaves off at least 250 different tree species, and as they lack natural predators in the U.S., cause significant damage. The moths often chew leaves but don't actually eat them, thus increasing the potential damage.

At Rocky Arbor, they have already stripped all the trees in some areas of the park. The caterpillars can kill trees directly, but more usually weaken them so that they are more susceptible to die from other causes, such as disease.

North Korea launches missile in 'military drill'

According to the Japanese Defense Ministry North Korea has fired a short-range missile today into the Sea of Japan. Officials believed it to be part of a regular exercise.

"North Korea fired a short-range missile in what appeared to be part of a military drill," a Japanese Defense Ministry official was quoted as saying by Yonhap News Agency.

A South Korean defense spokesman said such tests are routine.

"We don't deny that North Korea fired a missile," South Korean Army Colonel Ha Doo-chul, told Yonhap. "If it did, we regard it as a routine exercise."

The test comes at the same time when North Korea is inviting inspectors in to discuss its nuclear programs.

Supporters of Myanmar's Suu Kyi mark detained leader's 62nd birthday

Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained leader of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar marked her 62nd birthday today, still under house arrest, where she has spent most of the past 17 years.

About 250 supporters met at the National League for Democracy (NLD) headquarters in Yangon, not far from Suu Kyi's home, and held a rally calling for her release. Doves and balloons were released into the air, under the watchful eyes and video cameras of around 50 plainclothes police officers, who were stationed across the street.

The police force was augmented by a dozen truckloads of members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association, the political arm of the State Peace and Development, the junta that rules Myanmar.

"The doves symbolise peace. We also released colourful balloons, which rise like her prestige when they fill the sky," NLD women's wing leader Lai Lai was quoted as saying by Agence France Presse.

With the party marking marking Suu Kyi's birthday as "Myanmar Women's Day," Lei Lei read out a

statement at the ceremony, calling Suu Kyi "irreplaceable" and praising her "honesty, bravery and perseverance."

Security was beefed up around Suu Kyi's lakeside home on University Avenue, which is usually open to traffic during daytime, but is closed on significant anniversaries such as Suu Kyi's birthday or the May 30 anniversary of her detention.

NLD supporters said police were also watching their homes.

"Plainclothes police circled around my house on their motorcycles last night until dawn," Su Su Nway, 34, was quoted as saying by Agence France-Presse. She was arrested on May 15 with 60 others during a prayer rally for Suu Kyi in Yangon, and was released for health reasons on June 7. She said around 52 NLD supporters were still in custody.

Suu Kyi is generally barred from receiving visitors, so she spent the day alone. Except for her maid, a personal physician, a dentist and an eye specialist, the only other person to visit with Suu Kyi in the past year was United Nations Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari, whom she met for one hour last November at a government guest house.

Winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 11 of the past 17 years, continuously since 2003. Her National League for Democracy won a landslide election in 1990, but the military, which has ruled Myanmar since 1962, refused to honor the results. The country is also known as Burma, but the military government renamed it Myanmar

in 1989.

Calls for Suu Kyi's release have been issued by the NLD, various world bodies and other countries, but the pleadings have been met by no response from the generals.

"In our view, until their constitution is ratified, she will not be released," Sann Aung, a Bangkok-based leader of the Burmese government-in-exile was quoted as saying by Reuters.

"They are worried that she will be a threat to the National Convention and the referendum," he told Reuters, referring to the planned national referendum on a new constitution that is being written by the generals.

The Nation newspaper in Bangkok marked Suu Kyi's birthday with an editorial, saying that sanctions against the Myanmar regime have been ineffective.

"The junta has earned huge amounts of foreign revenue from oil and gas exports, with prices jacked up many times over. With rich mineral resources, energy hungry countries have been attracted to Burma despite the repressive nature of the junta," the editorial said, also making note of a recent deal that Russia has made to build nuclear reactor in Myanmar.

The paper also said Myanmar bodes ill for the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional grouping.

"As long as Aung San Suu Kyi remains incarcerated, ASEAN's reputation and the group's international standing will be tarnished. Asean leaders have repeatedly appealed to the Burmese junta to free her, but to

no avail ... today, Burma is the black sheep of ASEAN. Without any current provisions for sanctions, Burma will remain as intransigent in the future as it is today."

Thaksin ordered back to Thailand on stock-sale charges

Ousted and living in exile, with assets frozen in Thailand, former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was ordered today by the Royal Thai Police to appear on charges related to the sale of some of his family's stock holdings.

The order adds to mounting, increasingly complex legal troubles for Thaksin, the telecommunications billionaire who led Thailand until he was unseated in a coup last year.

Thaksin and his wife, Potjaman Shinawatra, who are both outside of Thailand, were both ordered to present themselves to the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) by June 29 at the latest. A relative of Potjaman's, Busaba Damapong, was also ordered to appear.

"If they intentionally fail to appear, we must issue an arrest warrant," DSI chief Sunai Manomai-udom was quoted as saying by Agence France Presse.

Noppadol Pattama, Thaksin's lawyer and spokesman in Thailand, could not say when his client would return.

"We will have to seek legal consultations among the lawyers. His security is only one factor. We will have to see what our options are and consult with him as well," Noppadol was quoted as saying by Associated Press.

Last week, interim Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and the junta's leader, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, both said Thaksin could return to Thailand of his own free will, in order to appeal the seizure of his assets. But later, Sonthi said Thaksin might face harm if he returned too soon.

The latest charges relate to the transfer of shares in 2000 in a real-estate company called SC Asset to a British Virgin Islands-owned company called Win Mark. Police say the Shinawatras' controlling ownership of SC Asset was illegally concealed through nominees. Potjaman's relative, Busaba Damapong, served as executive director of SC Asset.

Through nominee companies and disclosed shares, Sunai said, the Shinawatra family owned 79.87 percent of SC Asset. "Not only did they have control of a majority stake but also control over board decisions," Sunai told Associated Press.

They broke the law in failing to report their ownership in SC Asset and failing to report the transfer of the shares, Sunai said. They could face five years in prison and fined at least 500,000 baht (about US\$15,000), Sunai added.

Thaksin is also suspected of violating the prohibition on Cabinet members holding shares in publicly traded companies, and could face up to ten years in prison and a 1 million baht fine for that.

Potjaman's legal troubles, land purchase

Potjaman and Thaksin were also charged yesterday over the purchase of a 13-acre tract of land along Ratchadaphisek Road near the Thailand Cultural Centre in Bangkok.

The Office of the Attorney General says Potjaman purchased the land in an auction that was possibly rigged. Valued at 2.1 billion baht before the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and 870 million baht after, Potjaman purchased the land in 2003 for 772 million baht.

The Attorney General's office is recommending to the Supreme Court that the land be confiscated by the government.

Potjaman is also sought in Thailand to testify before the Assets Examination Committee (AEC) on the sales of her family's Shin Corporation stock to Singapore-owned Temasek Holdings.

She sent word today that she is seeking medical treatment for headache and irregular heartbeat in Raffles Hospital in Singapore, and that she asked the AEC to delay the hearing.

Potjaman appeared in court last month to plead not guilty to charges of tax evasion in the sale of Shin Corp. stock to Temasek.

Missing 8 million baht found

The AEC yesterday ordered an additional seven bank accounts seized after it was discovered that the accounts are controlled by the Shinawatra and Damapong families. The accounts contain 8 million baht that was feared missing last week after the AEC ordered 21 of Thaksin's bank accounts frozen. The 8 million baht had been transferred just before the AEC's order, to the other seven accounts.

Authorities have frozen a total of 52 billion baht, or about US\$1.6 billion, frozen, money they say came from the Shinawatra family's

sale of Shin Corp. stock to Temasek. The stock sale prompted mass protests against Thaksin last year and was one of the factors in the coup that overthrew his government. The authorities also believe that the Shinawatras and the Damapongs have 73 billion baht from the stock sale remaining in Thailand, and officials are still hunting for another 21 billion baht to seize.

CNN and YouTube partner for democratic debate

CNN and YouTube have joined forces to enable YouTube users to upload videos with questions for democratic candidates in the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

CNN will choose the "most creative and compelling videos" to air live on CNN on July 23 in Charleston, South Carolina at the South Carolina Democratic Debate to be hosted by Anderson Cooper in partnership with the South Carolina Democratic Party.

The debate is scheduled to be held at the Citadel, and will last for two hours.

Creators of videos chosen by CNN to air live on the show will get the chance to fly to the debate, and offer reactions on the official YouTube political blog.

CNN Washington's bureau chief, David Bohrman said that "Journalists do a really good job asking questions, but there is another world of questions out there I'd like to see. This is wide open to creativity and the use of sound and pictures. The tone and flavor will be so different from any other debate."

4.5 quake hits northern Thailand

A minor earthquake centered in

Mae Rim, Chiang Mai Province shook northern Thailand today, panicking residents in Chiang Mai city, who fled from tall buildings that swayed.

The quake, measuring at around 4.5 magnitude, struck at 12:06 p.m. (0506 UTC), Meteorological Department director-general Suparek Tansriratanawong told Thai News Agency. The quake was on the active Mae Tha fault line, which had a 5.1-magnitude quake on Dec. 19, 2006.

No injuries or major damage was reported in today's quake, Thai News Agency said. The Nation newspaper's website reported that the main Buddha statue at Wat Krong Or in Chiang Mai was cracked by the shaking.

Yesterday, a 4.2-magnitude quake was reported near the Myanmar border in Mae Hong Son, Thailand.

5.6 quake shakes Iran

A 5.6-magnitude earthquake struck yesterday in Iran, about 125 kilometers (77 miles) south of Tehran.

Nearer to the epicenter, in the holy city of Qom, people fled into the streets in fear, but no injuries or major damage was reported, residents and state television said.

Today in History

451 - The Battle of Chalons against Attila the Hun is the last major battle of the Western Roman Empire.

1756 - A garrison of the British army in India was imprisoned in the Black Hole of Calcutta.

1789 - 577 deputies of the French National Assembly took the Tennis Court Oath, starting the French Revolution.

1837 - Queen Victoria succeeded to the British throne.

1973 - Snipers fired into a crowd of Peronists near the Ezeiza Airport in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing at least 13 people and injuring 365 others.

June 20 is World Refugee Day; Father's Day in Bulgaria; Flag Day in Argentina (since 1938).

Quote of the Day

If there's not love present, it's much, much harder to function. When there's love present, it's easier to deal with life.
~ Brian Wilson

Word of the Day
glyph; n

1. A figure carved in relief or incised, especially one representing a sound, word, or idea.
2. A single formed character or symbol, usually representing a letter in a font.

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