



Top Stories

Bush Administration changes official position on legitimacy of Qu'ran desecration allegations

After an investigation of allegations that the Muslim holy book Qu'ran was desecrated in front of inmates at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the Bush administration has acknowledged the credibility of some of these reports. The US government first denied a specific report that the Qu'ran had been flushed down a toilet at the prison facility, but on Friday revealed that similar allegations were indeed true.

Amnesty International called for the shutdown on Guantanamo Bay due to numerous human rights violations, saying "The 'war on terror' appeared more effective in eroding international human rights principles than in countering international 'terrorism'."

White House spokesman Scott McClellan responded saying the report's allegations were "ridiculous and unsupported by the facts."

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Government of Zimbabwe violently forces thousands out of their homes

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U.S. military confirms Korans were kicked, stepped on and splashed with urine at Guantanamo

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Wikipedia Current Events

- A French court finds the newspaper Le Monde guilty of defamation against the Jews and Israel, in an article published in 2002 which used "Jews" and "Israel" interchangeably.
- Hundreds of people attend the funeral in Beirut of anti-Syrian columnist Samir Kassir, killed by a bomb on Thursday. Opposition leaders Elias Atallah and Saad al-Hariri, son of slain former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, are in attendance.
- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announces the postponement of legislative elections originally scheduled for July 17. He cited a report from the Palestinian election authority that it needs more time to implement changes in laws concerning seating of legislators. Hamas leaders object to the postponement.
- Roberto Maroni, Italian Minister of Welfare, calls for Italy to stop using the Euro and revert to the Lira.

Fire in Alpine road tunnel between Italy and France



Italian firefighters say a truck burst into flames inside the 13 km (8 mile) Frejus tunnel under the Alps. At least one body has been recovered from the tunnel between Italy and France. According to the Italian news agency ANSA, the truck which caught fire was carrying tires, and the fire has spread to three other vehicles: another truck, loaded with paint, a van of the French tunnel company and a car. Italian emergency services were being held back about a mile from the fire by the intense heat, but French services have managed to reach the blaze. Several vehicles are thought to be still in the tunnel. Police are trying to contact a group of people who escaped on foot in order to assess whether people may be trapped inside.

French officials have stated that all people who made it to safety alcoves (ventilated shelters directly linked to a fresh air shaft) on the French side of the tunnel have been safely rescued, but there has been no information about rescues from the Italian side of the fire, where intense heat has been hampering the emergency services.

The tunnel has a 0.54% uphill gradient in the France/Italy direction, which means that heat and smoke will generally escape on the Italian side, with cold fresh air sucked in on the French side, as the uphill

tunnel acts like a chimney.

Val Fréjus is a city on the French side of the border, in the Rhône-Alpes département.



Fire crews seen from the webcam outside the tunnel

A fire in a similar tunnel under the Alps (the Mont Blanc Tunnel) reached temperatures of 1,000° Celsius and killed 39 people in 1999.

Government of Zimbabwe violently forces thousands out of their homes



Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe 200,000 people living around Harare, Zimbabwe have been evicted from their homes, which have been targeted in a demolition programme by the government. Most have been forced to sleep out in the open while rental prices in the city have skyrocketed.

The operations have targeted at least six Harare suburbs: Hatcliff extension, Epworth, Dzivaresekwa, Glenorah, Glenview, Budriro and Mbare.

The official government newspaper, The Herald, says that 22,735 people have been arrested in the drive against "illegal structures, businesses and criminal

activities".

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) are pressing for the government for a six month waiting period to give residents time to make new housing arrangements. ZimRights director Munyaradzi Bidi told the IRIN news service: "About 200,000 people have been affected in the demolition drive — and many of them have papers to prove that they were legal occupants with lease agreements".

Israel upset Republic of Ireland again in World Cup Qualifiers

Having come back in the final minute of time to draw 1-1 with Ireland in Tel Aviv two months ago, Brian Kerr's squad were determined not to let it happen a second time in last night's sell out Lansdowne Road Group 4 World Cup qualifier clash. However despite two early goals for the Republic of Ireland, the Israelis still managed to claw back a draw - much to the dismay of on looking Irish supporters.

After just five minutes, Ian Harte scored from a 25 yard free kick putting the homeside ahead just like in the first match. However unlike in the first game, the Irish did not slow down the pace and become conservative. At the 11th minute mark, Robbie Keane scored Ireland's second goal of the match; much to the delight - and even moreso relief of the Irish supporters in the crowd of 34,000.

In a seemingly comfortable position, disaster hit the Irish team when Robbie Keane left for the bench with a shoulder injury sustained in the third minute of the game. As the 40th minute approached, Israel's Benayoun and Avi Yehiel combined efforts to put the ball in the back of the Irish net to bring their team back into the game. Things went from bad to worse for the Irish as the first half drew to a close with John O'Shea getting a yellow card in the Irish box - and giving his opposition a penalty. The penalty was scored three time by Nimni, but only on his third attempt did it count - the first

two disallowed because the referee had not blown his whistle.

The second half proved to be less fruitful for both teams, with no goals scored. The Irish became increasingly frustrated as the game progressed because of perceived Israelis time-wasting. As the game became more scrappy Andy O'Brien got sent off when he attempted to block the Israeli keeper from punching the ball.

The game finished 2-2, much to the despair of the Irish squad, who now can only draw encouragement from the fact that they remain ahead of France in the group table.

Big shoes to fill at eBay



There are often odd, unusual and controversial items up for sale on eBay - multi-million euro planes, the Pope's old car and a young woman's virginity, to name just a few. But how about the Prime Minister's shoes?

Shoes custom designed for former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher have been put up for sale on eBay. The shoes, which have a reserve price of £2,930 (US \$3,580), are currently owned by 65 year old Eleanor Graham. Ms. Graham bought them in in a Sue Ryder charity shop after seeing a member of Thatcher's staff drop them in the shop. She guessed that they would increase in value over the years, so Ms. Graham purchased them.

The Rayne shoes - which come in gold, silver and black suede - are size five and come with a letter received in 2001 from Ms Thatchers office confirming that she

did wear Rayne shoes.

Bush Administration changes official position on legitimacy of Koran desecration allegations



After an investigation of allegations that Islam's holy book the Qu'ran was desecrated in front of inmates at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the Bush administration has acknowledged the credibility of some of these reports. The US government first denied a specific report that the Qu'ran had been flushed down a toilet at the prison facility, but on Friday revealed that similar allegations were indeed true.

On May 16, Newsweek magazine apologized to the victims of deadly riots that ensued due to a Newsweek article stating that U.S. officials defiled the Koran. White House spokesman Scott McClellan criticized Newsweek's initial response to the incident, saying it was "puzzling." Later that day, Newsweek retracted the story, which the White House said was a "good first step".

On May 20, the International Red Cross (IRC) revealed in a rare public announcement that it had documented and reported to the United States credible information concerning desecration of the Koran by Guantanamo Bay personnel. Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman, acknowledged that allegations were made on "rare occasions" but were uncorroborated. Simon Schorno, a Red Cross spokesman, disputed the Pentagon's denial saying, "All information we received were corroborated allegations." He added that, "We certainly corroborated mentions of the events by detainees themselves," and that "the ICRC considers such reports very seriously, and very carefully, and

[we] document everything."



Irene Khan, Secretary General, Amnesty International

Scott McClellan explained in a press conference that the White House is not trying to tell Newsweek what to print. McClellan said, "Look, this report caused serious damage to the image of the United States abroad. And Newsweek has said that they got it wrong. I think Newsweek recognizes the responsibility they have. We appreciate the step that they took by retracting the story. Now we would encourage them to move forward and do all that they can to help repair the damage that has been done by this report. And that's all I'm saying. But, no, you're absolutely right, it's not my position to get into telling people what they can and cannot report."

On May 25, Amnesty International called for the shutdown on Guantanamo Bay due to numerous human rights violations, saying "The 'war on terror' appeared more effective in eroding international human rights principles than in countering international 'terrorism'." Amnesty International's view was shared by both the International Red Cross (IRC) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The IRC has said it reported to the U.S. government detainee's reports of desecration of the Qur'an. In the foreword of the report, written by Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan, Guantanamo was compared to a Soviet-era gulag in that it is "entrenching the practice of arbitrary and indefinite detention in violation of international law".



White House spokesman Scott McClellan

White House spokesman Scott McClellan responded saying the report's allegations were "ridiculous and unsupported by the facts. The United States is leading the way when it comes to protecting human rights and promoting human dignity. We have liberated 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have worked to advance freedom and democracy in the world so that people are governed under a rule of law and that there are... protections in place for minority rights, that women's rights are advanced so that women can fully participate in societies where now they cannot", as well as supporting the fight against AIDS in Africa. About the allegations of abuse at Guantanamo, which McClellan has previously called isolated incidents, he said, "We hold people accountable when there is abuse. We take steps to prevent it from happening again, and we do so in a very public way for the world to see that we lead by example, and that we do have values that we hold very dearly and believe in."

On May 31, U.S. President George W. Bush dismissed the human rights report as "absurd" for its harsh criticism of U.S. treatment of terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, saying the allegations were made by prisoners "who hate America." "It's an absurd allegation. The United States is a country that promotes freedom around the world," Bush said of the Amnesty International report.

William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA, defended the report, saying, "What is 'absurd' is President Bush's attempt to deny the

deliberate policies of his administration." and "What is 'absurd' and indeed outrageous is the Bush administration's failure to undertake a full independent investigation". Irene Khan also responded saying, "The administration's response has been that our report is absurd, that our allegations have no basis, and our answer is very simple: if that is so, open up these detention centres, allow us and others to visit them."

And, on Friday, the U.S. military released the results of their investigation and confirmed that in 5 separate incidents, American guards at the Guantánamo Bay prison "mishandled" the Islamic holy book. However, they stress that guards were usually "respectful" of the Koran. One incident involved splashing a Koran with urine by urinating near an air vent while others involved kicking, stepping on and writing in Korans.

Brigadier-General Jay Hood, the commander of the jail, looked into the allegations, published and then retracted by Newsweek, that American personnel flushed a Koran down a toilet. He said that the inquiry did not find any evidence supporting this particular allegation. "The inquiry found no credible evidence that a member of the Joint Task Force at Guantanamo Bay ever flushed a Koran down a toilet. This matter is considered closed."

This article contains first-hand journalism by a Wikinews Reporter.

Online poker firm set for multibillion pound flotation

Partygaming Plc, the worlds largest online poker company, has announced that it intends to float on the London Stock Exchange by the end of this month. Although it has not yet set a price, analysts in The City are speculating that the flotation could value the firm at up to STG£5bn. Such a valuation would make the flotation the largest in four years.

The Gibraltar-based company, which owns the Partypoker brand, intends to sell

23% of the company in the flotation. If the companies initial public offering is successful, the firm will enter the FTSE 100 Index (the top 100 firms on the exchange by value). Its value would be greater than that of both British Airways and Boots.

Partygaming Plc was founded in 1997 by Anurag Dikshit and has since grown at a huge rate - doubling profits in the past year alone to STG£371m. At peak times it attracts 70,000 simultaneous players.

U.S. confirms Korans were kicked, stepped on and splashed with urine at Guantanamo



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One incident involved splashing a Koran with urine by urinating near an air vent while others involved kicking, stepping on and writing in Korans.

Brigadier-General Jay Hood, the commander of the jail, said that these incidents are the exception to the rule. In a statement issued late Friday, he said: "The inquiry ... revealed a consistent, documented policy of respectful handling of the Koran dating back almost two-and-a-half years."

Gen. Hood looked into the allegations, published and then retracted by Newsweek, that American personnel flushed a Koran down a toilet. He said that the inquiry did not find any evidence supporting this particular allegation. "The inquiry found no credible evidence that a member of the Joint Task Force at Guantanamo Bay ever flushed a Koran

down a toilet. This matter is considered closed."

The incidents reported are:

- a guard kicking a prisoner's Koran;
- Korans wetted by water balloons thrown by guards;
- a "two-word obscenity" written, in English, inside the cover of a Koran. Military officials state that it is equally possible that a guard wrote this in the prisoner's Koran or that the prisoner wrote this in his own Koran;
- a guard who urinated too close to an air vent, spraying a Koran with urine;
- an interrogator who stepped on a Koran during an interrogation.

First winter snowfall in New Zealand

Overnight Friday a Southerly storm brought snow to both the Southern Alps and the central North Island mountains of New Zealand for the first time this year, closing major roads and stranding travellers at the start of the Queens Birthday holiday weekend. Police and the AA urged motorists to drive with extra care and to the conditions this weekend.

In the North Island, State Highway 1 between Waiouru and Rangipo, the Desert Road was closed at 7 PM on Friday night. Other roads in the area, including other parts of State Highway 1 between Bulls and Turangi, State Highway 4, via National Park, and 49, via Ohakune, were also closed. These road closures stopped all traffic through the centre of the North Island. About 200 travellers were reported to have spent the night at the Waiouru Army Camp, being accommodated in the Marae and the Barracks. Grit trucks and snow ploughs worked overnight to clear the snow and reopen roads, with the Desert Road finally being reopened about 12:30 PM Saturday.

Together with a slip threatening to close State Highway 3 in the Manawatu Gorge and damage to State Highway 2 after floods in the Bay of Plenty a couple of weeks ago, the only reliable alternative route for travellers around the North

Island was via Wanganui and Taranaki.

In the South Island, Police and the AA advised that chains were essential when travelling over the mountain passes.

Yesterday, Mount Hutt skifield announced it would be opening Saturday morning. Early Saturday morning, skiers were reported to be queuing at the gates of Mount Hutt skifield, eager to get the first opportunity to hit the slopes in 2005. Other South Island ski fields were also indicating June opening dates.

The weather outlook is for cold southerly winds and rain over the Queens Birthday holiday weekend, with snow down to 400m in the South Island.

Continuing civil unrest in Iran fueled by election tensions, soccer victory

In the past several weeks, Iran has seen civil unrest in several major cities, ranging from peaceful student demonstrations to riots to apparent politically motivated assassinations. Tensions have been especially high in the past several days.

Major soccer victories have served as the spark for some demonstrations, while others seem to be a symptom of disputes regarding ballot issues in Iran's upcoming (June 17) elections. The Guardian Council which approves all political candidacies has cleared eight nominees, barring several popular candidates.

On the night of June 3, students at the University of Tehran peacefully protested outside their dormitories against the exclusion of two candidates from ballots for the upcoming presidential elections. At the same time, fans in Tehran clashed with Bassiji militiamen (a component of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps after Iran's 1-0 soccer victory over fellow "Axis of Evil"-member North Korea. Attendees had been warned against excessive jubilation, as the nation is supposed to be in mourning for the anniversary of the death of the Islamic

Republic's founder, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. Some young women were reportedly seen removing their veils and dancing in the street.

An earlier soccer victory on March 27, against Japan, also led to public unrest in the capital.

Also on June 3, an Iranian exile organization reports that two plainclothes security police agents have been killed in the city of Isfahan, and there are reports of others being struck in hit-and-run motorbike attacks.

Protests which began in late May continued at Amir Kabir. Other protests in late May and early June occurring in Isfahan, Shiraz and other cities were broken up by Bassiji; however, the students at Amir Kabir have apparently been too numerous to disperse.

June 2, two badly-burned bodies were found hogtied in the River Karoun at Ahwaz in Southern Iran. The city in Khuzestan has been under martial law since widespread unrest last month. Students at came out to Khoy University protest Iran's mandatory female veil policy. The students shouted anti-regime slogans and called for election boycotts. Some of them initiated a hunger strike the previous day. The students were dispersed by Herrassat (university police), who were reportedly seen confiscating cameras, mobile picturephones and other recording devices. Several students were reportedly wounded in clashes with authorities.

June 1, students at the University of Ilam disrupted a speech by presidential candidate Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, a former security forces chief. Several students were arrested.

Today in History

1849 - Denmark became a constitutional monarchy.

1947 - George Marshall called for economic aid to war-torn Europe.

1967 - The Six-Day War began with an Israeli air force attack on Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

1968 - Sirhan Sirhan mortally shot Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles.

1995 - A new phase of matter, the Bose-Einstein condensate was discovered.

2004 - U.S. President Ronald Reagan died.

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