

FACES AND PLACES

Stephen Hawking

British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, 67, recently was hospitalized and said to be “very ill” and undergoing tests. Sources close to him said he had been fighting a chest infection for several weeks. Days later he was said to be on the “road to recovery.” Hawking gained worldwide renown for his work on black holes and the origins of the universe, despite being paralyzed by the incurable degenerative disorder known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. Hawking wrote a best-selling book in 1988, “A Brief History of Time.” Hawking, who was diagnosed with the disease that is also known as ALS when he was only 21, communicates through an electronic voice synthesizer activated by his fingers.

Have you read Hawking’s book? What else do you know about him?

John Madden

After three decades as an NFL television analyst and broadcaster, John Madden has announced he is stepping down. He became a staple of TV football after coaching the Oakland Raiders for 10 years, during which he led the team to a Super Bowl win and landed in the Hall of Fame. Madden, 73, is widely credited with helping pro football gain the enormous popularity and money-making ability it reached in recent decades. “He changed football,” said longtime NFL broadcaster and executive Matt Millen. “He made it bigger than probably even he ever thought it could be,” he said, adding that Madden has been “the face of the NFL” and “the voice of the NFL.” Madden won 16 Emmy Awards and gained a huge following because of his ability to make viewers understand games as well as enjoy them. He was known for his offbeat style and his sound effects, such as “Boom!” or “Doink!”

Will you miss John Madden?



Iran

The case of an Iranian-American journalist who is being held in an Iranian prison is causing some complications in the move to repair relations between the U.S. and Iranian governments. Roxana Saberi is the daughter of Iranian parents and grew up in Fargo, North Dakota. A former beauty pageant contestant, Saberi was convicted of spying for the United States by an Iranian court earlier this month after a one-day trial behind closed doors. She was sentenced to eight years in prison. Saberi, who had worked for NPR, the BBC and several American broadcasters, was arrested three months ago for buying a bottle of wine, which is illegal in Iran. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for fair treatment for Saberi and said she should have the legal right to defend herself. **Have you heard more about this case? Do you think Saberi will eventually be released?**

Washington, D.C.

On April 27th and 28th, President Obama will host representatives of the world’s 16 major economies and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon at the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate. The meeting will focus on increasing clean energy sources and cutting greenhouse gas emissions. The goal of the meeting is to work out some issues before a much more important summit, a U.N. meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark in December. At the December meeting, leaders hope to forge a new pact to replace the Kyoto Protocol on cutting greenhouse gases, which former President Bush had refused to sign. “Our goal is to use this forum very much as a key part in how we reach an overall agreement,” said a White House official, calling the April talks “an important piece of the puzzle of how we get from here to Copenhagen.” **What do you think might be accomplished at this meeting?**