



Top Stories

US flag burning amendment approved by House

The House of Representatives Wednesday passed an amendment that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the Flag of the United States. The bill was passed by a vote of 286 to 130.

Lebanese politician George Hawi assassinated as historic elections end

A veteran Lebanese politician, George Hawi, was assassinated today in Beirut. Hawi's death came as a grim punctuation mark to the final round of parliamentary elections in Lebanon, the first since Syrian occupation ended earlier this year. Hawi was formerly the secretary of the Lebanese Communist Party. He had long been a Syrian ally, but recently became a critic of Syrian influence in the country.

Zimbabwe bans crop growing in urban areas

Farming in urban areas has been banned in the latest turn in the Zimbabwean government's 'crackdown' on the country's poor. Zimbabwe is in the grip of a chronic drought and with food supplies running low, thousands fear starvation after they were told they could no longer supplement their food supply with crops grown themselves. A police spokesman told a UN news agency that they were under government instruction to prevent urban farming.

Wikipedia Current Events

- n Indonesia, the team that is investigating the death of human rights campaigner Munir Said Thalib states that the Indonesian intelligence agency BIN may be involved. Munir died of arsenic poisoning en route to the Netherlands on September 7, 2004.
- Thousands of workers from UPM-Kymmene and Stora Enso, two leading Finnish companies in the paper industry go on strike over pay and working hours. Finland provides two thirds of the paper supply for the European magazine market. Industry analysts believe that the strike may have serious repercussions on the magazine market of Europe.
- The Supreme Court of the United States decides 5-4 that local governments can seize residential and commercial property for private development projects against the will of property owners if they offer 'just compensation'. In a dissenting opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote "Any property may now be taken for the benefit of another private party, but the fallout from this decision will not be random. The beneficiaries are likely to be those citizens with disproportionate influence and power in the political process, including large corporations and development firms."
- Elderly former Ku Klux Klansman Edgar Ray Killen was sentenced to 60 years in prison for the 1964 killing of three civil rights workers, the notorious crime that galvanized the civil rights movement and inspired the 1988 movie "Mississippi Burning." Circuit Judge Marcus Gordon handed down the maximum possible sentence for the 80-year-old former Baptist preacher, a punishment likely to keep him in prison for the rest of his life.

Jack Kilby, Nobel laureate and inventor of integrated circuit, dies at 81

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 2000 for his work on developing the integrated circuit, Jack Kilby died after battling cancer on Monday, June 20, 2005, in Dallas at the age of 81. After years of claims, Kilby agreed to share credit for the invention with Robert Noyce, the co-founder of chip maker Intel.

His contribution to the pioneering breakthrough of the integrated circuit was made by Kilby during his employment with Texas Instruments(TI) in 1958. He also is credited with co-inventing the handheld calculator which made TI the leader in early consumer electronics development. The integrated circuit paved the way in the development of the microchip used today in computers, DVD players, interactive video games and cell phones.

Kilby's work includes the awarding of 60 patents. It was said of him in a statement by TI chairman Tom Engihous that, "In my opinion, there are only a handful of people whose works have truly transformed the world and the way we live in it — Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, the Wright Brothers and Jack Kilby."

In his first year working with TI, Kilby's work on what became the forerunner to the microchip was an invention he fabricated by using a sliver of germanium on a glass slide. This invention was the predecessor to the semiconductor that ultimately replaced vacuum tubes and switching wires then in use as the transistor devices. The invention also led to solid state electronics able to withstand more shock and impact in handling.

Kilby is recognised for his 'seminal

thought' on the integrated circuit by being awarded the Robert N. Noyce Award in 1995, the Semiconductor Industry Association's highest honor. He is survived by two daughters and five grandchildren.

US flag burning amendment approved by House

The House of Representatives today passed an amendment that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the Flag of the United States. The bill (H.J.Res.10), whose main sponsor was Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-Calif.), was passed by a vote of 286 to 130. The required two-thirds was present. This is the fifth time a flag burning amendment has passed the House.

The bill will now move on to the Senate, where it stands the best chance of passing ever. If a majority of two-thirds passes the bill, it will then move on to the states to be ratified with a seven-year window open on the ratification. Each time an amendment like this was passed in the House, it died in the Senate, the last time being in 2000.

An informal survey conducted by the Associated Press suggested that the vote will be close — 34 senators surveyed opposed the amendment, the exact number required to defeat it. However, supporters of the amendment are optimistic that the amendment will pass because four seats were gained by the Republicans in the election last November.

The amendment seeks to bypass the 1989 Supreme Court case *Texas v. Johnson* which ruled that desecration of the flag was legal; flag burning was established to be a form of protected speech under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. In New Zealand, a 22-year-old law banning the destruction of their flag was also recently overturned as it was considered an act of free speech.

Solar sail craft may have made orbit

The Planetary Society have stated that their experimental solar sail craft Cosmos 1 is probably lost, but intermittent signals have given them some hope the mission has made orbit.

The 100kg vehicle was launched atop a converted ICBM from a Russian nuclear submarine, however it is believed the first stage of the Volna booster rocket failed 83 seconds into the flight. The team behind the \$4m craft have a slim hope that it managed to reach a low orbit, and efforts to pick up the tracking beacon are continuing.

Signals have apparently been received by at least two tracking stations around the globe - in the Czech Republic, and in the Marshall Islands. The Planetary Society are being assisted by the US Strategic Command in an effort to find the spacecraft, if it did make orbit.

However a scientist from the Czech station has said they have received only noise.

If Cosmos-1 is in orbit, the onboard computer may still be functioning and could begin to unfurl the 30m diameter sail in three days time.

Solar sailing depends on harnessing the wind from the sun - a fast moving stream of particles ejected from our star - to push the craft along. Although acceleration is very slow, it can go on indefinitely - it was hoped Cosmos-1 would use a 30m diameter sail to reach an orbit 800km above the Earth, as a demonstration of the potential of the technology.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister resigns

Australia's Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson resigned today citing health concerns.

Anderson suffers from a benign tumor in his prostate and said he feels that only by cutting back his official and policial

commitments would his condition improve.

Anderson also said in a speech to parliament he will be stepping down as leader of the National Party of Australia -- the junior partner in the current Liberal Party of Australia coalition government. It is not immediately clear who will replace Anderson.

No resolution in North Korean nuclear stalemate

North and South Korea today agreed to continue the quest for a peaceful resolution to the ongoing nuclear crisis in North Korea but did not agree on a date for continued talks, delegates from North and South Korea announced.

Issuing a joint statement, South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said in part, "The South and the North have agreed to take real measures for peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue through dialogue as the atmosphere is created with the ultimate goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il said last week that he would consider rejoining negotiations if the United States would give North Korea the respect it deserved as a nation.

Zimbabwe bans crop growing in urban areas

Farming in urban areas has been banned in the latest turn in the Zimbabwean government's 'crackdown' on the country's poor.

Zimbabwe is in the grip of a chronic drought and with food supplies running low, thousands fear starvation after they were told they could no longer supplement their food supply with crops grown themselves. A police spokesman told a UN news agency that they were under government instruction to prevent urban farming.

Police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena said "a lot of harm is being done to the environment. Why can't those who want to cultivate crops go to rural areas, where people are being allocated farms under the land reform programme?"

People living in urban areas had taken to growing their staple crop - maize - and other grains in patches of land near their houses. Much of the land being used had already been earmarked for cultivation, but the police have been told to ignore any such designations.

An non-governmental organisation, Environment Africa, agreed with some of the policy. "We totally understand and appreciate the need for urban people to supplement their incomes, but they should not do it the wrong way. Ideally, farming should be done on farms, not in towns. What we have witnessed is an irreparable damage to the environment, which will certainly have dire consequences for our beloved cities," said an official.

A spokesman for the opposition - the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) - said that while planting on undesignated land, especially amid a maze of houses in townships was not something they could approve, planting on designated areas should be allowed.

Such urban farming could produce up to 100,000t of grain in a good year, the spokesman added. He believes the government aims to drive urban people - who are often MDC supporters - out into the countryside, with the promise of getting land under the "reform program".

As international concern about Zimbabwe grows, Kofi Annan plans to send a special envoy to assess the situation. However, he has not scheduled a time to actually go.

Canadian PM vows to push ahead with same-sex marriage bill

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin's

Liberal government is planning on passing the same-sex marriage bill, Bill C-38, before the spring session winds up. The gay-marriage bill is being linked with the passage of a \$4.6 million budget bill that provides more money directed at social services and foreign aid. The two bills will be the final confidence vote until the fall.

The opposition, the Conservative party, has vowed to do everything it can to defeat the Liberal government unless they pull the vote and wait until fall. Liberal House leader Tony Valeri tabled a notion early Tuesday to extend the spring sitting, delaying the scheduled summer break. The Liberal party is facing resistance from several of its backbenchers, some of who believe the marriage bill should be delayed until the fall.

At least three Liberal MPs have indicated that they might vote against the gay marriage bill along with the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois. If the motion were defeated, the government would be forced to resign.

Canadian military accused of Agent Orange cover up

Canadian military officials are being accused of covering up the use of the deadly chemical agent Agent Orange and other defoliants during the 1950s and 1960s at a New Brunswick base.

At a public meeting attended by at least 200 people, defence officials said only a small amount of the herbicide was used, over a total of seven days between 1966 and 1967 at the army base to clear foliage to prevent fires during artillery training and to clear the view for soldiers.

The American military was also given permission by the Canadian military to test Agent Orange, Agent Purple, and Agent White during the Vietnam War on less than 500 acres of the Canadian base.

Thursday's public meeting followed in the aftermath of recent media reports that

a U.S. army report indicated the use of Agent Purple, which is considered three-times more toxic than Agent Orange, as part of the spraying program.

When revelations about the use of Agent Purple first surfaced in mid-June, retired sergeant, Earl Graves, said, "They were out in the exercise area and the planes flew over spraying and they were told to just put ponchos over their head, that it wouldn't hurt them."

He said 170 soldiers in his regiment died of cancer and many of them died young.

At the public meeting held Thursday afternoon, angry and fearful civilians and veterans voiced fears that the chemicals were responsible for illnesses later developed.

Veteran John Chisholm said soldiers were told the sprays were harmless and to keep their mouths shut. "Now we found out this stuff here is killing us. No wonder all my buddies are dead."

The Defence Department said Thursday that it was conducting tests to determine the dioxin level in the soil and consulting with the U.S. military to find out the exact carcinogen levels in the sprays used.

Today in History

1128 - Alfonso I of Portugal fought the Battle of São Mamede, the first step toward Portuguese independence.

1314 - Scotland regained independence as forces led by Robert the Bruce defeated Edward II of England in the Battle of Bannockburn.

1441 - Eton College in Berkshire, England, was founded by King Henry VI to provide free education to poor students who would then go on to King's College, Cambridge.

1535 - The Anabaptist state of Münster was conquered and subsequently disbanded.

1597 - The first Dutch voyage to the East Indies reached Bantam on Java.

1947 - First known sighting of UFOs: Kenneth Arnold saw nine luminous disks in the form of saucers flying above the U.S. state of Washington.

June 24 is Battle of Carabobo Day in Venezuela (1821), Fête nationale du Québec (Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day) in Québec, Canada

Quote of the Day

Conservative, n. A statesman enamored of existing evils, as opposed to a Liberal, who wants to replace them with new ones.
~ Ambrose Bierce

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