

Top Stories

Internet virus circulates disguised as e-mail from US government

E-mails containing the Sober X worm are being sent around the Internet disguised as an e-mail from either the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Central Intelligence Agency, both organizations of the United States government. Opening the e-mail on a system running on the Microsoft Windows operating system should be avoided at all costs, experts say.

Tens of thousands of workers demonstrate in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Despite heavy snowing, tens of thousands of workers and supporters assembled today in Ljubljana, Slovenia to demonstrate against the government programme of economic reforms.

Featured story

Further details about Bush-Blair memo stopped

The U.K. attorney general Lord Goldsmith has warned British media that further reporting of details from an allegedly leaked memo about a dispute between Tony Blair and George Bush "could be in breach of section 5 of the Official Secrets Act."

Wikipedia Current Events

•The tribunal trying Saddam Hussein and 7 co-defendants adjourned for a second time after hearing posthumous evidence.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Canadian federal election, 2006: Prime Minister Paul Martin's minority government is defeated in a confidence motion by a vote of 171 - 133. An election will be called tomorrow, expected to be for mid-January 2006. (CBC).
- EU Justice commissioner Franco Frattini makes an unprecedented call for the suspension of any member state found to have hosted a CIA black site.
- Running Water is restored to the City of Harbin, in Heilongjiang, China after several days of a water cut-off due to the toxic benzene spill. Yilan County, Heilongjiang, however, is still without running water.

Congressman Cunningham admits taking bribes

U.S. Representative Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) pled guilty today to conspiring to take bribes in exchange for using his influence as a member of the House Appropriations Committee to help a defense contractor get business. In total he pled guilty to one count of income tax evasion and four counts of conspiracy, namely mail fraud, wire fraud, bribery of public official and accepting bribes. U.S. District judge Larry A. Burns scheduled Cunningham to be sentenced on February 27. He is facing up to 10 years in prison and nearly \$500,000 in fines, as well as forfeiture of unspecified amounts of cash and property.

In the court hearing, Cunningham admitted to accepting "bribes in

exchange for performance of official duties" between "the year 2000 and June of 2005", taking "both cash payments and payments in kind" and following up by "trying to influence the Defense Department".

The federal investigation against Cunningham was triggered by his sale of his California residence to defence contractor Mitchell Wade in late 2003. However, Wade never moved in and sold the house at a \$700,000 loss three quarters of a year later. At the same time Wade's company MZM won tens of millions of dollars in defence contracts. Subsequent investigations discovered more questionable business transactions, including interactions with the defence contractor ADCS.

Cunningham announced his resignation after the hearing. In a written statement released by his law firm O'Melveny & Myers LLP he declared "The truth is -- I broke the law, concealed my conduct, and disgraced my high office. I know that I will forfeit my freedom, my reputation, my worldly possessions, and most importantly, the trust of my friends and family."

McCartney slams Chinese fur practices, rules out future concerts in China

Legendary musician Sir Paul McCartney has vowed that he will not play any concerts in China in the future. McCartney, a known animal rights activist, was reacting to a preview of BBC news footage that was filmed undercover at a

fur market in Guangzhou, China. The footage, some of which is to air during BBC's Six O'Clock News at 18:00 GMT on November 28, 2005 shows animals, in particular dogs and cats, being thrown from the top of buses and being dropped into boiling water. McCartney's wife Heather, who also watched the footage, alleged that some footage she had seen clearly showed that the animals were alive when they were skinned. The footage, which was filmed by an investigator connected to the animal rights group PETA shows cats squirming in a bag before being thrown into boiling water, and then skinned in a laundrette drier-like machine.

McCartney slammed the practices, saying "It's like something out of the dark ages. And they seem to get a kick out it. They're just sick, sick people" referring to the apparent smiles and laughter of the workers handling the animals as they are killed.

He and his wife called for a boycott of Chinese goods, adding that this was unacceptable behaviour from the nation to host the next Olympics.

However the Chinese Ambassador to London's spokesperson said that China is not to blame. "The fur trade mostly feeds markets in the US and Europe. This fur is not consumed in China. So the Americans and Europeans should accept the blame."

ABC's "Alias" to end run in May 2006

The American TV show Alias will end in May 2006 after five seasons, ABC said Wednesday. No reason for the cancellation has been given.

Alias stars Jennifer Garner as top secret CIA agent Sydney Bristow. Jennifer Garner has won a Golden Globe and a Screen Actors Guild award for her performances in the show.

Alias currently airs Thursday night at 8:00 on ABC. This has led to a drop in ratings as it is opposite CBS's popular reality TV show Survivor: Guatemala

Last season Alias averaged 10.3 million viewers per week according to Nielsen Media Research. This season they only averaged 7 million viewers per week.

Official reveals \$44 billion budget for U.S. intelligence

Mary Margaret Graham, the deputy director for national intelligence collection and a 27-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, revealed the annual budget for U.S. intelligence: \$44 billion. The apparent slip occurred during a talk Graham was giving at a San Antonio conference on Oct. 31. The disclosure of the number, reported in the Nov. 14th issue of U.S. News and World Report, marked the first time the figure has been revealed since 1998, when the figure was almost half its current figure, at \$26.7 billion.

Steven Aftergood, the director of the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists and a secrecy expert, and his group have led efforts to sue for the disclosure of the budget on four different occasions. He relayed in an interview that this is only the third time since 1947 (the year of the CIA's inception) that the intelligence community has revealed its spending. In 1997, George Tenet, then the director of

the CIA, compelled by the lawsuit brought by Aftergood's group under the Freedom of Information Act, made public that year's budget: \$26.6 billion. The budget was again revealed in the following year, but in 1999, Tenet reversed the policy, and budgets have since remained classified with support from the courts.

Currently, the Senate has signed off on a provision presented by Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) that would strip the security clearances of any government official, including those in Congress and on House and Senate staffs, who intentionally discloses national security secrets. A request for a roll call vote was avoided when senators Lautenberg and John Warner (R-VA) compromised, and instead, an unusual parliamentary procedure called a "standing division" was implemented to approve the addition of the provision to the defense bill. Senator Lautenberg could still have requested the "yeas and nays" -- a roll call vote. In this procedure, senators in the chamber at the time rise to denote approval. The Democrats accused the Republican refusal of a roll call vote to be a reflection that they did not want to go on record in favor of the provision, while the Republicans blamed time constraints and said that they did not want to inconvenience senators preparing to leave town for Veterans' Day.

Mr. Miyagi passes away, Thanksgiving Day

Pat Morita, nee Noriyuki Morita, who was best known for his work in the 1980's hit The Karate Kid and its sequels, passed away on November 24. The cause of death is not yet confirmed, but was said to be natural.

Pat started out at a stand-up comedian in the 1960's, and styled himself the "Hip Nip". "'Hip Nip' just sounds groovy," Morita said "A drummer laid it on me." His career took off, and he became a regular on the show Happy Days as "Arnold" of "Arnold's Restaurant" fame. He also acted in the show Mr. T and Tina which was an unsuccessful spin-off of the Welcome Back Kotter series.

However, Pat's career continued, and he starred in several TV movies including "Amos" and a 1987-88 made-for-TV police drama called Ohara. Then, for his acclaimed performance in Karate Kid, he was nominated for an Academy Award.

At his death, Morita had over 100 screen credits, including the Karate Kid sequels, and also as a voice character in the Disney films "Mulan" and "Mulan II". Morita was beloved by many children of the 80's, and remains a popular icon.

Confidential EU report about Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem

A confidential report, prepared by top diplomats representing the 25 EU governments, has been leaked to The Independent. European Foreign Ministers put in a veto when publication of the report was planned. They will not risk its relationship with Israel. For the first time, Israel has given its blessing to the EU to play a key security role in the region.

According to The Independent, the report provides the most detailed and remorselessly critical account yet produced by a Western international body of Israel's policy in East Jerusalem. The 11-page page document concludes that

European governments should consider direct intervention in an attempt to curb the systematic measures being undertaken by Israel to increase its control and population in the historically - and legally - Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem.

During discussions at last Monday's meeting, EU foreign ministers decided to express "deep concern" over Israel's activities in East Jerusalem and its surroundings, including establishing settlements, constructing the West Bank wall and demolishing homes.

Israel's policies in Arab East Jerusalem are hurting the prospects of a final agreement on the city with the Palestinians. A major expansion of Ma'ale Adumim, the largest Israeli West Bank settlement, will be joined to Jerusalem and this threatens to complete the encircling of the city by Jewish settlements, dividing the West Bank into two separate geographical areas.

In the 1967 Six-Day War Israel seized East Jerusalem, along with the rest of the West Bank and Gaza, and claims the city as its "united and eternal capital". Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state of their own.

'Guantanamo' under construction on Australian Island

The Australian Government is currently building a "Guantanamo-style detention facility" - a \$210 million, 800-bed Immigration Reception and Processing Centre - on Christmas Island, 1400km off Australia's northwest coast. The project has residents concerned about the prospect of having

imprisoned detainees and possible terrorism suspects as neighbours.

Christmas Islanders fear the remote detention facility will be Australia's very own "Guantanamo Bay."

The island's Shire President, Gordon Thompson, says residents are also worried about the effects the controversial detention centre development will have on the island's tourism industry. "We're not building tourism based on a prison tour," he said, also voicing fears that residents would be barred from areas on the northwest point of the island. Another resident complained that access to popular fishing and snorkelling spots on the island would be limited.

Department of Immigration (DIMIA) said that when construction of the Christmas Island facility was finished, a review was likely to be taken to close some mainland detention centres such as Baxter in South Australia. "Its (Christmas Island) only use is as an immigration reception and processing centre," said a DIMIA spokesperson.

Mr Thompson, who is opposed to the imprisonment of refugees, said the centre was being built on the island in an effort to avoid public scrutiny from mainland Australians. "It's a long way from the mainland where the lawyers and trouble-makers are," he said. "We'll be kept away from it."

A resident of eight years, two as shire president, Mr Thompson said he did not trust the federal Government because it ignored the concerns of the 1500-strong community. "There's a sense the Commonwealth will do what it wants," he said. "You've got to be

a little suspicious of a government that lets its own people be held in Guantanamo Bay, like David Hicks. People here have that feeling that when something big is being built away from the media - it's not fishy, it's smelly."

Mr Thomson said the Shire council were not notified when the current Christmas Island detention centre reopened last week to detain seven West Timorese asylum seekers.

Azmi Yon, president of the island's Malay association, has lived for 37 years on the island and wants the federal Government to leave it alone. He said locals were confused and did not know if the new centre would just be used for refugees or as a Guantanamo-style prison. "We need something from them in black and white to say what it is," he said. "Tell us something, don't keep us in the dark."

Mr Yon said the island was home to a harmonious group of Chinese, Malays and Europeans who respected each other's cultures. "Why disturb an isolated and unique environment when you can (build the centre) somewhere else?" he said.

A group of seven asylum seekers were transported by DIMIA to Christmas Island last week. One detainee, his wife and infant children have been allowed to live in the community under new detainment laws. However, three other assylum seekers remain the sole inhabitants of the current Christmas Island detention centre - reopened for the seven from Indonesian West Timor on November 17.

Refugee advocates, Democrats and Greens senators said the

recent West Timorese asylum seekers had been "shunted" to the remote facility at a massive cost, raising more doubts about the Howard Government's promise not to detain children.

Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett, who visited a previous group of 52 Vietnamese asylum seekers in December last year, said he was especially alarmed to learn that children were still being detained despite the Government's promise that children would only be detained as a last resort.

"We want to know exactly what the cost has been to unnecessarily fly these people over to Christmas Island and why, seeing that they managed to arrive within the accepted migration zone and should be processed here," Senator Bartlett said. "The only possible reason this family has been transferred to such a remote location is the very deliberate intention of the Government to deny these people proper processing of their claims and to prevent them from accessing adequate legal and other support. It is also assists the Government to keep the family away from media attention or public scrutiny."

Australian Greens Senator Kerry Nettle says the Government should suspend the construction of the Christmas Island detention centre and review the necessity of the facility. "At a time when the Government claims to be reforming its immigration detention system, it is increasing its capacity to lock people up," Senator Nettle said. "After the recent scandals and abuses, the public want alternatives to detention, but the Government insists on building more empty prisons."

According to Immigration Department figures provided at the November 2005 Senate Estimates:

- The current immigration detention centres - Baxter, Villawood, Maribyrnong, Perth, Port Augusta and the existing Christmas Island facility, already have a capacity to hold 1,688 people and they have contingency places for 667 more people, bringing the total capacity to 2,355.
- Port Hedland has a capacity to hold 820 people and is costing \$3 million a year to be ready to reopen.
- The infamous Woomera Detention Centre holds 800 and costs \$2.6 million to keep mothballed.

Senator Nettle said: "Australia's total immigration detention capacity is already 3,975 people. The locals on Christmas Island are opposed to this facility, yet the Government is wasting \$210 million on another empty prison. Is the government planning to increase the number of people in detention and deport people from the mainland to Christmas Island?"

There has also been environmental concerns about the development. The detention centre site is adjacent to prime "Abbotts booby" habitat, in the north-west corner of the island, and is surrounded by the Christmas Island National Park.

Endangered Abbott's Boobies nest in tall rainforest trees immediately to the north, south and south-east of the site, and their proximity puts the species at the mercy of turbulence generated by the

passage of wind across the clearing.

The National Park encloses the entire range of at least 35 endemic species, more than any other Australian protected area. It is part of the network of habitats of migratory species that Australia must protect under international agreements such as the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA).

The Wilderness Society have said, "There are several serious environmental concerns with the selection of this site, not least of which was the selection process itself, the Howard government's self-exemption from environmental scrutiny normally required under the EPBC Act, and its commitment to best practice environmental measures during construction of the detention centre."

Research has shown that Abbott's Boobies nesting within 300 m of clearings experience significantly lower breeding success than birds nesting further away. At last count, 36% of breeding sites across the island were located within this 300 m danger zone.

The centre, under construction since January this year, is not due to be operational until late 2006.

NBC cancels "Three Wishes"

NBC has officially decided to cancel its high-rated reality show "Three Wishes" after only nine episodes. The network also cut back the number of season episodes for Law & Order from 24 episodes to 22.

"Three Wishes," which is hosted by

Christian music artist Amy Grant, was watched by approximately 8.7 million viewers upon its premiere on September 23. It continued to boost high ratings, but NBC nonetheless rescinded its order for six more episodes of the series. The final episode is scheduled to premiere on NBC on Friday, December 2nd at 9:00 PM (8:00 PM Central Standard Time).

In response to the cancellation of "Three Wishes," many petitions have sprung up throughout the Internet and in dozens of cities. A few petitions are listed below.

Today in History

1777 - San José de Guadalupe, the first town in the Spanish colony of California, was founded.
1854 - The Eureka Flag (pictured) was flown for the first time during the Eureka Stockade rebellion in Australia.

1890 - The Diet of Japan, modelled after the German Reichstag, first met, when the Meiji Constitution went into effect in Japan.

1944 - Alfred Blalock and Vivien Thomas at the Johns Hopkins Hospital performed the first Blalock-Taussig shunt operation to treat blue baby syndrome.

1947 - The United Nations General Assembly voted to approve the Partition Plan for Palestine, a plan to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict in the British Mandate of Palestine.
November 29 is Liberation Day in Albania

Quote of the Day

"Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be

satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience." ~ C.S. Lewis

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