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According to a senior administration official, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has come to the conclusion there is a growing likelihood Israel could attack Iran sometime this spring in an effort to destroy its suspected nuclear weapons program. Panetta's views were first reported by the Washington Post's David Ignatius, who wrote Panetta "believes there is strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June - before Iran enters what Israelis described as a 'zone of immunity' to commence building a nuclear bomb." Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned Thursday that Iran may be close to the point "which may render any physical strike as impractical."

* The Australian Maritime Safety Authority reports that rescuers plucked more than 230 survivors from the sea after a passenger ship sank off the east coast of Papua New Guinea today. The ferry company says that there were about 350 aboard the boat when it sank. The Rabaul Queen was ferrying passengers from the town of Kimbe on New Britain Island to Lae when it got into difficulty.

* At least 11,000 villagers have been trapped by heavy snow and blizzards in Serbia's mountains, authorities announced Thursday, as the death toll from Eastern Europe's weeklong deep freeze rose to 122. Those stranded live in some 6,500 homes in remote areas that cannot be reach due to icy, snow-clogged roads. Thursday, emergency crews were pressing hard to try to clear the snow and deliver supplies.

* Pakistan's Supreme Court has summoned Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani to appear February 13 to be charged with contempt of court. The move raises the stakes in a long-running battle over the court's demand that the prime minister investigate President Asif Ali Zardari, among others, for suspected corruption. Gilani has refused, saying the head of state is immune from prosecution. The corruption cases stem from money-laundering charges against Zardari and his late wife, the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. A Swiss court convicted them in absentia in 2003 of laundering millions of dollars.

* Police are investigating alleged email interception by Rupert Murdoch's Times of London, dragging Britain's oldest national newspaper into the broadening scandal over press wrongdoing. Labour Party legislator Tom Watson, who helped lift the lid on tabloid phone hacking, released a letter from police confirming they were investigating alleged email hacking by The Times. Police are holding parallel inquiries into phone hacking, police bribery and claims of computer hacking by Murdoch papers, all of them triggered by the revelation that the now-defunct News of the World tabloid routinely listened to phone voice mails in its quest for stories.

* The coroner who conducted the inquest into the death of Amy Winehouse has resigned after officials discovered that she had not been a registered lawyer in the United Kingdom for the required five years, raising the possibility that the case could be reopened. Greenaway had ruled in October that Winehouse, who was found dead on July 23rd, died of accidental alcohol poisoning. Winehouse's family said they are consulting with attorneys and have not yet decided whether to pursue a new inquest.

* The US Senate overwhelmingly approved a bill Thursday that makes clear it's illegal for members of Congress, their staffs and many executive-branch employees to trade stocks and other securities based on inside information learned on the job.

* Donald Trump endorsed Mitt Romney for president Thursday. It is unclear whether Trump's decision will have any impact on the Republican race.

NATIONAL NEWS

An Edmonton family of four, including two young children, was killed in a car crash near Barriere, B.C. on Wednesday night. The family, who have not been named, was travelling to California on Highway 5, north of Kamloops when icy conditions caused their SUV to cross the centre line, into the path of an oncoming truck.

* The city of Edmonton and the regional airport authority have signed an agreement that will allow city taxis to pick-up, as well as drop fares at Edmonton International Airport. Under the new deal, the airports authority will only sign contracts with Edmonton-based cab companies. For the past five years, Leduc-based Airport Taxi held the exclusive right to pick up passengers at the airport.

* Stephanie Beckley, 27, convicted in the impaired driving death of a University of Alberta pharmacy student last year was sentenced to three years in jail and prohibited from driving for five years. Laura Chee, 23, was a passenger in a Honda Civic that was t-boned by a Jeep that ran a yellow light at 178th St. and 76th Ave. on Feb. 21, 2011

* Police in Ontario have arrested 60 men — including a daycare worker — and charged them with hundreds of child pornography offences. Initially police have laid 213 charges for possessing, making, distributing and accessing child porn. They say there could be more charges as their investigation continues. Police said those taken into custody were found after police uncovered IP addresses linked to child pornography.

* Vancouver billionaire David Ho has been sentenced to one year's probation after pleading guilty to charges of unlawful confinement on Thursday. The charges stem from an incident in 2008, when Ho called a chat line looking for a date. He picked a woman in her mid-20s and brought her back to his Shaughnessy mansion, but after the pair had sex, Ho refused to let her leave. The woman scaled a 2.4-metre fence breaking her ankle as she tried to escape the property.

* The TSX gained 35 points Thursday to 12,553. The loonie closed at USD$1.001 while March oil gained 40-cents to USD$96.76 a barrel.

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BEEF BREAK

Bob Barker does make some excellent points about animal cruelty, but before singling out first the Edmonton Zoo and then the Calgary Stampede, he should ensure that the Price is Right respects human rights as well. How much of the merchandise given away on the Price is Right is manufactured in countries that use child labour and subjugate women? How many trips are given away to countries that do the same? Guess that cleaning up his own backyard's too hard so he'll pick on a couple of Canadian cities.
Comments: beefbreak@bellyellow.com

On This Day in History

1916 - Ottawa Ontario - Fire destroys the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings, killing seven. The gothic Parliamentary Library is saved by a quick thinking clerk, who closes the iron doors. The tragedy is widely blamed on German wartime saboteurs. The building, containing the Commons and Senate, will be rebuilt in the Gothic revival style, and completed in 1920.

Today's Pop Quiz: Who's rhe Roman goddess of love?
Yesterday's Quiz:
What fraternal order is the IOOF?
A. International Order of Foresters

Weather
Today: sunny, H 5
Tomorrow: sunny, H 1

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