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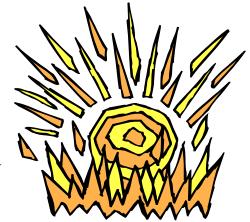
SUN STORM TO HIT WITH 'FORCE OF 100M BOMBS'

August 26, 2010 News.com.au reported: "AFTER 10 years of comparative slumber, the sun is waking up - and it's got astronomers on full alert. This week several US media outlets reported that NASA was warning the massive flare that caused spectacular light shows on Earth earlier this month was just a precursor to a massive solar storm building that had the potential to wipe out the entire planet's power grid.

NASA has since rebutted those reports, saying it could come "100 years away or just 100 days", but an Australian astronomer says the space community is betting on the sooner scenario rather than the latter.

Despite its rebuttal, NASA's been watching out for this storm since 2006 and reports from the US this week claim the storms could hit on that most Hollywood of disaster dates – 2012. Similar storms back in 1859 and 1921 cause worldwide chaos, wiping out telegraph wires on a massive scale.

The 2012 storm has the potential to be even more disruptive. "The general consensus among general astronomers (and certainly solar astronomers) is that this coming Solar maximum (2012 but possibly later into 2013) will be the most violent in 100 years," astronomy lecturer and columnist Dave Reneke said.



"A bold statement and one taken seriously by those it will affect most, namely airline companies, communications companies and anyone working with modern GPS systems.

"They can even trip circuit breakers and knock out orbiting satellites, as has already been done this year."...

They claim satellites will be aged by 50 years, rendering GPS even more useless than ever, and the blast will have the equivalent energy of 100 million hydrogen bombs."..."

FRANCE INVITES HANDFUL OF MINISTERS TO 'IMMIGRATION' SUMMIT

August 24, 2010 EU Observer reported: "Paris has invited a handful of member states to an 'immigration' summit next month, amid strong controversy stirred by its high-profile deportation of scores of Roma back to Romania and Bulgaria.

The meeting is to take place in Paris on 6 September and is supposed to deal with the "general topic of immigration", EUobserver has learned. The list of invitees includes interior ministers from Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Greece. The Canadians have also been invited, while the Belgian EU presidency was added to the list as an afterthought.

But the list is notable for who is not on it. Neither Romania or Bulgaria have been invited - the destination for Roma currently being deported from France."...Poland, a large member state normally makes up part of a so-called G6 group of interior ministers who meet to discuss justice and home affairs issues, has also not received an invitation.

The meeting has no formal agenda, just the broad topic of 'immigration', however it is likely to attract high amount of media attention after being publicised by Italy's interior minister Roberto Maroni."..."

OIL-EATING MICROBES CHEWING THROUGH SPILL

August 25, 2010 Los Angeles Times reported: As efforts continue to clean the oil that gushed from the blown-out Deepwater Horizon well in the Gulf of Mexico, a team of scientists has found that nature's microbial helpers are hard at work, too— and doing a better job than researchers had expected.

Data collected in May and June showed populations of carbon-eating bacteria were spiking in parts of a plume of oil drifting in deep water in the Gulf, said lead author Terry Hazen, head of Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory's ecology department.

"Within the last few weeks we've gone back and can find bacteria—but do not see detectable oil." Hazen said. The most likely reason, he added, is that the voracious bugs ate it.

The study, published online Tuesday in the Journal Science, examined the deep-sea plume of oil 3,600 feet below the surface and up to 6 miles from the leaking wellhead. The scientists scooped seawater from different points within the plume as well as outside of it, freezing some samples and leaving others alive.

They assessed the mass of bacteria in their samples several ways: by counting cells under microscopes measuring how much oxygen was depleted from the water, a sign of active microbial life; and by measuring chemicals called phospholipids (which are found in bacterial cell membranes).

The researchers also used DNA analysis to identify the types of bacteria they found. Bacterial populations were low outside the plume, Hazen said, but were 100 times denser in oily areas.

Within those prospering colonies, the bacteria that dominated were bugs that had genes for consuming oil. The DNA of one particular carbon-eater—closely related to a group of bacteria called Oceanospirillales—made up just 5 percent of the bugs found in a control sample of unpolluted seawater, but more than 90 percent of the plume-dwelling populations."

S. KOREA PLEDGES TOUGH RETALIATION AGAINST N. KOREA

August 24, 2010 SpaceDaily.com reported: "South Korea vowed Tuesday to retaliate immediately under a new military directive if North Korea fires across the disputed sea border, as China sought to defuse tensions on the peninsula.

The South's Defence Minister Kim Tae-Young said that troops had been ordered to launch a powerful counter-attack if North Korea were to fire shells into Seoul-controlled waters. Previous guidelines required South Korean troops to issue warnings three times before opening fire. The order was in line with new combat policy for South Korean troops guarding the volatile sea border, Kim told a parliamentary defence committee.

The North fired an artillery barrage into disputed inter-Korean waters in the Yellow Sea on August 9. Military officials said most of the shells landed on the northern side of the borderline, but some fell on the southern side. South Korea did not fire back.

Tensions have run high between the two since Seoul accused Pyongyang of torpedoing a South Korean corvette in March with the loss of 46 sailors. North Korea vehemently denies involvement.

The South has been carrying out a series of military exercises, jointly with the United States or alone, as a show of force against the North. News reports in South Korea say the country has been practising a new war plan during the current Ulchi Freedom Guardian (UFG) exercise that envisions occupying and stabilising its impoverished communist neighbour.

The August 16-26 UFG exercise involves 56,000 South Korean and 30,000 US troops, as well as an unspecified number of American soldiers based in the United States who link up by computer."..."

Top Chinese nuclear envoy Wu Dawei will visit Seoul on Thursday after making a trip to Pyongyang last week for discussions on how to resume talks on dismantling the North's nuclear programme.

The North quit six-party talks, also involving South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan, in April 2009 in protest at UN condemnation of an apparent long-range missile test."..."

MEXICO: BLEEDING TO DEATH IN THE WAR ON DRUGS

August 26, 2010 Independent.co.uk reported: "The shootout left four people dead, but that was just the beginning. As dust began to settle on a ranch in north-eastern Mexico, thought to have been owned by one of the world's most powerful drug cartels, the battle-hardened Marines stumbled upon their first decomposing corpse.

Minutes later, they found a second, then a third. By the time troops had finished searching the remote property, roughly 90 miles from the US border, a total of 72 contorted bodies had been laid out in rows beneath the summer sunshine. The 54 men and 18 women had all been recently murdered.

A lone wounded survivor, who was left for dead but later stumbled upon a military checkpoint, told local newspapers yesterday that he and the victims were illegal migrants from Central America trying to make their way to the US. They had been taken hostage by the Zetas, a gang of drug-runners who have recently taken to kidnapping and human trafficking. The Ecuadorian man said his group was taken to a ranch by gunmen and shot after they refused to pay ransoms."



The discovery on Tuesday afternoon marked a new low in a brutal conflict that has taken the lives of an estimated 28,000 Mexicans since the President, Felipe Calderon, declared "war" on the nation's wealthy and extraordinarily well-armed drug cartels in 2007."..."

They provide stark reminders of the growing cheapness of life in a conflict that is constantly plumbing new depths of barbarity."..."

IRAN HAS MATERIAL FOR 1-2 ATOM BOMBS: EX-IAEA AIDE

August 26, 2010 Reuters reported: "In unusual public remarks about Iran's disputed nuclear program Olli Heinonen, the former chief of U.N. nuclear inspections worldwide, told Le Monde newspaper that Iran's uranium reserve still represented a "threat."

Until he stepped down... this month for personal reasons, Heinonen was deputy director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency and head of its nuclear safeguards department, which verifies that countries' nuclear programs are not being diverted for military use.

A no-nonsense Finn, he was one of the U.N. agency's leading experts on Iran, which denies Western suspicions that its nuclear program is aimed at making bombs despite intelligence indications to the contrary, which he investigated for years.

In the interview published on Thursday, Heinonen said the Islamic Republic now possessed three tonnes of low-enriched uranium, material which can be used to fuel nuclear power plants, or form the core of a bomb if refined much further.

"In theory, it is enough to make one or two nuclear arms. But to reach the final step, when one only has just enough material for two weapons, does not make sense," Heinonen said in the interview carried out just before he left office.

In comments translated from English to French, he suggested this was not sufficient to constitute a serious bargaining chip in any negotiations with the United States, the Islamic Republic's old adversary."..."