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## SIDELIGHTS



American cluster balloonist Jonathan Trappe is questioned by French police officers after landing on farmland in Moeres, France, on Friday. (AP)

### Man crosses Channel on helium balloons

■ LONDON: In a goofy yet mesmerizing stunt, an American adventurer has crossed the English Channel tied to a bundle of helium balloons. Jonathan Trappe was strapped in a seat below a bright cluster of balloons when he lifted off early Friday from Kent, in southeast England. After sailing above the water for several hours, Trappe lowered himself into a French field by cutting away some of his colorful collection. Trappe told Sky News that the crossing fulfilled a lifelong dream and that it was an "exceptional" experience. The crossing is reminiscent of the animated film "Up." In the movie, an elderly man whose wife had died attached hundreds of colored balloons to his house to fly away for an adventure — although in his case he traveled to South America.

### 'Jungle woman' runs away from home

■ PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: A woman dubbed the "jungle woman" after emerging naked and unable to speak from the wilds of northeastern Cambodia three years ago has apparently fled back to the forest, her presumed father and police said Friday. Sal Lou, who claims to be the father of Rochom P'ngeng, said she went missing Tuesday while bathing by a well behind their home in Rattanakiri province, nearly 600 kilometers northeast of Phnom Penh. She is thought to be 29 years old. "There is no sign indicating that her disappearance could be foul play. I am sure she went back to the forest," Sal Lou said by phone from the jungle area where he has been searching for her. Rochom P'ngeng emerged from the jungle in early 2007, attracting attention when she was caught trying to steal food from a villager. Sal Lou's family then said she was their daughter, who was 8 when she disappeared in 1988 while herding buffalo in a remote area. However, the relationship was never proven, and it was not established how she could have survived in the wild for 19 years. Some villagers suspected she was not Rochom P'ngeng, but someone else suffering from mental problems who had been lost in the jungle for a much briefer time.

### Air NZ plans to 'let u text, e-mail n fly'

■ AUCKLAND: Air New Zealand is planning to let some passengers send text messages and emails mid-flight by the end of the year but fellow travelers need not worry — phone calls will not be allowed. New Zealand's national carrier said it expects to let people send and receive text messages and emails on their iPhones, BlackBerries and GSM mobiles on its new 777-300 aircrafts by November. The new service will also enable customers to use their Netbooks or laptops in conjunction with their mobile broadband connection to access the Internet. The airline said the new mobile text and data service is being introduced after feedback from passengers who want to stay connected on long-haul flights but it is subject to regulatory approval. However based on customer feedback, Air New Zealand said it did not currently plan to enable voice calls onboard. "Customers onboard our new Boeing 777-300 aircraft will be able to use their own GSM/GPRS devices safely when the system is activated during the cruise stage of flight," airline spokesman Ed Sims said in a statement. "Passengers will also be requested to keep their phones on 'silent mode.'" Sims said passengers will be billed by their own mobile service, like any other global roaming plan, but standard in-flight roaming costs will apply.

### Kitten survives washing ordeal

■ SYDNEY: A Persian kitten gave her owners the shock of their lives when she emerged from the washing machine, dizzy and bedraggled after surviving a full cycle. Brendon Rogers, from Manly Vale, Sydney, said four-month-old Kimba, a white, fluffy kitten, must have climbed into the front-loader machine when the door was open and curled up on the dirty clothes — unbeknownst to his father Lyndsay who turned the machine on for a cold wash. They were both amazed when the cycle — including a high level spin — finished and they opened the door to pull out the clothes to find Kimba in the machine. "We could hardly believe our eyes when she emerged, looking like a drowned rat," he told Reuters. Although Kimba was alive she clearly needed help so they rushed her to the vet where she was put on an intravenous drip and treated for shock and hypothermia. Her eyes were also badly affected by the detergent and needed treatment. "It is just amazing that she survived but we reckon she's used all of her nine lives," said Rogers.

— Compiled from agencies

## Thousands queue in iPad mania

CAROLE LANDRY | AFP

PARIS: Thousands of die-hard Apple fans mobbed shops in parts of Europe and Asia on Friday after the iPad, touted as a revolution in personal computing, began its global launch.

Long queues of customers snaked outside Apple shops in Australia and Japan hours before the opening and similar huddled masses of gadget lovers turned out at stores in six European countries including Britain and France.

The iPad — a flat, 10-inch (25-centimeter) black tablet — was also going on sale in Canada as part of a global roll-out that was pushed back by a month due to huge demand in the United States.

One million iPads were sold in 28 days after the product's US debut in early April, forcing the firm to delay its foreign launch.

At Apple's flagship store in Paris, set in the prestigious underground mall of the Louvre museum, 24-year-old engineer Audrey Sobgou beamed as she walked away with one of the prized tablets.

Sobgou traveled 205 kilometers (127 miles) from her home town in Lille, northern France, and waited nearly two hours before stepping inside the busy Apple store to make her purchase.

"I'm not a victim of hype," she insisted. "I know Apple products and it's about the quality, the interface,

how it's designed and what it can do. With elegance and style." Hundreds of people had already queued outside of the Paris Apple store hours before it opened at 8:00 a.m. (0600 GMT) and the launch made the frontpage of major newspapers.

The freesheet Metro daily in Paris showed a full-page picture of the tablet under the polemical question "iPad: gadget or revolution?"

About 40 enthusiasts were already waiting outside the flagship Apple store in central London, at 3:00 a.m.

(0200 GMT) Friday to get their hands on the iPad when the store opened at 8:00 a.m.

Most of them were sitting on deck chairs and some were wrapped in sleeping bags and blankets.

Staff escorted the first group of customers one by one up to buy their iPad after they opened the doors, whooping, chanting and cheering.

"I queued overnight for about 20 hours since midday yesterday but it was very, very worth it," Jake Lee, a 17-year-old student from Essex, told AFP, clutching his treasured iPad.

"I wanted the iPad since it was announced, I'm just really excited about it," he told AFP.

The iPad also went on sale in Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland and will be followed in July by a launch in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

About 50 people waited under a driving rain in Frankfurt outside the Apple store while 19-year-old student



Japanese actress Lena Fujii gives the first customer, Kazuki Miura, an iPad as they start to go on sale at the shop of Japanese Internet service provider Softbank, Apple's exclusive partner in Japan, in Tokyo on Friday. (AFP)

Claudio Roccario was among some one hundred customers waiting to buy his iPad in Milan.

"I wanted to be among the first," he said, echoing the sentiment of most die-hard Apple fans who turned out for the first day of the launch.

Many Apple aficionados in Zurich camped out overnight in front of the store to be among the first to buy the tablet and download some of the 5,000 available apps.

Prices in Japan and Australia for the basic 16GB iPad are comparable to US prices, once sales tax is includ-

ed, although a significant markup by Apple in Britain and continental Europe has triggered some grumbling.

In France, wifi models sell for between 499 and 699 euros (620 and 969 dollars) with the 3G models going for between 599 and 799 euros.

The multi-functional device is tipped by some pundits to revitalize media and publishing, with many major newspapers and broadcasters launching applications.

Newspaper mogul Rupert Murdoch

has said the iPad has the potential to save the newspaper industry but in France, that enthusiasm is not shared by President Nicolas Sarkozy's minister for the digital economy.

Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet last month dismissed the "marketing frenzy" surrounding the iPad launch and declared that it was "a bit heavy" compared to the Archos tablet, made in France. Other than the five other European countries, California-based Apple plans to bring the iPad to Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand and Singapore in July.

## NEWSMAKERS

### Simon Cowell feels the love on 'Idol' send-off

■ LOS ANGELES: Paula Abdul sat on his lap, and his best insults were turned into a song as a softer Simon Cowell took center stage on Wednesday in his last appearance as a judge on "American Idol".

The British music executive may have become a household name in the United States by trashing wannabe singers, but his send-off on Wednesday was a love fest.

The season finale was scattered with video clips of memorable Cowell faces, humorous tributes from fellow judges and a song that strung his most famous one-liners together. Ex-judge Abdul teased Cowell about his haircut and recalled a love-hate relationship on screen that she said made them "America's most dysfunctional family" before she quit the show last year. "When everyone asks who's going to replace me, who's going to be the next judge, the truth is, you guys are the judge of this show," Cowell said, indicating the

viewers and voters. Cowell is leaving "Idol" to bring a version of his British talent show "The X Factor" to the United States next year, leaving producers to find a replacement for him on the top-rated Fox singing show.

### Actor Gary Coleman 'critical' in Utah hospital

■ LOS ANGELES: Former "Diff'rent Strokes" child star Gary Coleman was listed in "critical condition" in a Utah hospital on Thursday after reportedly injuring his head.

A spokeswoman for Utah Valley Regional Medical Center in Provo declined to reveal anything beyond his condition, but said his family could release more information on Friday.

Coleman, 42, was hospitalized on Wednesday, after suffering what his brother-in-law told TMZ.com was a head injury after a fall. A spokesman for Coleman did not reply to an e-mail seeking comment.

Coleman, who lives in the nearby town of Santaquin, has already been to the hospital twice this year for seizure-related maladies. He also spent the night behind bars in January after being arrested at his home on domestic violence charges.

### Adviser to NYC celebrities charged with fraud

■ NEW YORK: Prosecutors on Thursday charged a financial adviser who has worked for Wesley Snipes, Sylvester Stallone and Martin Scorsese with stealing \$30 million from clients and accused a former city council president of lying about his own finances during the probe.

Kenneth Starr, 66, was ordered held without bail on charges of wire fraud, investment adviser fraud and money laundering after a prosecutor said Starr hid behind coats in a closet at his home when agents came to arrest him, forcing them to yank him out by the collar.

US Attorney Preet Bharara said at a news conference that Starr stole money in a Ponzi-like scheme from January 2008 through April after gaining the trust of wealthy and influential clients and sometimes controlling their finances.

"He made it a point to seem like it was a very exclusive thing, creating a mystique about what it means to be a client of Mr. Starr," Bharara said.

There's no indication Snipes, Scorsese or Stallone were victims. An IRS criminal complaint said cheated clients included a former hedge fund manager and well-known philanthropist, an actress who was a longtime friend of Starr's, a former talent agency executive and his wife, an heiress and a prominent jeweler with a flagship Manhattan store. They were not identified by name.

### Ben Kingsley gets star in Hollywood Walk of Fame

■ LOS ANGELES: British Oscar-winning actor Ben Kingsley got his star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame Thursday, a milestone in his long acting career he said he never suspected of achieving.

"Dear friends, standing here today amongst you is one of the many things I thought would never happen to me," Kingsley, 66, said at the unveiling ceremony attended by his wife, fellow actor Bruce Willis and around 100 admirers.

The unveiling of the 2,410th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame came on the eve of the release of Kingsley's latest film, "Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time," based on the video game of the same name. Kingsley plays the evil nobleman Nizam in the film.

The four-time Oscar nominee clinched Hollywood's top award in 1983 for his riveting, internationally acclaimed performance in "Gandhi." He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2002.

— Compiled from agencies



Miss USA Rima Fakih poses on the field with a bat and wearing a New York Mets jersey before the Mets baseball game against the Philadelphia Phillies at Citi Field in New York, on Thursday. (AP)