



Top Stories

FEMA head relieved of duties

Michael Brown, director of the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, has been relieved of his duties regarding the Hurricane Katrina aftermath, following a controversy about his apparent failure to respond to the disaster quickly.



UN inquiry finds mismanagement and failure of oversight

Independent Inquiry Committee findings: the United Nations requires stronger executive leadership, thorough administrative reform, and more reliable controls and auditing.

Featured story

How the Army Corps of Engineers closed one New Orleans breach

After Category 4 storm Hurricane Katrina brushed New Orleans, several flood control constructions failed. The Corps worked on the 17th Street Canal breach, water flow was stopped September 2, and the breach was closed on September 5th.

Wikipedia Current Events

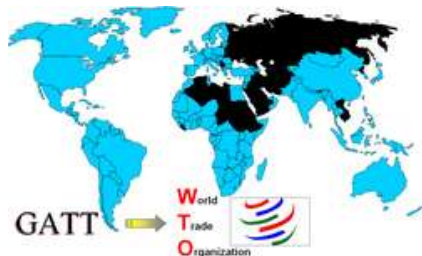
- Iraqi forces attack Iraqi insurgents in Tal Afar.
- The 2005 World Summit to take place on Wednesday,

Wikipedia Current Events

September 14 is expected to be the largest gathering of world leaders in history, with more than 170 world leaders in attendance.

Saudi Arabia agrees with the US on joining the WTO

Saudi Arabia signed on Friday a trade agreement with the United States, which was considered to be one the last major hurdles to the World Trade Organisation membership of the kingdom. Now, Saudis have to complete negotiations at the Geneva-based WTO the formal accession document.



Member unions of the WTO shown in blue.

The deal opens Saudi markets to US farm and manufactured goods, as well as most services, including IT, financial, energy and tourism sectors. It also forced Saudis not to boycott US companies which are doing business with Israel.

The kingdom also promised to have normal trade relations with all 148 WTO members, which include Israel.

The other problem remains a Saudi-EU row over gas prices. The

EU officials accused Saudi Arabia of selling the natural gas to their home petrochemicals at rates below international market prices, which could cause losses to the European producers.

FEMA head relieved of duties

The U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, announced from Baton Rouge, Louisiana on Friday that Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad W. Allen will replace the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Michael D. Brown as the Principal Federal Official (PFO) for the recovery effort; however, Mr. Brown will continue as the Director of FEMA.



Thad Allen

Admiral Allen was given the assignment of special deputy to Mr. Brown earlier this week. Secretary Chertoff now describes Allen as, "the Principal Federal Official overseeing the Hurricane Katrina response and recovery effort in the field."

Mr. Brown, who came under intense pressure for government failures to provide timely

assistance to disaster victims of Hurricane Katrina, was ordered back to Washington and relieved of his duties in the Gulf States. His immediate FEMA role now will be for its national administration. The personnel change results in FEMA's local effort now being headed-up by military leadership, instead of civilian. However, Admiral Allen's Deputy (the number two federal official in the field) is a civilian.



Michael Chertoff

The Coast Guard came under the homeland's security umbrella in 2003. Allen, a career Coast Guard officer, was in charge of its Atlantic forces fleet during the terrorist 9/11 attack in New York City in 2001.

Mr. Brown, who was hailed last week by President Bush, "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job," was nominated by Bush himself to head FEMA in 2003. Recent allegations that credentials Brown listed on his resume prior to employment at FEMA, which began in 2001, that said he worked in emergency services for the city of Edmond, OK from 1975 to 1978, along with being awarded "Outstanding Political Science Professor" at the Central State University in Oklahoma, both have come under fire in a report by TIME magazine two days ago. Critics question how thorough the White House was in its vetting Brown for the FEMA assignment.

When commenting about Mr.

Brown last Friday, Senator Mary L. Landrieu, who spent more than a week in the hurricane struck area, said "I have been telling him from the moment he arrived about the urgency of the situation" and "I just have to tell you that he had a difficult time understanding the enormity of the task before us."

Swedish minister wants more free-to-air channels in the the terrestrial television network

In a press release on September 8 from the Swedish Ministry of Education, Research and Culture it was announced that new television broadcasting licenses for the Swedish digital terrestrial television network was to be given and that the Radio and Television Authority (RTVV) had been given the task to handle the applications. All digital television licenses will seize by the end of 2005 and the companies must apply for a renewal if they want to continue broadcasting in 2006 and 2007.



Decryption cards like this are needed in order to view certain digital TV stations in Sweden.

Minister Leif Pagrotsky says in the press release that he is "taking an initiative towards a broader offer and more free channels". He doesn't give any clue on how this will be done in the press release, however. In an interview in

Dagens Media, his press secretary Thomas Johansson says that new applicants most likely must offer free-to-air channels if they want a licence. Johansson says that there is space for at least two more channels in the network.

The RTVV shall leave a suggestion of what channels will get new or continued licenses on November 21, 2005. As of September 8 TV4 AB, Dagens Industri, Sportexpressen and Eurosport SA had sent their applications for new or continued licenses.

Currently, very few of the 33 channels in the network has chosen to go free-to-air, as opposed to the United Kingdom, Germany and Finland where most channels are free-to-air.

One week before German federal election, the race is wide-open again

With only one week to go till the German federal election, all polls say it's impossible to predict who will govern the country for the next four years (for the polls see end of article).

Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) had headed the polls for over two years. Only three months ago, when chancellor Gerhard Schröder proclaimed he would seek early elections, a move that at the time was considered to be political suicide by many commentators, it seemed not unlikely that the CDU could even govern on its own, without an coalition partner. While their lead was slowly shrinking in the past few months, there was still a comfortable majority for a coalition with the Free Democrats (FDP).

Then came the TV debate between

Schröder and Merkel. Commentators and newspaper editorials first thought it didn't have much impact. Sure, the "Media chancellor" Schröder was widely considered to have performed better, but that was to be expected. And Merkel certainly wasn't as bad as Schröder's Social Democrats (SPD) had hoped. Also the topics they talked about weren't really new. Every position they stated had already been printed and broadcasted over and over again.

But something did happen. The CDU plunged between 2-3% in the various polls, while the SPD gained as much as 3.5%. Suddenly the black-yellow (named for the party colors of the CDU and FDP) majority was gone. But the current red-green (this time the colors of SPD and Greens) coalition is even farther from reaching a majority because there is also the Left Party.

The Left Party (or simply The Left) is essentially a renamed PDS, which in turn is the successor of the SED, the former ruling party of the GDR. It failed the 5% quorum in the 2002 election and currently only has two representatives in the Bundestag; both won constituencies in East Berlin. The Left originally planed to merge with the WASG, a party mainly consisting of former SPD members who were disappointed by Schröder's social reforms, before the election which would have been held in 2006. However, they were caught off guard by the early elections call, so candidates of the WASG for the Bundestag now run under The Left banner. One of them is Oskar Lafontaine.

Lafontaine was the Party chair of the SPD. He was also the Finance minister in Schröder's first

government. But only a few months after the SPD got in power after 16 years of CDU government, he resigned in March 1999 from both the offices of minister and party chair, citing insurmountable political and personal differences with Schröder. He largely stayed out of politics, writing only a few books and newspaper columns, but is now, along with Gregor Gysi, one of two front-runners of the Left Party.

So the Party of Left may tip the scales in this election. But all other parties have ruled out a coalition with them and The Left itself also called it impossible that a common ground could be found with the "neoliberal" parties currently in the Bundestag.

So, assuming neither black-yellow nor red-green reach a majority, what options are left? Maybe, the only remaining possibility is a grand coalition between the SPD and the CDU. But the differences between those two parties seem irreconcilable from today's viewpoint. There are radically different approaches in the fields of taxation, social and labor reforms to name only a few. Angela Merkel has recruited a noted economist, Paul Kirchhof, to her team. Kirchhof plans to introduce a flat tax on income, 25% for everyone, and remove all tax exemptions. While the CDU doesn't want to go that far during the next four years, it has already named Kirchhof finance minister in the case they win the election. The SPD has blasted those plans as "radically unsocial" and instead plans to increase the taxes for wealthier people.

Another hot topic is Germany's high unemployment. The CDU plans to abolish the dismissal

protection of workers to give companies greater flexibility in the hiring of their employees. Again, this is a no-go for the SPD.

But the two parties won't even speculate about this option. Both ruled out a coalition with each other. Nonetheless, 35% of all Germans think this coalition would be the best for the nation, a survey by the ZDF shows. That is still more than the 31% who would favor a black-yellow coalition and 17% who want a continuation of the current red-green government.

Party	ARD	ZDF	Focus	FAZ
SPD	34,0	34,0	34,5	32,7
CDU/CSU	41,0	41,0	40,5	41,5
Greens	7,0	7,0	7,0	7,2
FDP	6,5	7,0	7,0	7,0
The Left	8,5	8,0	8,0	8,9

Poll results

So, Germans have to wait for the 18th of September to know who will govern them for the next four years. But then again, it might even take two weeks longer because a by-election is required in Dresden, after a candidate died. And if it gets even closer than the aforementioned polls suggest, Germany will have to wait till October 2nd for a new, or the old government.

Controversy over proposed Australian anti-terror laws

The Australian government has received criticism over its new proposed anti-terror laws, claiming they are encouraging a transition into a police state. Critics say that the laws are draconian, too open to abuse, and may restrict the Australian 'way of life'.

The government has responded by saying that the laws are necessary to ensure security due to the rising terrorist threat to Australia. It is also considering sunset clauses for some laws, to counter claims that the laws may be abused after the terror threat has ebbed.

The proposed legislation includes an increase in the number of security cameras, penalties for leaving bags unattended at airports, electronic tags and restraining orders on suspects and tougher jail terms for inciting violence. Greater powers will be given to police and spy agencies to deal with terror suspects, and the length of time before permanent residents may apply for citizenship will increase from two to three years.

There has been concern from the Muslim community that the laws are unfairly biased against Muslims. The government has denied this, with Prime Minister John Howard saying that all Australians, including Muslims, should have nothing to fear if they are law-abiding citizens. "These laws are not directed at Islamic people, they are directed at people who might be contemplating terrorist deeds," Mr Howard said.

There will be a meeting of State and Federal leaders, to determine the finer details of the new legislation, later this month.

All major American TV networks show charity concert for Katrina victims

On Friday, all six major American television networks; ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, WB, and UPN, along with most PBS stations, united in a rare show of solidarity to air a one

hour charity concert called Shelter from the Storm: A Concert for the Gulf Coast.

The concert aired live at 8pm in the Eastern time zone and 7pm in the Central time zone and on tape-delay in the Mountain and Pacific time zones. It was also shown on the Internet and many cable networks such as USA, Bravo and G4.

The show was produced by Joel Gallen, the same man behind the September 11th tribute concert America: A Tribute to Heroes. The show was not censored for political statements but was for obscenities. Gallen did not expect any political statements. Last week, rapper Kayne West made a remark on an NBC charity show A Concert for Hurricane Relief, in which West claimed that "George Bush doesn't care about black people.", which caused controversy.

Donations were being solicited for the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

Telecom company AT&T provided toll-free calling and 10 call centers for the event and MCI provided volunteers from their call centers.

BET also held a charity concert called S.O.S (Saving OurSelves), a half-hour before cutting to the main one.

MTV, MTV Overdrive, VH1 and CMT will air a charity show Saturday called ReAct Now: Music & Relief.

Red Cross is not in New Orleans for Katrina, Guard raced it to Superdome

The American Red Cross is not lending its usual assistance in New Orleans, because the

Louisiana National Guard acted first.



Superdome roof, 2 days after Katrina struck

The organization explains on its web site:

- Access to New Orleans is controlled by the National Guard and local authorities and while we are in constant contact with them, we simply cannot enter New Orleans against their orders.
- The state Homeland Security Department had requested-- and continues to request--that the American Red Cross not come back into New Orleans following the hurricane. Our presence would keep people from evacuating and encourage others to come into the city.
- The Red Cross does not conduct search and rescue operations. We are an organization of civilian volunteers and cannot get relief aid into any location until the local authorities say it is safe and provide us with security and access.
- The original plan was to evacuate all the residents of New Orleans to safe places outside the city. With the hurricane bearing down, the city government decided to open a shelter of last resort in the Superdome downtown. We applaud this decision and believe it saved a significant

number of lives.

On September 1, the Red Cross offered to Louisiana state officials to enter New Orleans, who rejected the offer due to logistical difficulties. Making the offer the next day to Col. Jay Mayeaux, the deputy director of the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, the Red Cross was asked to wait 24 hours while preparations were made. By the next day, Saturday September 3rd, the National Guard had arrived in the city. The National Guard felt they had adequate supplies and did not need the Red Cross.

Superdome: refuge of last resort

The American Red Cross is often involved in emergency situations, and the term applied to the Superdome, "refuge of last resort", is based on Red Cross shelter standards. It is the minimal type of shelter, defined primarily by not meeting shelter standards:

1. May or may not meet any of the ARC criteria for a shelter and has not been approved for use as a shelter by the ARC.
2. May be located either inside or outside of the Hurricane Risk Area.
3. Physical features required:
 - i. Located outside of the flood zone or ability to locate on floors elevated above flood potential area and hurricane wind resistant structure.

Ticking clock

Despite the Superdome being a

minimal shelter, it was reported there were 26,000 people there. As the Times-Picayune reported on Sunday, August 28, Col. Mayeaux was involved in preparations:

"To help keep them fed and hydrated, the Louisiana National Guard delivered three truckloads of water and seven truckloads of MREs — short for "meals ready to eat." That's enough to supply 15,000 people for three days, according to Col. Jay Mayeaux, deputy director of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Preparedness."

The National Guard delivered enough food for 15,000 people for 3 days, to a place which may have had 26,000 people. The National Guard next reached the Superdome 5 days later.

British Gas announces a hike in energy bills of 14.2%



British Gas logo

One of Britain's largest domestic energy suppliers, British Gas, has announced that it is to raise the price of its gas and electricity prices by a record 14.2%. It blames the price rise on increasing wholesale gas prices, which have gone up by over 50% in the past year, the rising cost of oil & the increasing difficulty in getting gas from the North Sea, a major gas field for the United Kingdom.

250 000 people on low incomes will receive a one-off GBP 60 (USD 110.35 , EUR 88.93) rebate to alleviate this price rise.

This follows increases from other

suppliers including Powergen and EDF Energy, with both having risen their prices by 7 to 12%. Energywatch, Britain's consumer energy watchdog has said domestic gas and electric bills have gone up by 17 and 22% on average respectively in the last 18 months to August.

In 2004, British Gas increased its prices by 5.9% in January and 12.4% in September.

Across the water in Ireland, the Irish government approved a 25% increase on gas prices by the state owned monopoly, Bord Gais.

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Today in History

September 11:

1297: Scots under William Wallace defeated English troops in the Battle of Stirling Bridge.

1922: The British Mandate of Palestine began.

1955: The Bern Switzerland Temple, the first Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Europe, was dedicated.

1973: A military coup in Chile headed by Augusto Pinochet overthrew the government of President Salvador Allende.

2001: September 11 Attacks: Three passenger airliners were hijacked to destroy the World Trade Center in New York City and part of The Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a fourth crashed in Pennsylvania. In total, almost 3,000 people were killed.

Quote of the Day

"I strongly reject any conceptual scheme that places our options on a line, and holds that the only alternative to a pair of extreme positions lies somewhere between them. More fruitful perspectives often require that we step off the line to a site outside the dichotomy." - Stephen Jay Gould

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