



Top Stories

Former Chilean president Pinochet dies at 91

Former Chilean Head of State, General Augusto Pinochet, 91, has died in Santiago de Chile's Military Hospital at 2:15 p.m. (1715 GMT).

Canadians to elect senate for first time

For the first time ever Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has proposed a bill that says Canadians will elect the Senate of Canada. The PM will still appoint senators, but will only appoint those who are elected by popular vote.

Featured story

British computer scientist's new "nullity" idea provokes reaction from mathematicians

Reading university teacher Dr. James Anderson's claim that he has devised a number system that handles the "divide by zero" problem has been challenged by academics and bloggers, who have also criticised the BBC for its reporting on the claim.

Wikipedia Current Events

- A research expedition concludes that the Chinese River Dolphin is now likely extinct, directly due to human action.
- Ban Ki-moon is officially sworn in as the United Nations Secretary-General.
- The Supreme Court of Israel decides that the targeted

Wikipedia Current Events

assassination of Palestinian militants by the Israeli military can be legal under international law.

- U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) undergoes surgery after suffering a brain hemorrhage due to an arteriovenous malformation. If he is unable to complete his term, the Republican Party Governor of South Dakota, Mike Rounds, can appoint his replacement, potentially changing the balance of the Senate.

- Gunmen dressed in military uniforms kidnap between 20 and 30 people in the Sanak area of central Baghdad.

- Operation Paget, the inquiry into the death in 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales headed by Lord Stevens, a former chief of London's Metropolitan Police, concludes that there were no suspicious circumstances and that the fatal car crash in which she died was a 'tragic accident'.

- UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is interviewed by police investigating cash for honours allegations.

- The European Union announces it will introduce a common EU-wide driving licence in 2013.

Actor Peter Boyle dies at age 71

American actor Peter Boyle, well known for his "Holy Crap!" role on Everybody Loves Raymond, died Tuesday from Bone marrow cancer

at the age of 71 at New York Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan, New York. He suffered from bone marrow cancer and heart disease.

Boyle suffered a stroke in 1990. He also had a heart attack while taping an episode of Everybody Loves Raymond in 1999.

Boyle is the father of comedian Ray Romano, who played Boyles son on the sitcom which ran from 1996 to 2005.

Prof. Stephan Hawking concludes visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority

Professor Stephen Hawking today concluded his eight-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The visit was organised by the British Embassy and the British Council. The world-famous scientist and best-selling author of A Brief History of Time embodies the UK's scientific excellence and his visit has promoted Britain as the international partner of choice in science and technology collaboration.

Professor Hawking met with teenage scientists in an event organised by the British Council at the Bloomfield Museum of Science in Jerusalem on Sunday 10 December. Also on that day, Professor Hawking met the Prime Minister of Isreal Ehud Olmert.

This evening, December 14, Professor Hawking gave a public lecture to over 1,000 people at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on

"The Origin Of the Universe."

In between he met other Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) patients and gave them courage.

He also visited the Jewish Arab joint village of Newe Shalom, Tel Aviv University, Weizmann Institute of Science and the Birzeit University in Ramallah (at the Palestinian Authority).

Fictional documentary about Flemish independence causes consternation in Belgium

The Belgian French-speaking public television channel RTBF interrupted its programming last night for a special news bulletin reporting that the Flemish Parliament had suddenly created an independent Flemish state separate from Belgium. However, during the broadcast it became clear that the report was actually a documentary meant to stir up the debate on the position of the states and regions in the federal country Belgium. Walloon Minister of Media Fadila Laanan said that the message "this is fiction" appeared only at her request, after she had received several "panic" calls and text messages.

During the report, King Albert II of Belgium was alleged to have left the country to show his disagreement with the unilateral Flemish decision. Several politicians (Jean-Marie Dedecker, Jean-Marie Happort, Herman De Croo etc.) contributed in the making of the program, giving their reaction to the news and explaining some of their views on Flemish independence. There were images of thousands celebrating in Antwerp and flag-waving independence supporters in front of the Royal Palace in Laken, but also trams stuck at the "new border", and traffic jams in the

direction of Brussels Airport. After a while more comedy entered the report; two Flemish policemen where shown to be called into action to patrol the border, and Guy Vanhengel (VLD) was interviewed inside the Atomium, the monument symbolic of Belgium, where he spoke of a "monumental" mistake. The report was followed by a debate on the subject of the Flemish independence movement.

The head of news at RTBF reacted: "We obviously scared many people - maybe more than we expected," and this was indeed the case. A spokesman of Belgian Prime Minister Verhofstadt stated late last night that the newspaper Le Monde had already called them, and that CNBC already thought it was not fictional. Several embassies reported the news to their countries, and a Belgian representative in the European Parliament reported "consternation". A survey by the RTBF shows that 89% of spectators admit being fooled by the report, with even 6% continuing to believe it after the fiction notice appeared.

Leaders on both sides of the country spelled out their appall: Elio Di Rupo said it is "...unacceptable to play with the institutions and the stability of the country.", while Yves Leterme, Minister-President of the Flemish government, regretted that some of the Flemish demands were caricatured. Pro-independence politicians such as Filip Dewinter and Bart De Wever didn't hide their approval of the fake news report. Several politicians have criticized the method used by the RTBF, and expect that this will reflect badly on the credibility and reputation of the channel. The usual RTBF news studio and

anchorman were used to make the fictional report.

The incident is headline news in Belgium. The report comes at a time of a growing discussion on the topic of granting Flanders more independence from Belgium, one year before the elections in Belgium. Only last week, the pro-Flemish political parties CD&V and NVA announced that they would demand a major constitutional change during the next federal negotiations.

Yahoo!7 creates joint venture with Xtra

Xtra, owned by New Zealand telecommunication monopoly company Telecom, has created a joint venture between themselves and Yahoo!7, creating Yahoo Xtra. Yahoo!7 is the joint venture between Yahoo! and Australian network, Seven.

The joint venture replaces the current and long-lasting partnership between Microsoft and Xtra, called XtraMSN. The current partnership's contract will expire at the end of this year. Telecom chose to change the partnership because Yahoo! has worked together with BT Group, Verizon and Rogers Communications.

The new site, along with new online content will go online on around March 1, 2007.

The partnership will result in Yahoo!7 taking 51% control of the partnership and Xtra taking the remaining 49%.

Kevin Kenrick, chief operating officer of Telecom, said that they will now be able to target the underdeveloped online advertising community. "We see there is a fantastic opportunity to grow online advertising and the share of

the online market. Online advertising in New Zealand is getting to a tipping point of growth where there is a critical mass of online connections, broadband connections and an increase in the amount of time people are spending online."

When the new site is launched, it will include a range of news, sport, weather, enhanced e-mail spam and virus protection, photo sharing, and internet radio.

Theresa Gattung, chief executive of Telecom, said: "The Yahoo Xtra joint venture will provide New Zealanders with access to the world's best online services in a localised way."

Ian Smith, chief executive of Yahoo!7, said: "The company was achieving market growth of online advertising of between 50 and 60 per cent a year in Australia and believed it could do the same in New Zealand." He said that the partnership will give them a great opportunity to showcase its tools, technology and platforms in New Zealand.

Mr Kenrick said that the reason they had gotten a partnership with Yahoo!7 was that it is very difficult for a small player to develop its services in a New Zealand size market.

One other online company Xtra had considered for the partnership was Google, among others. The reason they chose Yahoo!7 over other companies was because Yahoo!7 has the top position in big fields such as TV and video. Mr Kenrick said: "The whole area of content management is one we thought would benefit from others with greater expertise and more scope."

Telecom manages 80% of the telecommunication market.

Canadians may elect senate for first time

For the first time ever Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has proposed a bill that says Canadians will elect the Senate of Canada. The only way for this to happen is to amend the constitution, however, Harper's plan would bypass the need for constitutional change.

Traditionally, the Prime Minister is the one who picks who should be in the senate, who can serve until they are 75. Then the PM passes the selection on to the Governor General, who makes the final appointment. If this bill will pass Canadians will vote on which person should represent their province or territory. The PM will still appoint senators, but will only appoint those who are elected by popular vote.

Senators would campaign like any other politician. Voters in their province that has a Senate vacancy would cast ballots for their favorite candidate at the same time as a vote in a general election.

The only provinces that actually have senate elections are Alberta and British Columbia.

Alberta Premier designate Ed Stelmach says he agrees with Harper's proposal

"I believe what Prime Minister Harper is doing is opening up consultation in terms of how to bring about Senate reform and we're going to work with him," said Stelmach in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta. "We have been supportive of Senate reform for many, many years and will

continue to do so. I'm awaiting the details of his proposals."

"This bill will allow us to move to a new era in Canadian democracy," Harper told the Conservative Party at their last meeting before Christmas break, which was held publicly.

"For the first time, it will let the prime minister give Canadians the decision on who represents them in the upper house."

"Imagine that. After a century and a half, democracy will finally come to the Senate of Canada," Harper said in a speech to members of the Conservative Party. "If need be, we'll use a plurality (first-past-the-post) voting system at first, and then move to a preferential system of proportional representation," — Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper

Harper has already introduced a bill which will attempt to limit the terms of senators to eight years. The 105-member Senate is currently dominated by the Liberals.

"Many Albertans I'm sure will share my view that it will not be good for the province to have an elected Senate as long as we don't have a constitutional change on the number of senators by province," Liberal leader Stephane Dion said.

If the bill fails, Harper is expected to campaign on the issue in the next federal election, which is expected next year.

U.S. Senator Tim Johnson hospitalized

Tim Johnson, a United States Democratic Senator from South Dakota, reportedly suffered a stroke at about 11:30 this

morning. However, subsequent tests revealed that the senator did not suffer a stroke or a heart attack. He was transported to George Washington University Hospital by ambulance, where he was diagnosed with a congenital arteriovenous malformation and underwent brain surgery. He is currently "recovering without complications" but it still being monitored.

Currently, the US Senate is controlled by the Republican Party; however, when the Senate reconvenes after the recent midterm elections the Democrats will have a one senator majority. Under the 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, state legislatures can give their governor the power to appoint someone else to take over, but this power can only be used in cases where the senator vacates his seat. Historically, this applies to death or resignation, but serious illness does not count.

Should Johnson die or resign, the Republican governor, Mike Rounds, will likely appoint a Republican in Johnson's place. This would bring the Senate to a 50-50 tie for organizational purposes and give Vice President Dick Cheney the tie-breaking vote, thus letting the Republicans control the Senate. This appointment would last until the end of Johnson's term, in 2008.

Today in History

1791 - The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, collectively known as the United States Bill of Rights, were ratified.
1891 - James Naismith introduced the first version of basketball, with thirteen rules and nine players on each team.

1961 - Former Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann was sentenced to death after being found guilty on fifteen criminal charges, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

1994 - The web browser Netscape Navigator 1.0 was first released.
December 15 is Hanukkah begins at sunset (Judaism, 2006);
Zamenhof Day

Quote of the Day

My deepest impulses are optimistic; an attitude that seems to me as spiritually necessary and proper as it is intellectually suspect.

~ Ellen Willis

Word of the Day

pectinate; adj

1. Resembling a comb.

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