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The World

Briefing

10 ESSENTIAL STORIES

1. Brazil

What Happened to Flight 447?

On June 3, search teams combing the Atlantic Ocean discovered wreckage from the Air France jet that vanished between Brazil and West Africa two days earlier. The mystery of why the Airbus A330 went down may endure—a lead investigator says that the doomed aircraft's voice and data recorders may never be recovered from the remote ocean floor, more than a mile below. Meteorologists suspect the wide-body jet encountered a band of torrential thunderstorms packing 300 m.p.h. (50 km/h) winds as it flew from Rio de Janeiro to Paris, but the precise cause of the catastrophe remains unknown. All 228 people aboard the airliner are presumed dead, making this the deadliest crash in Air France's history and the world's worst civil aviation disaster since 2001.

2. Afghanistan

Bringing Back Body Counts

Reversing decades of military policy, the U.S. Army has begun regularly releasing statistics on the number of enemy combatants killed in Afghanistan—a figure nearing 2,000 over the past 14 months. The practice of disclosing enemy deaths was abandoned after the Vietnam War, when they were reportedly inflated to project the illusion of victory. U.S. military officials say releasing casualty tallies will help counter insurgent propaganda.

3. Israel

Obama, Unsettled

President Obama's hopes of delivering important Israeli concessions to Arab leaders during his landmark Middle East trip dimmed after Israel demurred on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The administration called for a freeze on new settlement construction, a significant move that could ease tensions with European partners and could win approval from the European Parliament. Israel has responded with new West Bank settlements, although a coalition of U.S. senators has written to the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, expressing deep concern about the rise of settlement activity. The administration has also proposed increased aid to the Palestinian Authority to help alleviate the pressures of the situation.

4. Los Angeles

Stalking the Wii

In a bid to combat Nintendo's Wii—the best-selling game console since 2006—Microsoft and Sony announced major control improvements of their own at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). Sony's new wireless controller is based on a camera, while Microsoft's Project Natal eliminates the controller entirely, using a 3-D system to detect a player's body movements. That's not the only innovation—Microsoft has not yet set a release date.

5. Rome

‘Spicy’ Affair Slays Hot

Ghiggia of Italy Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's wife in early May that he had an affair with a young opera singer, who he later threatened with legal action if he publicized the affair. Beccarini, wife of his finance minister, also threatened to bring legal action. The affair has been a major source of embarrassment for Berlusconi, who has been repeatedly found in compromising situations, including a video of him apparently engaging in a sexual act with an underage girl. The affair has also been a source of concern for the European Parliament, which has voted to investigate the matter.

6. London

Bad News Bears

 Communities Secretary Hazel Blears became the fourth member of Prime Minister Gordon Brown's cabinet to resign in scandal over British taxpayers' lavish expenses that have implicated more than 200 of Parliament's 646 members. The crisis was prompted by a report on Parliamentary standards that revealed widespread misuse of public funds and actions that have eroded the integrity of the House of Commons. The government has established a new body to investigate the expenses, but the scandal has also highlighted the growing public appetite for transparency and accountability.

7. Tehran

Election Showdown

With Iran's presidential election quickly approaching, competition among the four main contenders is heating up. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Moussavi (above) are the current front-runners, but they face off against Mohsen Rezaei, former mayor of Tehran, and conservative Mohsen Rezaei. On June 3, during a televised presidential debate, reformist candidate Moussavi accused a government official of spreading lies about the election, and Ahmadinejad denied any contact between related officials. Moussavi later claimed that the government had threatened him with violence, but Ahmadinejad denied any interference. The election is considered crucial for Iran's future, with the winner expected to have a significant influence on the country's domestic and international policies.

8. South Africa

Underground Tragedy

The bodies of all 49 illegal miners were discovered in an abandoned coal mine near South Africa's Harmony Mining, the world's third largest gold producer. The incident, one of the worst in the nation's history, highlighted the growing problem faced by unauthorized mining operations, which are exploiting thousands of miles of abandoned tunnels and high unemployment rates and spiraling gold prices.

9. Washington

Putting the Emergency Back in Emergency Room

According to a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, wait times in ERs across the nation are at worrying lengths. Largely because of overcrowding, patients can languish twice as long as recommended by medical associations; those in need of the fastest attention may wait nearly an hour or more. The report highlights the need for improved emergency care, including better resource allocation and more effective use of hospital beds.

10. Minnesota

The Eternal Senate-Seat Battle

More than 50 days after voters went to the polls, Minnesota has yet to seat its junior U.S. Senator. On June 3, the state's Supreme Court heard arguments on the unconstitutionality of absentee-voting regulations, which the incumbent candidate, Republican Norm Coleman, contends were inconsistently applied and would therefore invalidate a lower court ruling that Democrat Al Franken won the race by a margin of just 325 votes. The court is expected to rule on the issue within weeks. Franken's admission to the Senate would give Democrats a 60-vote majority, which would enable them to override Republican filibusters.

Numbers:

| Percentage of Americans who believe torture is justified to prevent terrorist attacks | According to a recent survey, 52% of Americans believe torture is justified to prevent terrorist attacks. | 83% increase in the amount of time Americans spent on social networking sites in April compared with the same month in 2009. |

[2.3] Estimated years of life lost now says the earth will remain habitable before the sun fries—is—about 2.3 billion years longer than previously thought. [19,273] Number of avian flu cases confirmed by the World Health Organization, which announced it is close to declaring the virus a pandemic.