



Top Stories

Iraqi forces battle militants in Basra for second day



On Wednesday, the ISF battled militants who have been described as loyal to Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in

Basra, Iraq's main seaport and the country's third largest city. Reports indicate that at least sixty people have been killed and hundreds have been wounded.

Popular soap opera 'The Young and the Restless' celebrates 35 years on the air



Wikinews interviews three actresses of the popular U.S. daytime soap opera The Young and the

Restless to commemorate the serial's 35th anniversary, which was celebrated Wednesday. Actresses Melody Thomas Scott, Michelle Stafford, and Tricia Cast took part in the largest Wikinews interview to date.

South Park episodes available free online

Episodes of the Colorado-based cartoon comedy television series South Park have been made available for free via streaming video on the website SouthParkStudios.com. Full-length episodes from the past 12 seasons of South Park can be seen on the site, as well as behind-the-scenes clips and

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information on upcoming episodes.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Wikinews interviews German music video director Uwe Flade

Uwe Flade is a music video director from Germany. He has worked with numerous artists, including Depeche Mode, Rammstein, Apocalyptica, In Extremo, Nickelback, Franz Ferdinand and Tarja Turunen. Wikinews conducted an exclusive email interview with him.

Wikipedia Current Events

2008 Mahdi Army revolt: Iraqi authorities impose a curfew until Sunday in a bid to stop clashes with Shiite militants.

- Puerto Rican Governor Aníbal Salvador Acevedo Vilá and twelve others are charged with electoral fraud.
- Germany scraps plans to build the Transrapid high-speed monorail link between the Bavarian capital Munich and its airport because of a massive overrun in costs.
- Airbus parent EADS wins a £13 billion contract for airtankers from the United Kingdom.
- The oldest known recording of a human voice, created with a phonograph by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville on April 9, 1860 is discovered by American researchers.

Wikipedia Current Events

•A gunman opens fire at Doctors Hospital in Columbus, Georgia, United States, killing two people and critically wounding one other before being shot and wounded by police.

Kosmos-3M rocket launches fourth SAR-Lupe satellite

A Russian Kosmos-3M rocket has launched the German SAR-Lupe 4 reconnaissance satellite into low Earth orbit. Lift-off, from area 132/1 at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in Northern Russia, occurred at 17:15 GMT. The launch, which was originally scheduled to occur today, was moved up to Tuesday, and subsequently delayed twice due to strong winds at an altitude of 13 kilometres, which prevented launch.

SAR-Lupe is a German reconnaissance satellite constellation, consisting of five spacecraft. The first of these was launched in December 2006. The next satellite, SAR-Lupe 5, is scheduled for launch sometime around October 2008. The spacecraft are equipped with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), which allows them to produce imagery at night, and through cloud cover.

The carrier rocket which was used, Kosmos-3M, is a derivative of the Soviet R-14 missile. It first flew in 1967, and the launch of SAR-Lupe 4 marks its 442nd flight. It is also the 900th launch of a member of the R-14 family of rockets.

The launch was declared successful, with the satellite reaching orbit at 17:43 GMT. It is the fourteenth orbital launch of 2008.

Teräsbetoni's 'Myrskyntuoja' tops Finnish album chart

Myrskyntuoja, the third album from Finnish heavy metal band Teräsbetoni, has topped the charts in the Nordic country. The album was produced by the famed Hiili Hiilesmaa, whose past credits include HIM, Apocalyptica, The 69 Eyes and Lordi.

Both of Teräsbetoni's previous albums reached number two, making this their first number one album.

The lead single from the album, Missä Miehät Ratsastaa, is Finland's entry at the 2008 instalment of the annual Eurovision Song Contest. The song reached number two on the Finnish singles chart and is currently number four.

Missä Miehät Ratsastaa will be performed at the Eurovision semi-final on May 20. If enough other nations vote for the entry, it will proceed to the final in Belgrade, Serbia.

Airbus parent EADS wins £13 billion UK RAF airtanker contract

European Aeronautic Defence & Space NV (EADS), the parent company of European airframer Airbus, has won a £13 billion contract to supply the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force (RAF) with aerial refueling tankers to replace the nation's current ageing fleet.

AirTanker Ltd., an EADS-led consortium, have signed a 27-year contract with the Defense Ministry

to supply 14 new Airbus A330-200 passenger airliner converted for the task. They will be owned by AirTanker, who retains commercial leasing rights to five which can carry 290 passengers plus cargo, but will fly in RAF livery. They replace existing Lockheed Tristar and Vickers VC-10 aircraft. The first aircraft will be in service by 2011 and all by 2016.

Rolls-Royce, part of the consortium, will supply engines. France's Thales will supply electronics, Wimborne, UK's Cobham will manufacture refueling equipment and Southampton, UK's VT Group will provide service management.

Last month, Northrop Grumman and EADS defeated Boeing to win a massive order for 179 tankers from the United States Air Force. Airbus has also inked recent deals with the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal Saudi Air Force and the UAE Air Force.

Ryanair executives pay frozen over increased fuel prices

Thirty-eight members of the senior management of Irish airline Ryanair, including chief executive Michael O'Leary, have seen their pay frozen in light of the increasing price of fuel, driven by rising oil prices.

O'Leary, who owns 4.2% of the airline and earned €992,000 (£780,000) last year including €565,000 basic pay, said "I think it's inappropriate for managers to be awarding themselves pay increases if profits are falling," and that pay would only be unfrozen if oil significantly decreased in price and "we can see some prospect of profits being increased."

Ryanair has currently hedged oil prices at US\$68 per barrel, but

this is set to expire, leaving the no-frills airline paying full market prices. "Our hedging finishes next week and we go from about \$70 to about \$100. Next year's fuel bill is going up by €400m. We only have around 10% hedged in the high \$70s for next year and I wouldn't be hedging now. We'll take our chances in the markets," explained O'Leary.

UBS analyst Tim Marshall estimates Ryanair's fuel bill is set to increase €732m this financial year to €1.01bn. UBS predicts a profit of €485m for this year, but O'Leary says profits could be down to €235m between now and March 2009, dependant on "oil prices and average fares". In light of the news, shares in Ryanair fell 2¾ cents to €2.96½ each.

Ryanair is trying hard to reduce costs, O'Leary saying they were "renegotiating airport contracts, handling contracts, maintenance contracts. We [Ryanair] want to reduce costs in every area of our operation." He said prices for passengers are set to go up, as "bag charges will keep going up until we can persuade half of our passengers to travel without checked-in luggage so we can get our handling charges down". At present, around 40% do this.

He said that to fill an extra 30% of seats the airline will keep fares relatively low. "We won't have to cut the fares like hell but they are not going to go up... More will fly with Ryanair than British Airways, Air France and all the other high-priced airlines."

US President George Bush discusses 'war on terror'

The President of the United States, George W. Bush today discussed the "global war on terror," at the National Museum of the United

States Air Force. In the speech Mr. Bush discussed the surge in Iraq. He said, "Over the past year, we [the US government] have seen significant security gains result from the surge."

Bush also claimed that the United States had achieved many things in Iraq. He stated that "the military achievements in Iraq have been accompanied by a political transformation. It can feel like distant history, but it was only five years ago that Iraq was one of the most brutal dictatorships on Earth - a totalitarian nightmare where any election was a sham, and dissenters often found themselves buried in mass graves. In a matter of 15 months, the Iraqi people reclaimed their sovereignty. They went on to choose an interim government, and to ratify the most democratic constitution in the Arab world. And in December 2005, 12 million Iraqis elected a government under that constitution - a display of courage that defied the terrorists, disproved the critics, and should always inspire the world."

He continued, saying that, "Tragically, the [democratic] progress [in Iraq] threatened to unravel in 2006. The new government Iraqis elected took months to form. In the meantime, a terrorist attack on a Shia shrine in Samarra drove sectarian tensions past the breaking point. Sunni extremists, including al Qaeda terrorists, and Shia extremists, some backed by Iran, slaughtered innocent Iraqis in brutal attacks and reprisal killings. And across the country, political and economic activity was set back."

President Bush did, however, say that the US coped well with the situation in Iraq. "We took a hard

look at the situation, and responded with the surge. This dramatic shift in policy had two primary goals. The first was to improve security conditions. So I ordered 30,000 additional soldiers and Marines into Iraq, and gave them a new mission, to focus on protecting the Iraqi people, and to hold the gains that had been made," he said.

Governor of Puerto Rico indicted in campaign finance probe

Today, Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, was indicted with 19 counts related to irregularities found in the financing of his campaigns for public offices on and off the island. Puerto Rico is a semi-autonomous territory of the United States.

Indicted along with Acevedo Vilá are 12 other people associated with his Popular Democratic Party, all living in Puerto Rico, Washington D.C., or Philadelphia. In total, there were 27 charges.

The U.S. Attorney Rosa Emilia Rodríguez of the District of Puerto Rico said that, because of the nature of the crimes he is charged with, the Governor himself will not be arrested immediately and will be given a chance to "give himself up to the police." Some of the other people charged, however, have already been arrested and await trial.

The 13 defendants are charged with conspiracy, false statements, wire fraud, federal program fraud and tax crimes related to the financing for the Governor's 1999-2002 campaigns for Resident Commissioner, the sole representative of the island in the U.S. Congress, and for his subsequent 2004 gubernatorial

run.

This indictment comes after a two-year investigation by a Grand Jury of donations made to the Governor's past campaigns.

The defendants face three to ten years in federal prison, as well as several \$100,000 to \$250,000 fines.

Acevedo Vilá's lawyer Thomas Green says he will defend the Governor "vigorously", and that he finds it troubling that these accusations come only months before the General Elections in Puerto Rico, in which the Governor will run for a second term.

Governor Acevedo Vilá made a televised statement at 5:30 p.m. local time (22:30 UTC) in which he defended himself from the accusations and indicated he will continue in his post.

Governor Acevedo Vilá is the chairman of the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico, which supports the island's current Commonwealth status with the United States, instead of full statehood or independence.

South Park episodes available free online

Episodes of the Colorado-based cartoon comedy television series South Park have been made available for free via streaming video on the website SouthParkStudios.com. Full-length episodes from the past 12 seasons of South Park can be seen on the site, as well as behind-the-scenes clips and information on upcoming episodes.

After new episodes of the program air on Comedy Central they will be added to the site for one week, but will then be unavailable for the

next 30 days before being added to the site's archives, due to contractual obligations.

SouthParkStudios.com was relaunched with free streaming episodes on March 19, and as of Comedy Central's announcement Tuesday the site had three million hits, two million video plays and one million full-episode streams. 168 of the series' 169 episodes are currently available on the site.

The site is currently in a beta format and is ad supported, but visitors can watch an unlimited number of episodes. Streaming episodes are uncensored, and each episode will have between three and four advertisements. The website also has news, games, blogs and a feature where users can create South Park avatar characters in their likeness. Fans can also choose from 3,000 episode clips from the show to embed on their blogs or websites. The website was created by WPP agency Schematic, with Toyota and Virgin as launch sponsors.

SouthParkStudios.com launched this past summer with games and other media content, in a deal between South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker where their contract with Comedy Central was extended for three years and the cable television channel agreed to split online ad revenue 50-50. Matt Stone commented on the three-year contract to produce more episodes of the series: "Three more years of South Park will give us the opportunity to offend that many more people ... And since Trey and I are in charge of the digital side of South Park, we can offend people on their cellphones, game consoles, and computers too. It's all very exciting for us."

"We got really sick of having to download our own show illegally all

the time, so we gave ourselves a legal alternative."

—Matt Stone and Trey Parker

Parker and Stone released a statement about the website: "We got really sick of having to download our own show illegally all the time, so we gave ourselves a legal alternative." Parker and Stone don't think that the move will affect DVD sales of past seasons, because fans will still want to own episodes in a "hard copy" format.

The website is managed by South Park Digital Studios LLC, a joint venture of Parker and Stone and Comedy Central. Anne Garefino, general manager of South Park Digital Studios stated: "One goal in moving forward is to make every episode of South Park available worldwide ... Currently, full episodes are not available in the U.K., Australia and a few other foreign territories, but we're not far off from making that happen. We have some contractual issues to sift through but we're getting there."

On the move to make the episodes available for free, Sam Thielman of Variety wrote: "It's a good time for Parker and Stone to distance themselves from the YouTube community given Comedy Central parent Viacom's protracted lawsuit against the Web-based video distrib, which features clips from the show." Viacom is suing YouTube for USD\$1 billion in damages relating to video clips displayed on the video-sharing website. Richard Menta of MP3 Newswire wrote: "With all their content already out there Stone, Parker and Viacom realized offering South Park episodes online directly is a low risk proposition. They might as well draw some ad revenue from it."

U.S. accidentally delivered nuclear missile components to Taiwan

The Pentagon made a public statement on Tuesday saying that four ICBM detonation fuses were accidentally delivered to Taiwan by the United States military back in 2006.

According to the Pentagon's official statement, the Taiwanese government had purchased helicopter batteries from the U.S, but instead received four nose cone fuses by accident in the autumn of 2006. The U.S. government was notified of the mistake by Taiwanese officials earlier in 2008, and the full extent of the mistake was finally realized last week.

On Tuesday, the fuses were returned to the United States, and an investigation was launched to determine the cause of the accidental shipment. A U.S. government official cited an error in labeling as a possible cause of the incident.

Taiwan has disputed parts of the Pentagon's claim. While the Pentagon stated that Taiwan only alerted the U.S. of the error recently, a spokesperson for the Taiwanese military argued that the United States military was notified by Taiwanese officials immediately after the delivery of the fuses. The U.S. responded by saying it was informed of the mistake, but was not told that Taiwan received the nose cone fuses and was therefore not aware of the full extent of the situation.

China has issued a statement in response to the incident, criticizing the U.S. for its negligence and demanding for the cessation of arms sales to Taiwan.

The accidentally-delivered nose cone fuses are designed to be employed in the LGM-30 Minuteman, an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

Iraqi forces battle militants in Basra for second day

On Wednesday, Iraqi security forces (ISF) battled militants who have been described as loyal to Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Basra, Iraq's main seaport and the country's third largest city. Reports indicate that at least sixty people have been killed and hundreds have been wounded. This marked the second day of intense fighting.

Combat is reported to have spread to other southern cities and also to Baghdad. Agence France-Presse reported that two United States soldiers were killed in the capital city.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has been in Basra since Monday to personally supervise Operation Sulat al-Fursan (Knights Charge) which the authorities described as designed to reimpose law and order. Today, he gave an ultimatum to the militants, giving them 72 hours to surrender. "Otherwise, they will face the most severe penalties," Maliki said in a televised statement.

Observers see the Basra operation as a test of the Iraqi government's ability to assert its control over a region that is not administered by foreign military forces. United Kingdom forces patrolled Basra from the onset of the invasion until they turned it over to Iraqi authorities in December of 2007.

US spokesperson Major-General Kevin Bergner said that, "These are Iraqi decisions, they are Iraqi

government forces and these are Iraqi leaders implementing and directing these decisions." He added that a year ago, the ISF would not have been able to conduct an operation of this scale.

Anthony Cordesman, a security analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies told Bloomberg via e-mail: "The current fighting is as much a power struggle for control of the south and the Shiite parts of Baghdad" as it is an attempt to establish government authority. The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council is "clearly positioning itself for a power struggle with Sadr and for any elections to come," Cordesman added.

Bergner further said that the fighting in Basra is neither a battle against the Mahdi Army, nor is it a proxy war against Iran. Rather it is "to deal with criminals in the streets with weapons," he said. "We [the US] shall continue to show restraint on those who have undertaken Muqtada al-Sadr's pledge." A 2006 US report, however, called al-Sadr's Mahdi Army a "most dangerous accelerant of potentially self-sustaining sectarian violence in Iraq."

"We have been living for the last hours in hell ... We haven't seen anything like this since the foreign troops arrived in 2003"
—Faris Hayder

Aides of Muqtada al-Sadr say that the cleric's cease-fire, which was declared in August 2007, is still in force. On Tuesday, al-Sadr called for a non-violent "civil revolt" and supporters have been protesting the Maliki government forcing schools and shops to close.

"There are ongoing negotiations

with the prime minister. Maliki asked to meet Sadr officials in Basra," Harith al-Ithari, head of al-Sadr's Basra office, told Reuters.

Muqtada al-Sadr was seen as instrumental in Maliki's rise to power, but al-Sadr broke from Maliki in 2005. According to Iraqi political analyst Hazem al-Nu'aimi, Sadr is a thorn in the side of other Shia groups that currently support Maliki. "There is a need to minimize the Sadrists' strength and influence and to draw the lines before they get any stronger," he said.

"We have been living for the last hours in hell. We have spent most of the time hiding under the staircase," said Faris Hayder, a 28-year-old resident of Basra to Reuters. "We haven't seen anything like this since the foreign troops arrived in 2003."

"No one wants to see a return to the violence of a year ago," Bergner said Wednesday on television from Baghdad. "This has been a difficult and challenging few days, it's also been a period of significant effort for the Iraqi security forces."

Space Shuttle Endeavour completes STS-123 mission

The Space Shuttle Endeavour landed on runway 15 at the Kennedy Space Center's Shuttle Landing Facility in Florida at 00:39 GMT this morning. Endeavour's landing marks the completion of the STS-123 mission, which saw two new components installed aboard the International Space Station during a 15 day, 18 hour, 10 minute and 54 second mission. Endeavour had travelled 6,758,000 miles, and orbited the Earth 250 times.

During the mission the JEM ELM-

PS module was installed, and the Dextre robotic arm component was assembled during a series of spacewalks. Dextre was delivered to the Station aboard a Spacelab pallet. This British-built component, which was first flown aboard the Space Shuttle in the early-mid 1980s as part of the European Spacelab programme, was making its final flight. It was returned to Earth by Endeavour.

Landing aboard Endeavour were astronauts Dominic Gorie, Gregory H. Johnson, Robert L. Behnken, Michael Foreman, Richard M. Linnehan, Takao Doi and Expedition 16 crewmember Léopold Eyharts. The landing was waved off on the first attempt due to overcast skies at the landing site. This resulted in a 90 minute delay to landing.

Main gear touchdown occurred at 00:39:08 GMT, followed nine seconds later by nose gear touchdown. Wheels-stop occurred at 00:40:41.

This mission was the 21st for Endeavour, the 122nd Space Shuttle mission, and the 25th and longest Shuttle mission to the ISS. The next Shuttle mission is STS-124, which will be flown by Discovery. This is currently scheduled to launch in late May. Before this, Soyuz TMA-12 will be launched, in early April, with the Space Station's Expedition 17 crew, and Yi So-yeon, who will become the first South Korean in space. Endeavour's next mission, STS-126, is planned for October.

Today in History

193 – Praetorian Guards assassinated Roman Emperor Pertinax and sold the throne in an auction to Didius Julianus.

845 – According to a Legendary Norse saga, Viking raiders under

Ragnar Lodbrok captured Paris and held the city for a huge ransom.

1795 – Partitions of Poland: The Duchy of Courland, a northern fief of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, ceased to exist and became part of the Russian Empire.

1862 – American Civil War: An invasion of New Mexico Territory by the Confederate States Army was halted in the Battle of Glorietta Pass.

1979 – British Prime Minister James Callaghan was defeated by one vote in a motion of no confidence by the House of Commons after his government struggled to cope with widespread strikes by trade unions during the "Winter of Discontent".

2005 – The Sumatra earthquake hit Indonesia, killing approximately 1,300 people.

March 28 is Teachers' Day in the Czech Republic

Quote of the Day

Just as we cannot stop the movement of the heavens, revolving as they do with such speed, so we cannot restrain our thought. And then we send all the faculties of the soul after it, thinking we are lost, and have misused the time that we are spending in the presence of God.

Yet the soul may perhaps be wholly united with Him in the Mansions very near His presence, while thought remains in the outskirts of the castle, suffering the assaults of a thousand wild and venomous creatures and from this suffering winning merit. So this must not upset us, and we must not abandon the struggle, as the devil tries to make us do. Most of these trials and times of unrest come from the fact that we do not understand ourselves.

~ Teresa of Avila

Word of the Day

caterwaul *v*

- To cry as cats in rutting time; to make a harsh, offensive noise.

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