

Breaking through the bubble

Hundreds killed in Iran earthquake

A powerful earthquake flattened villages in central Iran on Tuesday, killing at least 420 people. The toll was expected to rise as rescue teams still did not have a final count from the three most isolated villages in the mountainous region. Around 30,000 people were affected, many left homeless when some villages were reduced to piles of dirt and stone by the magnitude-6.4 earthquake. Some 40 villages were damaged in the quake, which struck a region 150 miles from Bam, site of a devastating earthquake in December 2003 that killed 26,000 people and leveled the historic city.

Bush denies U.S. plans to attack Iran

President Bush ridiculed the idea that the United States has plans to attack Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons program. Bush gave assurance to Iran's leaders. Last week, in a series of pre-trip interviews with European journalists, he also tried to dispel talk of a military attack, an issue that has been raised repeatedly since the United States went to war with Iraq primarily over its alleged weapons of mass destruction. On Iran, Bush has walked a careful line in expressing support for a European-led approach offering Iran technological, financial and political support in return for scrapping its uranium enrichment program.

Queen will not attend Prince Charles' wedding

Buckingham Palace reported that Queen Elizabeth II would not attend the civil marriage ceremony of her son Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles — but that her absence was not to be snub. The Queen wants the ceremony to be low key and if she attends it will not be possible, said the palace spokeswoman. She will attend the church blessing at Windsor Castle after the April 8 civil ceremony in the local town hall and will host the wedding reception at the castle.

Volunteers patrol Mexican borders

Nearly 500 volunteers have already joined the Minuteman Project, making themselves civilian border patrol agents determined to stop the immigration flow that routinely, and easily, seeps past federal authorities. They plan to patrol a 40-mile stretch of the southeast Arizona border throughout April when the tide of immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border peaks. Officials said that the Arizona border is the most accessible stretch on the U.S.-Mexico line. Also, recent intelligence show that al-Qaida terrorists are likely to enter the country through the Mexico border. Of the 1.1 million illegal immigrants caught by the U.S. Border Patrol last year, 52 percent crossed into the country at the Arizona border. Officials fear the Minuteman patrols could cause more trouble than they prevent. At least some of the volunteers plan to arm themselves during the 24-hour desert patrols. Many are untrained and have little or no experience in confronting illegal border crossings.

Daily papers are facing too much competition

The newspaper industry is struggling to remake itself. Under competition from cable television, the Internet, all-news radio, they leave little time for the daily paper. Papers are conducting exhaustive surveys to find out what readers want. They are launching new sections, beefing up websites and spinning off free community papers and commuter giveaways in hopes of widening their audience. They are even trying to change the very language of the industry, asking advertisers and investors to dwell less on "circulation" — how many papers are sold — and more on "readership," or the number of people exposed to a paper's journalism wherever it appears, in print, on the Web or over the air. The changes come as circulation totals have eroded steadily for nearly two decades and as newspapers no longer play the central role in daily life they once did.

Teacher shows students how to make a bomb

A high school chemistry teacher was arrested after students claimed he taught his class how to make a bomb. David Pieski used an overhead projector in class to give instructions in making explosives to students at Freedom High School, including advising them to use an electric detonator to stay clear from the blast. In Pieski's classroom in Orlando, authorities found a book labeled "Demo," which includes the chemical breakdown for a powerful explosive. Pieski told investigators he detonated chemicals in a coffee can by a ball field four times for his students as a chemistry project to show them a reaction rate. Pieski was charged with possessing or discharging a destructive device and culpable negligence.

— Compiled by Sarah Moser

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