



Top Stories

Major fire breaks out at Istanbul airport

A major blaze has broken out in Turkey's Ataturk International Airport, causing all flight-operations to be suspended. Large-scale fire-fighting operations are underway.

Indo-Pakistan talks on Siachen end in deadlock

Talks between the two countries regarding the demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier fail, as Pakistan refuses to validate its current positions on a map

Featured story

British sailor resumes around-the-world voyage after stop in Hawaii

British sailor Adrian Flanagan, seeking to become the first person to single-handedly circumnavigate the globe in a north-south direction, set sail from Honolulu on May 17 after a nine-day stop for supplies and repairs to his boat. Flanagan had spent his stay as a guest of the Waikiki Yacht Club, which arranged for emergency repairs to his boat.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Scientists confirm the theory that the HIV virus originated among wild chimpanzees in Cameroon.
- Human Rights Watch discovers that on April 12 and April 13, 2006, Sudanese soldiers and

Wikipedia Current Events

Chadian rebels massacred 118 civilians in the city of Djawara with machete and then buried them in mass graves. If the allegations are true, then the Sudanese government has sponsored genocide in Chad, and it has violated the Tripoli Accord.

•Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issues an ultimatum to Hamas, giving the group 10 days to recognise Israel or have the question put to the people in the form of a plebiscite.(CNN.com)

•Former Enron executives Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling are found criminally guilty for their role in the demise of the now-defunct energy-trading firm.

Appeals Court asked for quick decision in California High School Exit Exam case

Lawyers for students who sued to stop the use of the California High School Exit Exam today filed a request for an expedited hearing of their case in appellate court, hoping to have the test set aside in time for graduation.

"It would be tragic if students were deprived of the once in a lifetime opportunity to graduate with their classmates due to scheduling issues in this matter," according to the text of the appeal filed in Division Four of the First Appellate District.

Today's filing fulfills a promise made by lead attorney Arturo Gonzalez yesterday after the State

Supreme Court issued a stay of an Alameda County Superior Court judge's order that the test not be used to determine graduation. "Our clients are disappointed in today's 4-3 split decision of the California Supreme Court. However, this fight is not over," Gonzalez said, " We intend to seek immediate relief in the court of appeals in San Francisco. We are hopeful that oral argument can be scheduled in time to obtain an order that would allow the Class of 2006 to graduate."

On May 12, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Robert Freedman decided that the test was unfair and unconstitutional and issued an injunction against the use of the test. The following week, attorneys for State Superintendent of Schools Jack O'Connell, author and avid supporter of the law requiring the test, appealed Freedman's decision directly to the State Supreme Court, asking the court to stay the effect of the injunction immediately and to over rule it. Yesterday, the court issued the stay, but send the state's appeal down to the appellate court.

"Yesterday, the Supreme Court noted that it was "not persuaded" that the injunction was the appropriate remedy," according to the papers filed in court today. "It stayed the injunction and remanded the case to this Court with instructions to "establish a schedule for expedited briefing and argument."

"Plaintiffs respectfully submit that, if the schedule established by this Court does not allow for a decision on the remedy issued by the trial court before the bulk of high school graduations have taken place, then that schedule cannot be considered to be expedited," according to the filing, "There is only one issue that needs to be decided by this Court prior to the pending high school graduations — whether, assuming Plaintiffs prevail on their constitutional claims, the injunction granted by the trial court was an appropriate remedy."

In the filing, lawyers for Liliana Valenzuela, et al, who sued in February to have the test set aside so she and the other students involved in the case could graduate, remind the appellate court that the State Supreme Court needed only a few days to reach its decision.

"With the majority of graduations occurring in early June, Plaintiffs respectfully submit that it is a reasonable interpretation of the Supreme Court's Order to set a hearing for this matter next week," lawyers wrote in the filing. Cynthia O'Brien, who oversees testing at James Logan High School in Union City, expressed some exasperation over the on-again, off-again situation regarding the test. "What is happening at this time with the emotional lives of students who are in limbo is not reasonable or in their best interest" she said. "Although the exam's intention is to create a better education environment for students (my words), it is now more about politics than the students."

However, she's not opposed to the test itself. "I believe that the intent of minimum proficiencies is

in the right direction. We do a disservice to students who are not prepared to compete in their adult world," she told the James Logan Courier, " I do believe that the State needs to study real alternate paths that could be pursued, such as using proficiency on STAR, a senior project demonstrating both math and English proficiency or some other pathway."

Zogby poll finds 70% want new 9/11 investigation

Seventy percent of adults surveyed in a Zogby poll, think that the September 11, 2001 attacks should be investigated anew. Poll results indicate that 42% believe there has indeed been a cover up (with 10% unsure) and 45% think "Congress or an International Tribunal should re-investigate the attacks, including whether any US government officials consciously allowed or helped facilitate their success" (with 8% unsure).

These are figures from a nationwide telephone survey of 1200 individuals conducted by Zogby International from Friday, May 12 through Tuesday, May 16, 2006. The results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 2.9.

The poll was commissioned by 911truth.org, a coalition of researchers, journalists and victim family members.

The results of this Zogby poll were released last Monday (22 May), but were mainly ignored by the mass media.

An earlier Zogby poll (2004) showed nearly half of New Yorkers believed certain U.S. officials "consciously" allowed the attacks to happen.

Taylor Hicks crowned American Idol winner

Taylor Hicks the 29-year-old Birmingham, Alabama, native was crowned the fifth season winner of American Idol. He brought in 63.4 million votes after Tuesday night's two-hour performance show.

The finale was broadcast on Fox and CTV, from the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.

Hicks got a recording contract with the RCA Music Group as his prize. His first single is called "Do I Make You Proud" written by Tracy Ackerman, Andrew Watkins and Paul Wilson.

Hicks is expected to release an album in the upcoming months.

Family narrowly escapes fiery death in Christchurch, New Zealand

A family visiting Christchurch, New Zealand from Australia was minutes away from being burnt to death.

They were staying in the Meadow Park Holiday Park, Papanui.

The fire started about 3 a.m. NZST and Station officer Paul Rodwell said, "From the description, they were a few minutes away from perishing."

New Zealand-born Elaine Puku is on life support in Christchurch Hospital's intensive-care unit after receiving internal and external second-degree burns while trying to rescue her children.

Other family members - Malcolm Puku, 47, and sons Jeremy, 17, Matthew, 13, and Jordan, 10 - were also in the fire, but escaped grievous injury. They are currently recovering from minor cuts and smoke inhalation.

"I opened up the door into the lounge and the room was like a big volcano, so red and bright and yellow, and all this billowing black smoke," Malcolm Puku said.

There were no smoke alarms in the unit.

"It doesn't have any fire-protection smoke alarms because it's an old place," Rodwell said.

Fire safety officer Graham Davies said that the accommodation is exempt since it was built before fire detectors became compulsory.

The motel is now under investigation by the Fire Service.

Enron executives Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling found guilty

Former Enron Corp. CEOs Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling were found guilty of conspiracy to commit securities fraud in the collapse of the former energy giant Thursday morning. Lay was convicted of all six counts against him, while Skilling was convicted of nineteen of the twenty-eight charges against him and acquitted of the other nine. Both men now face many years in prison.

Outside the courtroom, Skilling continued to proclaim his innocence. "Obviously, I'm disappointed, but that's the way the system works," Skilling said after the verdict. He is expected to appeal. Lay did not immediately speak to reporters outside the courtroom.

The verdict was reached on the sixth day of deliberations after a four-month-long trial and brings to a close the first of the wave of accounting scandals earlier in the decade. The verdict also

represents another major victory for the government, which has successfully prosecuted a number of high-profile executives involved in accounting scandals, as well as obtained sixteen guilty pleas from former Enron executives.

Sentencing has been set for September 11, 2006. U.S. District Judge Sim Lake ordered Lay to post a \$5 million bond and surrender his passport before leaving the courtroom.

Australian Government under pressure to reveal nuclear sites

The Australian Labor Party has placed pressure on the federal government to reveal potential sites for nuclear power plants. The pressure comes after the release of a report by The Australia Institute, which identified several locations on the East Coast of Australia as "ideal" nuclear power sites.

Speaking in the Australian House of Representatives on Wednesday, opposition leader Kim Beazley (Brand, Labor) asked Australian treasurer and acting Prime Minister Peter Costello (Higgins, Liberal) to name potential nuclear sites.

"As part of the government's intention to consider nuclear power in Australia, will it nominate the proposed sites of its nuclear reactors and their associated high-level nuclear waste dumps?" Mr Beazley asked.

Mr Costello replied by attacking Labor's policy on limiting Australia to three uranium mines, supporting uranium exports while being opposed to an Australian nuclear energy industry. Mr Costello said "It would be a funny kind of a policy if Australia was

prepared to mine uranium and to sell it to other countries but was so opposed to the nuclear industry".

Labor member, Maria Elliot (Richmond, Labor) asked Mr Costello to rule out nuclear reactors and waste dumps in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales (part of which falls into Mrs Elliot's electorate) and the adjoining region of South-East Queensland. Mr Costello gave no assurances that there were no plans to build a reactor in the region.

During an interview whilst in Ireland, Australian PM, John Howard took the opportunity to attack Labor's nuclear policy. He said Mr Beazley's opposition was "hypocritical". "I'm also in awe of his hypocrisy on the issue. Apparently it is alright to export uranium to other countries that will then produce nuclear power with all the problems he says are unacceptable in Australia. Well in my view if nuclear power is unsafe, unacceptable and anti the environment, you shouldn't export uranium to any other country" he said.

State Labor leaders have voiced their opposition to nuclear energy.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie said he would fight strongly against any plans for a nuclear reactor in his state.

NSW Premier Morris Iemma said that NSW had laws prohibiting the building of a nuclear power plant in NSW. Under NSW law, the mining and enrichment of Uranium and construction of nuclear reactors is illegal unless unless the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) operates those reactors. The only

nuclear reactor in Australia, HIFAR is owned by ANSTO and is situated in Lucas Heights, South of Sydney in NSW. HIFAR's replacement OPAL is due for completion in 2007, and will operate alongside HIFAR for six months.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks said he was strongly opposed to the construction of nuclear reactors in Victoria despite many locations in the state being identified as ideal. As with NSW, Victoria also has laws prohibiting nuclear power generation.

Howard's revival of nuclear debate "surprising": Political expert

Dr Frank Cain, a political expert and Lecturer in Defence and Australian Political and Economic History at the University of New South Wales has told Wikinews that many political commentators are finding Prime Minister John Howard's revival of the nuclear debate "surprising".

Australia came close to building a nuclear power reactor in the Jervis Bay Territory in the late 1960s but was later abandoned in 1971 after massive anti-nuclear demonstrations. The fear that Australia would produce nuclear weapons as a by-product of its nuclear energy programs killed the plans and a change in government ended the plans.

The fear that the Jervis Bay reactor could have been used to produce weapons grade plutonium was substantiated when secret 1969 cabinet documents were released in 2000 stating that "The government will acquire a facility with long term defence implications" and "Over 25 years of operation the reactor will provide six tonnes of plutonium".

Anthony Albanese, the opposition's Shadow Minister for Environment and Heritage accused Mr Howard on Tuesday of living in the past and of not being serious about the debate.

In an interview with Wikinews, Dr Cain said that there are a number of possibilities for Mr Howard's nuclear revival. Dr Cain said one of these could be to challenge the opposition over its three mine policy. "One of his (Howard's) motives might be to challenge the ALP over its three-mine policy" said Dr Cain.

Dr Cain warned that such a move would be unpopular with younger voters, "The young people would not support his programme for the uranium mining companies to expand their mine numbers and production" he said.

Speaking on the economics of nuclear energy in Australia, Dr Cain said it was still uneconomic due to Australia's large supplies of coal and natural gas. "It still remains uneconomic for Australia to commence generating electricity from nuclear plants. Our coal supplies will last for another century and the natural gas deposits seem unlimited. These gas supplies will probably displace coal generation and thereby reduce the greenhouse gas problem" he said.

Martin Sevier, an associate professor in particle physics at the University of Melbourne told ABC Radio on Monday that nuclear power can be generated "almost as cheaply as coal". He said in the future nuclear power should be able to be produced for \$AUD40 per megawatt-hour, versus the current price of \$30 per megawatt-hour for coal.

Prof Sevier said that when the cost of carbon sequestering was included in the running costs for coal fired power plants that nuclear energy was "very, very competitive".

John Price, a professor at Monash University and expert in nuclear energy (having designed some in the UK) told ABC Radio that nuclear energy is competitive in many parts of the world, including Europe, North America and Eastern Asia.

Prof Price said that the use of nuclear energy in Australia is "inevitable" in Australia's future and that it may well be economically competitive with new lower emission coal fired power plants of which the costs are not known.

According to Prof Price, Victoria will need to generate 3 gigawatts more electricity within the next ten years, but conceded that it is likely that gas and coal fired plants will be built to meet that need.

Howard would not be proposing for the government to own its own uranium enrichment plant and would need to entice an overseas company to establish a plant in Australia according to Dr Cain. Dr Cain questioned whether a company from France, Russia, the US or China would be willing to come to Australia to "do what it has been doing quite well in its own country for decades".

Dr Cain said overseas companies would see "no financial advantage for them to do so".

U.S. appeals court upholds Honolulu aerial ad ban

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on Tuesday ruled that Honolulu's ban on aerial

advertising is constitutional and rejected the arguments of a pro-life/anti-abortion group that contended that the ban restricts free speech.

In a unanimous ruling, the court ruled that the city's ban on aerial advertising is not pre-empted by federal law and violates neither the free speech provisions of the First Amendment nor the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Writing for the court, Judge Margaret McKeown wrote that "Honolulu's airspace is a nonpublic forum, and the Ordinance is reasonable, viewpoint neutral, and rationally related to legitimate governmental interests." ("Nonpublic forum" is defined as a place that is not traditionally or explicitly opened to free expression.)

The Center for Bioethical Reform (CBR) challenged Honolulu's ban, claiming that the ban infringes on their right to public advocacy. The group planned to fly a plane towing a 100-foot banner showing graphic images of aborted fetuses, and contended that authorization they sought and received from the Federal Aviation Administration authorized the group to fly in all fifty states and Puerto Rico.

The CBR has driven vans with such images around Honolulu in the past few years.

Judge David Ezra, U.S. District Judge for Hawaii, ruled in November 2004 that the ordinance was constitutional. The appeal was argued before the 9th Circuit in Honolulu in November 2005.

Announcing their intent to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, Gregg Cunningham, executive director of the CBR, said, "We never expected to get justice in the U.S. District

Courts or in Honolulu. Our goal has always been to get to the U.S. Supreme Court. It's the only place we feel we'll get a fair hearing.

"If the environmental groups and political leftists who are trying to suppress the truth about abortion think we're going to go away because we lost two cases that we fully expected to lose, they're in for a rude awakening," Cunningham said.

Hawaii has had a statewide prohibition on billboards and similar forms of advertising since 1927, and is unique among U.S. states in this regard. In addition, since 1957, Honolulu has had a comprehensive law regulating the size and content of signs. Honolulu's ban on all aerial advertising was enacted in 1978.

Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann praised the decision, saying, "This obviously has strong implications for our visitor industry to know that when people come here they're going to see things here that really make for an island paradise type of vacation. This is great news for us."

Mary Steiner, head of the Outdoor Circle, an environmental group that supports the ban, said, "We have never doubted for a moment the importance of the scenic environment that it is just as important as any of the rest of the environmental issues that are out there. We're not going to stand by and let it be destroyed in any way, shape or form."

Fighting in Dili continues ahead of multinational deployment

Ahead of the deployment of 1000-1300 Australian troops in the next couple of days, fighting between renegade East Timorese military

forces and government security forces has continued in East Timor's capital, Dili, from which at least 21,000 people have fled. The 600 renegade military personnel were fired from East Timor's 1400 strong army after striking over poor pay and conditions, including ethnic discrimination. Based in the Aileu mountains, the rebel force is making small attacks around the southern, eastern and western sides of Dili, but reports of gunfire in the city centre are developing.

Australian-trained Major Alfredo Reinado, who leads the renegade force, has said that he aims to "guarantee justice and the creation of a professional defence force," not topple the East Timorese government.

Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, the Vice Chief of the Australian Defence Force, is to touch down in Dili today to discuss Australian troops' deployment in Dili and their Rules of Engagement (ROE) with the East Timorese Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri, and other government officials. However, gunfire and the burning of houses has been reported on a main road to Dili international airport, cutting it off from the city. In response, Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced the deployment of 150 soldiers from 4 RAR (Commandos) with Blackhawk helicopters and C-130 transport planes in order to take the airport and secure its perimeter to allow for flights to continue.

The multinational deployment has been met with appreciation amongst both the rebel and government forces. Foreign minister Jose Ramos-Horta has said that that the arrival of troops and police from Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and possibly Malaysia (which has indicated it

may send up to 500 police and troops), is still necessary for security. News of the arriving Australian-led peacekeeping force, was welcomed by Dilinese refugees Mr Ramos-Horta said; "Their mere presence in Dili, the capital city, will have a psychological calming effect." The leader of the rebel forces, Major Reinado has also welcomed the deployment, saying that he hoped the peacekeepers would be able to create a peace. MAJ Reinado has said "This is the only solution, ...There is no other way, or it will be war forever. The Government has taken too long. It is not capable of resolving this." and even told Portuguese news agency Lusa that he would personally shake the hands of the arriving multinational force. The United Nations Security Council, having appealed for an end to fighting, welcomed the deployment of military forces to East Timor.

Australia also led the successful International Force East Timor (INTERFET) and United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) forces from 1999 to 2002.

Indo-Pakistan talks on Siachen end in deadlock

The Defence Secretary-level discussion between India and Pakistan on demilitarising the Siachen glacier ended in a stalemate, without any major breakthroughs being made. Both sides however declared they would abide by the cease-fire agreement made in 2003.

India says that it will not pull its troops back from their current position on the world's highest battlefield till Pakistan agrees to validate its present position on the ridges that hem the glacier. Indian Lieutenant General

Pattabiramayyah has said that unless the Pakistan clarifies its current position on a map, India will be susceptible to a surprise attack similar to the one that occurred in the Kargil sector in 1997. Pakistan believes that recognition of Indian positions would be a de-facto surrender of its claim over territory from the last marked point on the Line of Control - Point NJ 9842 - to the Karakoram Pass.

Both countries have maintained troop positions on the ridges for over 20 years. The inhospitable Siachen glacier, according to a Ladakhi proverb, is a place where "one is only visited by either his closest friends or deepest enemies".

Pakistani immigrant convicted of N.Y. subway plot

Pakistani immigrant was convicted on Wednesday of plotting to blow up a New York City subway station in a case that shed light on police investigation tactics since the Sept 11 attacks.

Shahawar Matin Siraj, faces a maximum life sentence after a Brooklyn federal court jury convicted him of conspiring to place and detonate an explosive on the city's mass transit system.

Siraj, 23, was arrested on the eve of the 2004 Republican National Convention on charges he planned to attack a subway station in Herald Square, the dense Manhattan shopping district that includes Macy's flagship department store.

Siraj claimed he was entrapped by an over-zealous police informant twice his age, Egyptian Osama Eldawoody, 50, who met the Siraj in an Islamic bookstore while spying on mosques for the New

York police.

Taped conversations between the two men were played by prosecutors during the trial plans were discussed to bomb the Herald Square subway station in midtown Manhattan.

Mr Eldawoody testified in 2003 and 2004 that he served as the 'eyes and ears' of the police and was paid more than US\$100,000 to report about daily mosque activities, including prayers.

Prosecutors said Siraj had the will to carry out a plot supporting his extremist views. Their case was strengthened by the testimony of a co-conspirator who pleaded guilty in the case and an undercover police officer who said Siraj openly supported Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The jury also heard testimony by a Bangladeshi-born undercover police officer, who met Siraj while infiltrating a Muslim neighborhood as part of an investigation following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

During one conversation, Siraj "complimented" Osama bin Laden, the officer testified.

"He said he was a talented brother and a great planner and that he hoped bin Laden planned something big for America," said the officer, who testified under an alias because he is still involved in active investigations.

"The verdict is an important milestone in safeguarding New York against terrorist plotters whether home-grown or foreign," said New York Police Commissioner Ray Kelly.

Today in History

- 1805 - Napoléon Bonaparte was crowned King of Italy at the Duomo di Milano with the Iron Crown of Lombardy.
- 1896 - The Dow Jones Industrial Average was first published by Charles Dow as a stock market index.
- 1918 - The Democratic Republic of Georgia was proclaimed.
- 1972 - Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in Moscow, concluding SALT I.
- 1986 - The European Community adopted the European flag
- May 26 is Jerusalem Day in Israel (2006); Independence Day in Guyana (1966) and Georgia (1918); Mother's Day in Poland; National Sorry Day in Australia.

Quote of the Day

"When you get in situations where you cannot afford to make a mistake, it's very hard to do the right thing. So if you're trying to do the right thing, the right thing might be to eliminate the cost of making a mistake rather than try to guess what's right."
~ Ward Cunningham

Word of the Day

Lovecraftian; *adj*

Definition

1. Frighteningly monstrous and otherworldly.

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
+1-202-742-5918
(outside the U.S.)
+44-871-218-6397
(U.K. / Europe)

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543 Howard Street, 5th Floor
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