



Top Stories

Natural gas discovered in Chile according to President Ricardo Lagos



Natural gas discovered in Chile according to President Ricardo Lagos. Currently Chile imports 97 percent of their natural gas and 98 percent of its oil.

Officials in Mexico claim leaked Dirty War report isn't final copy



President Vicente Fox claims that a leaked draft by the report by prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo about state repression during the dirty wars is not a finished copy. Carrillo, however, says that his final report will not contradict the leaked draft.

Featured story

City Planning Board postpones decision on Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal



The City of Buffalo's Planning Board has postponed any decision on the proposed Elmwood Village Hotel, saying the public needs to be more involved. The Board is also concerned the hotel is still too big.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The U.S. Treasury, the Federal Reserve and U.S. Secret Service introduce the redesigned \$10 bill.
- A shipwreck from the 14th century is found buried in Riddarfjärden Bay in Stockholm, Sweden. If the ship is well preserved, there are plans to remove it from the waters.
- Alaksandar Kazulin, the Social Democratic Party candidate for the office of President of Belarus is detained by Minsk police after he was rejected entrance in a congress hosted by current leader Alexander Lukashenko. Kozulin also suffered injuries during the course of his detention, which is still being enforced, though the elections will commence in 17 days. BBC.
- Traces of a prehistoric, 8,000-year-old civilization are found in Shahrud, Iran. The discoveries included ovens, craft workshops, and other evidence of settlements.
- Televangelist Pat Robertson his loses re-election bid on the board of directors of the National Religious Broadcasters.
- Dubai Ports World controversy: The United States urges the United Arab Emirates to end its boycott of Israel: "The Bush administration said yesterday it is pressing the United Arab Emirates to drop its economic boycott of Israel - a major sticking point in the proposed takeover of key U.S. ports by a UAE-owned firm."

Colombia's National Liberation Army declares ceasefire for elections

The National Liberation Army (ELN), a rebel group in Colombia, has agreed to a truce for the upcoming congressional elections after attending government-sponsored peace talks, held in Cuba beginning in December. ELN representative Antonio Garcia says that the group wants Colombians to be able to vote undisturbed on March 12. According to Reuters, in some previous elections the ELN has attacked security personnel and kidnapped international observers. Some human rights groups are concerned that paramilitary groups might try to influence the vote with intimidation.

The ELN is the second largest rebel group in Colombia. The larger, FARC, shares with ELN their [[w:Marxism|Marxist] ideology, but has continued attacks. Some analysts suggest that ELN is losing its will to fight and military capacity, while the FARC is still large. ELN has been damaged by illegal paramilitary groups, and the Colombian army. According to military officials, ELN still has around 5,000 fighters.

Following elections, there plans for further peace talks in Cuba in April. Garcia has said, "The ELN ... expresses its desire for peace and ... will not realize a single military action that could affect election day March 12." Currently Garcia has not announced a truce for the presidential election on May 28.

One of their major concerns is to get recognition as a political organization, rather than as a terrorist group.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Sir Menzies Campbell has been elected the new leader of the UK Liberal Democrat Party.
- The European Central Bank raises Euro base interest rates by 0.25% to 2.5%. The move affects the 12 members of the Eurozone.
- Corruption in Kenya: Masked gunmen, since revealed to be Kenyan police, attack the offices of leading newspaper The Standard, and its television station KTN, following their report that President Mwai Kibaki held secret meetings with key opposition figure Kalonzo Musyoka.
- CIA flights: French newspaper Le Figaro reveals that the attorney general of Bobigny has opened up an investigation concerning the landing of a CIA flight in Le Bourget Airport, following a complaint deposed at the end of December 2005 by NGOs International Federation of Human Rights Leagues and the French Ligue des droits de l'homme.
- Crowds of 100,000 people protest against President of the United States George W. Bush while he is in Delhi.
- In a major turnaround for American policy, the United States signs a historic civilian nuclear pact with India, which promises to bolster India's rapidly growing economy.
- Just two days before U.S. President George W. Bush is scheduled to visit Pakistan, a car bomb explodes outside a United

Wikipedia Current Events

States consulate in Karachi, killing at least four people including a US diplomat and his driver, and injuring at least fifty others.

- A prison riot involving close to 1,300 prisoners at Afghanistan's Pul-e-Charkhi prison ends after four days.
- Italian judges in Milan to charge Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and David Mills (husband of Tessa Jowell, a British Minister) in connection with a bribery scandal.
- Former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, member of the moderate wing of the regime, describes the Holocaust as a "historical reality," contradicting the current leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an ultra who has described it as a "myth" last year.

Costa Rica falls to Iran in football friendly

In an exhibition warmup to the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Iran defeated Costa Rica in Tehran's Azadi stadium. Iran built up a 3 goal lead in the first 34 minutes and never looked back. The final score was Iran 3, Costa Rica 2.

Ali Karimi began by scoring in the 10th minute, Ali Daei in the 16th, and Vahid Hashemian in the 34th. For Costa Rica Carlos Hernandez scored in the 44th minute just before half-time, and Danny Fonseca scored in the 60th, but the visitors were unable to score again to tie the match.

This June, both teams will be in Germany to compete in the finals of the FIFA World Cup. Costa Rica have been drawn in Group A, while Iran are in Group D.

Five dead in attack in Pakistan

Two explosions near a US consulate in Karachi, Pakistan killed five and wounded more than fifty early Thursday morning. The explosions come just prior to United States President George W. Bush's scheduled visit to the country. According to Forbes report on the incident, Pakistani officials speculated that the attack was timed to coincide with Bush's visit.

According to police, a suicide bomber apparently hit the vehicle of a United States diplomat, detonating one of the explosions. It is not clear whether a subsequent explosion was another bomb or a vehicle explosion triggered by the initial blast.

The Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) reports that a hospital in the region has confirmed at least five persons were killed in the attacks, and over fifty more were injured, including a young Moroccan girl. According to the Associated Press, among the dead was a United States diplomat, a Pakistani official who worked at the consulate, a security guard for the consulate, and an unidentified woman. The driver of the car bomb is also presumed dead.

During a press conference in New Delhi, India, President Bush stated he would still travel to Pakistan despite the explosions, saying that: "Terrorists and killers are not going to prevent me from going to Pakistan. My trip to Pakistan is an important trip. It's important to talk with President Musharraf about continuing our fight against terrorists." Bush also expressed his condolences to the individuals lost in the attack during the conference.

The Pakistani news source GEO

states that the first explosion occurred at 9:05 local time (0505 UTC), with the second explosion occurring minutes afterwards. The explosions occurred at the parking lot of the Marriott Hotel in Karachi, about 60 feet (18 meters) from the consulate gate. Damage to the building as well as over ten nearby vehicles was also reported.

The Associated Press reports that the same consulate has been targeted twice in the recent past: an attack in 2002 left 14 Pakistanis dead, and in 2004 police defused a time bomb before it was set to detonate.

Officials in Mexico claim leaked Dirty War report isn't final copy

A leaked draft of a report on instances of state repression during Mexico's "dirty war" has been called into question by top officials. The document will be officially published next month. Report author, Ignacio Carrillo, assigned to the task by President Fox, commented by saying, "He will have to render his report. It will be placed in an open, public place," and "that will be there for history, but legally it's over." This being a reference to the fact that the Supreme Court has ruled that it is too late to prosecute possible offenders.

Carrillo claims, however, that his report is similar to the recently leaked draft. He said, "It's not going to totally contradict the draft." The draft was published by a Mexican magazine, claiming that the public has a right to know. The basis for the report is recently declassified military documents from the years 1964 – 1982. Carrillo also claims that his work was hindered by resistance from the courts, bad resources, and people involved being unwilling to

cooperate.

The Dirty War refers to the use of state terrorism in Latin America in a period from the 1960s to the 1980s, usually targeted at groups opposed to the government (usually leftist groups). Much controversy exists in the region about what is to be done with alleged offenders in the Dirty War.

South Africa to meet with Hamas representatives

Palestinian extremist group Hamas has been invited to meet with representatives of the South African government. Hamas won the Palestinian legislative council elections of January 2006 by a landslide and is now faced with forming a government and strained ties to European Union and the United States, which classify it as a terrorist organization responsible for several suicide attacks.

The South African deputy foreign minister Aziz Pahad confirmed on thursday that the country is preparing a meeting with the controversial group. According to Pahad South Africa wishes to share its experiences on the transformation from the Apartheid-era to democracy with the Palestinians and Israel. South Africa also sees it important to keep in contact with Hamas in the search for peace in the Middle East. Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesman said that there is no date for talks with South Africa yet. Israel criticized the South African invitation.

Russia has invited leaders of the Hamas for talks, which will begin on Friday. The Russian invitation was the first one after the elections of January 2006. However, Russia has put Hamas under pressure to recognize Israel

and renounce violence. There have been talks between Hamas leaders and the the Turkish foreign minister, Abdullah Gul. Another invitation for talks with Hamas came from Venezuela.

Israeli foreign ministry spokesman voiced his ministry's concerns that "giving legitimacy to an unreformed Hamas" could turn the movement "from a terrorist organization to a political party".

Natural gas discovered in Chile according to President Ricardo Lagos

On Thursday, President Ricardo Lagos announced the discovery of natural gas resources in southern Chile. The newspaper El Mercurio claims that this discovery could account for up to 25 percent of the country's natural gas needs. The discovery, found in Magallanes, could mean less dependence on foreign energy, specifically natural gas imported from Argentina. Currently Chile imports 97 percent of its natural gas and 98 percent of its oil. Magallanes has been an important producer of gas in the past, but resources were thought to have been exhausted until this discovery.

Lagos was interviewed by the local Radio W, where he said that the discovery could help them meet consumption of natural gas in the country, as well as help Methanex, a methanol company that has had difficulty finding enough natural gas for import. The situation has caused Lagos to have Chile's state owned gas company, ENAP, build a plant for conversion of liquid gas. In addition, they have considered importing natural gas from Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, and Indonesia.

Bush's Katrina statement contradicted by taped briefing

A video obtained by the Associated Press seems to contradict a statement by US President George Bush during Hurricane Katrina. He stated in an interview with ABC on September 1st that, "I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees".

In contrast, the video shows Bush during a video-conference received at his ranch in Texas Crawford on August 29, 2005, 19 hours before landfall of Hurricane Katrina. During the briefing, Director of the National Hurricane Center Max Mayfield warned "I don't think anyone can tell you with any confidence right now whether levees will be topped or not - but there is obviously a very very great concern".

Michael Brown, the former director of FEMA also shows concern about using the Superdome as a shelter for evacuees, saying "the Superdome is about twelve feet below sea level ... and I don't know whether that roof is designed to withstand a cat 5 hurricane".

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin said he was "shocked" by what the footage revealed, after being shown the video for the first time at a press conference.

The release of this video comes in the wake of a statement by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs that the "fog of war" made it difficult to evaluate and respond to the magnitude of the disaster early on.

Kenyan TV and newspaper raided by masked police

The offices of Kenya's second largest TV and newspaper companies were raided simultaneously this morning by groups of masked police officers. The TV station was taken off the air for 13 hours, and the newspaper's press was damaged and its uncirculated copies burned. The Kenyan government is characterizing the incident as an evidence-gathering step of national security investigation, in response to the paper and station's recent alleged publishing of false material to incite ethnic hatred and instability.

The Standard, Kenya's oldest daily newspaper, and Kenya Television Network (KTN), the paper's sister TV station, were the targets of the raid. The company that owns both outlets is the second largest media source in the country. The raid marks the first time the Kenyan government has shut down a major media outlet, and punctuates a period of increased media freedom in Kenya.

The CEO of The Standard, Tom Mshindi, has reported that his staff was "roughed up" and intimidated during the raid. The raiders, wearing gas masks and driving unmarked vehicles, did not have a warrant and did not identify themselves as police, but a Standard staffer recognized the voice of a police commander among the raiding party. Later at a press conference, Internal Security Minister John Michuki acknowledged the raid occurred as part of a "state security" investigation.

On Tuesday, February 28, three reporters from The Standard were arrested for publishing stories Saturday about an alleged secret

meeting between Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, and minister for the environment and deposed former foreign minister Kalonzo Musyoka, who has become an opposition figure to the president's policies, to resolve differences. Both Kibaki and Musyoka have denied having any such meeting.

The journalists are charged with "publishing false rumor with intent to cause alarm to the public", and have pleaded not guilty. The three were released on bail after their arraignment today.

Musyoka has expressed dismay at the government's actions, pointing out that there are standard legal recourses to such media actions that should be used, rather than a police attack.

KTN and The Standard have been increasingly critical of the president, who is seen by many as losing touch with the country.

The Standard was able to repair presses and produced a special edition late in the day. KTN also returned to the air in the afternoon, showing footage of the Standard raid. Both outlets reportedly had equipment removed or damaged during the raids, including computers, security cameras, and a backup power supply.

Australian Greens senator Bob Brown marks 10 years in Parliament

As the Australian Prime Minister John Howard celebrated his ten-year reign this week, Greens Leader Bob Brown marked the 10th anniversary of his election into the Federal parliament.

Senator Brown has outlasted 10 other party leaders: Meg Lees,

Cheryl Kernot, Natasha Stott-Despoja, Brian Greig, Andrew Bartlett, all former Democrat leaders. Pauline Hanson, Len Harris of the One Nation party, plus the Australian Labor Party's Kim Beazley, Simon Crean and Mark Latham have all been and gone during that time.

Only Prime Minister John Howard and Senator Bob Brown are left standing as leaders in the Australian Federal Parliament. Bob Brown was elected to the Senate in 1996, and re-elected in 2001. He has introduced bills for constitutional reform, forest protection, to block radioactive waste dumping, to ban mandatory sentencing, and greenhouse abatement.

Senator Brown says his party has hardly been in the balance of power at any stage, yet the Australian Greens have risen in popularity. "We've become the third major political party in the country and we're on our way to becoming a real power broker in this country and ultimately, the aim has to be becoming part of the Government of the country," he told ABC Radio.

While there's perpetual media speculation over John Howard's possible retirement, Senator Brown says he's full of beans and ready for the next 10 years. "And there's no speculation about me standing at next year's election. I can't wait," Senator Brown said. "Our election aim will be to rescue the Senate from the Howard government, and doubling our team is not beyond reality."

The Tasmanian Greens senator predicts his party could govern the country one day. "We're on our way to becoming a real powerbroker in this country and

ultimately the aim has to be becoming part of the government of the country," he said.

The Greens started with Brown's entry into the Senate after the 1996 election, doubled to two senators in 2001, and has four had senators represented since 2004.

The four Greens senators and their staff say they will celebrate with a chocolate cake – and 10 green candles. The government held a gala fundraising dinner in the Great Hall of Parliament on Wednesday night to celebrate Mr Howard's milestone.

Senator Brown said the success of Prime Minister John Howard is in his ability to play on fears. "(Howard)... is able to "dig a little bit below surface to play on fears that people have. He has presided over a country where the rich have got richer much faster than the poor have seen their conditions improve," he said. "And it is a country that says if you are down on your luck, bad luck. The good Samaritan aspect which is very strong in this country, doesn't reside with this government."

Of the Federal Labor Party the Greens leader said they should move back to humanitarian politics. He said Labor was trying to swing to the right but had lost its way. "I think the Opposition has lost its way and I think it is going to get worse," Senator Brown said. "The indications are that the Opposition thinks if it moves to the right it will do better," said Senator Brown.

Bob Brown is among 20 environmentalists, organisations and concerned citizens who were issued a 216 page writ by the Tasmanian-based timber company

Gunns Limited in December 2004. The woodchipping giant is suing for a combined AU\$6.3 million for actions it claims has damaged their business and reputation. The defendants say the case is 'industrial' style litigation, alleging conspiracy, interference with trade and business and defamation. Nine different campaigns are cited.

Uruguay turns down Argentina's request to halt construction of pulp mills
Argentine President Nestor Kirchner asked Uruguay to halt construction of pulp mills that bring up environmental concerns. He was answered by Uruguay who responded by saying that they would not halt construction. Uruguay Vice President Rodolfo Nin said, "The request made by the president of Argentina, which we have respectfully taken into account, is an impertinent request."

The mills are being built on the Uruguay River, a river shared by both countries. The mills cost \$1.7 billion to make. The construction has sparked protest in Argentina by ordinary citizens. Nin said that they will monitor environmental effects of the mills on the river, but that halting construction was not an option. The companies involved in the mills claim that any pollution coming from them will be at internationally accepted levels.

However this is likely not over, as Kirchner claims that they might take the case to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Google.cn to move servers out of China

Internet search giant Google announced yesterday that it will move its servers hosting Google.cn - aimed at Chinese internet users - to the United states.

Until now the servers being in mainland China has forced Google to comply with the censorship policies of the PRC government. The reason for the move is that Google fears local officials could access the servers search-data without the company's consent. According to Google, their policy of saving the IP addresses of its users is to gain more knowledge on how the search engine is used.

Google has been heavily criticized for agreeing to the censorship, but nonetheless admits that Chinese officials can also censor its contents through internet service providers, so refusing to remove pages from the search-index wouldn't be a solution. Google also underlines the fact that the service will let the user know when search results have been censored.

Coca growth up in Bolivia, Peru, claims U.S. State Department

A U.S. State Department report claims that coca growth is on the rise in Bolivia in Peru, and is a cause for concern according to them. They claim the victory of Evo Morales in the presidential race in Bolivia is one of the reasons for the rise in coca growing associations known as cocaleros. Morales campaigned on his support for the coca industry.

In a statement, the assistant secretary of state for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement said, "We are concerned about the inability thus far of Bolivia's new president to articulate whether or not he will allow coca eradication and U.S. counter-narcotics assistance to continue." At the time of his electoral victory, Morales claimed that he would support coca growth, but not for use in producing cocaine.

This puts Bolivia and Peru at risk of losing financial aide if they fail to meet international narcotics agreements, according to the U.S. State Department report. The report is one of the frameworks by which the decision is made as to which countries belong on the list of major drug-trafficking and drug-producing countries that the U.S. creates.

Bus crash outside Cusco kills at least 13

A bus crash outside of Cusco, Peru has killed at least 13 people, police say. The bus hit a parked car as it was leaving Machu Picchu, outside the Incan city of Cusco. Cusco is one of the busiest archaeological tourist destinations in the world, which is the reason the tourists were visiting. The bus then swerved out of control and crashed sideways.

Among the dead are tourists from Bolivia, Chile, and the United States. In addition there are reportedly up to 28 people injured, including a Chilean man who had previously been reported as dead. According to the police, one of the buses was a flat bed truck modified to fit more passengers, which are illegal in Peru.

Comedian Linda Smith dies at 48

It was reported by the BBC News service that Linda Smith, regular panelist on BBC Radio 4's The News Quiz, stand up comedian, satirist and writer, passed away from chronic ovarian cancer on Monday, 27th February 2006. Ms. Smith died age 48 and is survived by her partner, Warren Lakin.

Ms. Smith gained fame from her many roles on BBC television and radio. During her career she built strong friendships with a number

of colleagues. Amongst these is her colleague and friend Jeremy Hardy who responded to the news of her passing saying, "She was our greatest living Englishwoman. She reminds me of Alan Bennett in that wonderful Yorkshire terminology, the exactitude." Mr. Hardy has written a full tribute to Ms. Smith for the BBC website.

A tribute edition of The News Quiz, presented by her fellow panelist Andy Hamilton, will be aired on Friday, March 3, 2006 on BBC Radio 4 at 6:30p.m. (GMT), repeated the following Saturday at 12:30 - after this the show will be available for one week using BBC's Listen Again service.

City Planning Board postpones decision on Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal

Buffalo, New York – In an unanimous vote, the City of Buffalo's Planning Board voted to table the Elmwood Village hotel Proposal, postponing voting on legislation for up to thirty days.

The Board said its decision was due to the lack of public involvement, saying that there have not been enough meetings.

The Elmwood Village Hotel is a proposed project by Savarino Construction Services Corporation and was designed by Karl Frizlen of The Frizlen Group. The hotel would be placed on Elmwood and Forest Avenues in Buffalo, New York. In order for the hotel to be built, at least five buildings, that include both businesses and residents, must be demolished.

The Forever Elmwood Corp. is a Buffalo-based non-profit organization founded in 1994. Justin Azzarella, the Executive Director for the organization voiced support for the proposal,

stating: "I am here today to lend Forever Elmwood's support the hotel project. Particularly, Forever Elmwood is encouraged by the fact that this building follows the more stringent Elmwood Village Design Guidelines. We have been speaking with Savarino Construction, and they have promised us [Forever Elmwood] that they will engage the community further, including the surrounding Block Clubs and businesses. For that reason, while Forever Elmwood is in support of this project and the type of project that it is, we are asking also that the project be tabled so that the community can be further engaged. Specifically the surrounding Block clubs which include the Granger, Claremont, Asland and The Lincoln Parkway Block Clubs."

"Because of the excellent work that Karl does and the game plan that they have, I think its an ideal use of this particular location. I think that this particular type of development needs to be encouraged and promoted as opposed to roadblocked," said a man who owns five properties near the proposal site.

However, Evelyn Bencinich, a resident of Granger Place and whose house would be located directly behind the hotel said, "My property value will be depreciated or non-existent because no one is going to want to live behind a multi-story hotel. We are facing up to a year of noisy and dangerous demolition and construction. Children, pets and even drunk rebellers could wander on site and get hurt. Traffic tie-ups caused by large machinery and garbage bins is inevitable. Where will pedestrians walk? We could experience increased unsanitary flooding in our yards and

basements due to the digging and cementing for the underground parking garage. Rats will be displaced into the immediate neighborhoods and be in great abundance. Onced we get past the year of nightmare construction, what if you build it and they don't come? We could ultimately have a seven million dollar rooming house on our corner."

Patty Morris, co-owner of Don Apparel with Nancy Pollina at 1119 Elmwood also asked that the project be tabled saying, "this has only been public knowledge for less than two weeks and the public never saw the redesign. How can you vote on anything that no one has seen yet? The Board cut off Morris saying, "so specifically you don't have any problem with it [the design] you just..." Morris then said, "Oh I am totally against this project, but thats besides the point isn't it."

Planning board wants hotel smaller
The planning board is also concerned that the current design may still be too big.

At one point Board member Susan Curran Hoyt said, "we know you've cut down your number of rooms on this project, but we still see it doesn't seem to fit the description of a 'botique' hotel," and asked Eva Hassett, Vice President of Savarino Construction, "we wonder if you could reduce the rooms further."

"One thing I didn't talk about was the price levels of these rooms and that will be important to know. The room rate will be somewhere between one-hundred and twenty and one-hundred and sixty dollars a night which is about the same price of the Hampton Inn down town and the smaller you make

the hotel, the more expensive the rooms will get. We believe that we've made a good compromise in terms of the size of the hotel and perhaps botique means different things to different people," said Hassett.

The board was also concerned that there is not enough parking asking, "are there alternative plans for valet parking off-site, in the event that you have a full hotel or a large event going on?"

"We are exploring several possibilites with respect to additional parking for valet and parking near-by," replied Hassett. "We are also exploring the possibility of using the rear of 1105 Elmwood for additional parking, which would give us an additional ten or eleven spaces."

The new design has a total of fifty five parking spaces for seventy-two rooms, with thirty-nine of them underground and the rest on ground level.

Hassett also said that a "parking study" will be done on the area.

Concerns that the second floor of the hotel will be too close to the property of 605 Forest were also brought up. The board asked how far the hotel would be from the property and Karl Frizlen replied saying it would "be approximately five feet from the property line," but he also admitted that, "I do not know exactly how close the house next door" will be from the hotel, but did say "I think the house is about four or five feet away from the property line and we [the hotel] sit right on the property line."

The board is concerned the setback from the property is not enough saying the space between

the building and the hotel is "pretty narrow."

Common Council also tables hotel proposal

The city's Common Council also agreed to table the proposal also citing the need for more public engagement and the need for more organizations to respond including the Buffalo Preservation Board and the Office of Historic Preservation.

During that meeting, Hassett also said the proposal to try and get a variance to obtain the properties of 605 and 607 Forest were "now off the agenda."

The The common Council is expected to meet and hold a public hearing about the project and the rezoning of the properties to be demolished (1119-1121 Elmwood) on Tuesday March 7, 2006 at 2:00p.m. in Council Chambers at City Hall. At the moment the properties are not zoned for a hotel.

Interview with Usenet search sites targeted by the MPAA

Last week, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) announced it had launched seven lawsuits against operators of websites it claims had been "facilitating the distribution of copyright works".

In its announcement, the MPAA said it had commenced legal action against the following BitTorrent tracking sites— isohunt.com, bthub.com, and torrentbox.com, which are all owned by the same person; torrentsproxy.com; niteshadow.com as well as ed2k site ed2k-it.com and Usenet search engines—nzb-zone.com, binnews.com, and dvdrs.net.

Despite the announcement on its website and in the media, the MPAA has failed to notify the administrators of the sites involved directly. Joe from Binnews told Wikinews he only found out about the MPAA's actions after reading it on several news sites. He said, "At first, I double read the article making sure we were not being punk'd. But then I was shocked that we had to read about it publicly first. As of today (February 25), we have yet to get anything (from the MPAA)".

"Descds", an administrator of dvdrs.net told Wikinews that the first he knew of the action being taken against the site was when he was approached by the press and users of his site. He said, "We haven't been informed by the MPAA and quite frankly are outraged by the method they have adopted to file these lawsuits. In actual fact we would still be none the wiser had our members and members of the press not have contacted us."

"When we found out about the filed lawsuit we was first worried (after all we are only a small site with limited funds), then shocked and finally outraged. Had the MPAA contacted us anytime in the sites history regards their concerns we would have happily worked with them to gain a resolve," he said.

Descds also said that despite attempts to contact the MPAA he has received no response.

When asked by Wikinews how they felt about discovering the MPAA's lawsuits both administrators said they would have appreciated being notified before the announcement was made public.

Binnews told Wikinews, "We do

feel they should have notified first. We do not even have a confirmation this is for real."

Dvdrs said, "We have stated many times had the MPAA personally contacted us we would have happily listened to their issues and acted accordingly. We are doing nothing wrong legally on our site and to be made look like an established piracy ring is an outrage. We have worked extremely hard on site to keep within international laws and they have publicly destroyed everything we have worked towards in the last two years. We are receiving negative PR and this is totally unacceptable."

Wikinews has discovered that both Binnews and dvdrs.net have procedures in place for dealing with alleged copyright infringement under the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Despite this, both sites deny ever being contacted by any organisation with a "takedown" notice.

When asked if Binnews ever received a takedown notice, Binnews replied, "Nope, we have never received a notice from anyone. My cell phone is tied to the site, we have proper DMCA guidelines on the site and no one has contacted us."

When asked the same question, Dvdrs said, "No never. We would actively respond to any DMCA request quickly and efficiently. We fully support the law and would never try to evade anything within its scope. Had a DMCA been issued by any member, our site would have immediately deleted the offensive file."

When asked how they would deal with a DMCA takedown notice, Binnews said, "We would act quite

quickly. An email sent to the alert system is tied into all of "staff" members, my cell phone and my email."

According to Dvdrs, they would be equally as compliant. "We would immediately delete the offending file on our server and conduct a thorough research into any files that may also be connected to the one mentioned. We would also respond to the request personally with a follow up email expressing our actions," they said.

Wikinews asked the administrators if they thought their sites were any different to conventional search engines like Google and Yahoo. Binnews replied, "No, you can go to any search engine and find just about anything."

Dvdrs also shares Binnews' position telling Wikinews, "No. We index what is already readily available on commercial, tax paying, US based registered companies hard drives. All we are doing is pointing to files not on our network, much the same way google or any search bot operates. We do not host these files and without the premium paid service of third parties our marked up text based XML files are useless. We have never hosted illegal files and only offer information."

Dvdrs has expressed that if the MPAA deems them illegal they should also target those who are actually hosting the files. Descds said, "We feel that should the MPAA deem us illegal then they must also target premium paid Usenet Providers who act as the transit for these files. Ironically both Easynews and Usenetserver offer both indexing and carrier for these files and yet have received no such lawsuits filed."

"We also find it ironic still that Newzbin, creators, instigators and promoters of the NZB format and un-arguably the biggest Usenet Indexing site in the world have received no lawsuits filed. We feel that we are being rail roaded and are not at all happy about it."

On the other hand, Binnews was surprised that the MPAA did not target ISPs and Usenet providers in the first instance. "Cut the head off and there is nothing for us to index and report on. If the ISPs acted in a proper manner and did what they are more than capable of, we would not be assisting people in combating piracy on their networks," they said.

Despite being outraged with the MPAA and its actions, Descds said that despite being outside of US jurisdiction he is happy to assist the MPAA in anyway necessary. "We would like it known for the record that we are actively trying to reach a resolve regards this action by the MPAA. We have contacted them and said openly many times we would welcome their input and act accordingly. Should they feel that NZBS are illegal we will remove those sections immediately and await a legal judgement on their legality. DVDRS is not a pirate network and to call us such has insulted our member base."

"I would also like it noted that although we host in the US i am actually a UK citizen who currently does not have to adhere to their communications and judgements. However, such is our resolve that I would happily comply should communication between us take place. We can offer little more to help this but hope that the MPAA retract their statement that we are an organised pirate network and restore our good name. Should the

MPAA decide to not communicate with us and continue their legal actions we will instruct our attorneys and contact legal bodies like the EFF for help on this matter," he added.

Binnews also had this to say of the MPAA's lawsuit: "Binnews does not host any files, the claim that we read "BinNews.com offers files for over 3,000 movies" is 100% completely false. We do not host any files, never have and never will. We provide a legitimate service to copyright holders. No where on our site does it say, "join us, we can give you free movies." We do not even have pre-made nzb files."

History of binnews and dvdrs.net Binnews started "as a way to monitor what is on usenet," according to Joe.

"Our intent is not and never has been to facilitate piracy. Its quite the opposite. We have several guides that explain how binnews can assist a company in getting rid of piracy," he said.

Dvdrs.net started out as a community site in March, 2004, where people could discuss movies they loved, and hated, offer help to people with home cinema issues, discuss games and basically befriend members. Descds said, "We have evolved several times and have always kept a keen eye on the laws of both local and international authorities."

Dvdrs.net adopted NZBs at users' request several months after the site was launched. Descds told Wikinews that the site had never been contacted by any legal representative to ask for the removal of NZB files.

"There has never been a law passed anywhere, as far as we are aware, that states NZB files are illegal to host. Had there been, we would have dropped them and continue with other aspects of our site. DVDRS is not all about indexing Usenet and has a very healthy community discussion group," he said.

Australia's Prime Minister Howard marks 10 years in power

Today will mark Australian Prime Minister John Howard's 10th anniversary holding what is arguably the most powerful office in Australia. John Howard is Australia's second longest serving Prime Minister, behind Sir Robert Menzies.

Howard celebrated his decade in office last night at a gala dinner at Australian Parliament House in Canberra. Around 700 conservative supporters and business figures were present at the dinner.

Mr Howard gave a speech to his delegates, saying he was grateful to Australians for their support and promised to try not to abuse their trust.

"I am deeply conscious of the trust that you have put in us and I am deeply grateful ... for the privilege that has come our way," Mr Howard said.

"We have tried not to abuse it and we will try in the future never to abuse it, because public life is the ultimate in terms of serving a nation and serving a community," he said.

Peter Costello, Mr Howard's most likely successor gave a brief speech to the delegation saying "It's not just a wonderful 10th

anniversary for the coalition government."

"There is another 10th anniversary that we ought to acknowledge tonight - it's the 10th anniversary of Labor in opposition," he said.

Despite many political commentators believing that Howard (now aged 66) will soon retire and hand the reins over to Peter Costello, Mr Howard told ABC radio, "I will remain in the position as long as my party wants me to."

Mr Howard also showed his support for his likely successor saying "If I were to go under a bus, the person who would and should become the leader of the Liberal party is Peter Costello. I am very careful crossing roads."

Little to celebrate - Opposition The opposition has used the occasion to attack the government on its performance over the last ten years. Opposition leader, Kim Beazley told a press conference on Wednesday that "On this 10th anniversary of the Howard government we find record foreign debt - more than twice what it was that John Howard inherited."

Wayne Swan, Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services, said the government's celebrations come at a time when Australians are paying too much tax. "Sadly, for the Australian people 10 years of the highest taxing Government in our history has given all of those taxpayers a much bigger hangover," he said

A turbulent political career John Howard has had a turbulent political career, since first becoming elected as a Member of Parliament in 1974. He was treasurer under the Malcolm Fraser government from 1977

until 1983, when it was defeated by Bob Hawke.

Following the resignation of Fraser, Howard contested the Liberal Party leadership but was defeated by Andrew Peacock. Despite being defeated as leader, Howard stayed on as deputy leader.

After being defeated by the incumbent Labor Party government of Bob Hawke, Peacock became nervous and attempted to protect his leadership by removing Howard from the deputy position. Howard restood for the position and won, putting Peacock in an uncomfortable position and prompting his resignation. This allowed Howard to succeed to the leadership unopposed.

Howard held the Liberal Party leadership from 1985 until 1989, when he was defeated in a leadership challenge by Peacock. Howard's support was weakend following a speech in which he claimed that the rate of Asian immigration into Australia was too high. Following his defeat Howard was relegated to the backbench for a short time before taking a position on the front bench again. When Peacock lost the 1990 election, the Liberal Party began to look for a young leader - electing John Hewson. It was at this time that Howard conceded it unlikely he would ever be leader again. Howard himself compared the possibility of a political comeback to "Lazarus with a triple bypass".

After Hewson lost the 1993 election to Hawke's successor Paul Keating, the Liberal Party again appointed a new leader, this time current foreign minister, Alexander Downer. When Downer resigned in 1995, with deputy leader Peter Costello unwilling to step up,

Howard was elected to power for the second time.

Howard's coalition government swept to power in 1996, holding 96 of the 148 seats in the House of Representatives ending 13 years of Australian Labor Party governance. Howard led his government to comfortable victories in 1998, 2001 and 2004.

Amateur sex video stirs controversy on Internet

An amateur sex video allegedly filmed in Singapore using a mobile phone has become an Internet phenomenon. Various blogs are reporting that tens of thousands of Internet users are searching for the video, creating what bloggers call a "blogstorm". According to unconfirmed reports, the female in the video is "Tammy", a 17 year old student at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) in Singapore, and the male is her 21 year old boyfriend. The incident has stirred controversy, with many bloggers critical of the interest the video has attracted.

Terms such as "tammy nyp" and "tammy video" topped the list of search terms on Technorati, a blog search engine, for days. Bloggers appear to be creating entries containing the terms to increase hits to their blogs. Domain names such as nyptammy.com have been registered, in an attempt to make money through advertising.

One young blogger, calling herself "Roxen" criticized the people who had shown interest in the video, arguing that there was a double standard. "What puzzles me is: why are all the attention piled on the girl? Nobody is criticizing the boy involved in the act. Nobody wondered how he faced the society in future," she said.

Roxen also questioned the ethics of posting the video to the Internet, saying "How about the bloody farker who put the video up? The ethics of respecting other people's privacy does not need to be taught. Hello, would you like to have a picture of you digging nose being posted on the web? Not to be mention a XXX VIDEO. You sick shit stirrer."

The Malaysian Star reported last week that a DVD version of the clips is available for sale on the streets of Penang.

Corruption blamed for Papuan rainforest destruction

A new report on the commercial logging industry in Papua New Guinea (PNG) released by international forestry organization, Forest Trends, shows that the overwhelming majority of current commercial industrial forestry operations in PNG are ecologically and economically unsustainable.

Foreign logging companies are in open defiance of the law and cutting down Papua New Guinea's rainforests, thanks to corruption and government inaction, the report alleges. Washington-based environmental group, Forest Trends, linked Malaysian loggers to Papua New Guinea's political elite. It described working conditions as "modern-day slavery" and said forests were effectively being logged out.

While the PNG Government does have laws and regulations to ensure sustainable timber production, these were not being enforced, the report states. It identified "a political vacuum with no demonstrated government interest in controlling the problems in the sector".

The report summarised

independent reviews of the timber industry between 2000 and 2005. Forest Trends claimed corruption had devastated rural living standards and ignored the basic rights of landowners: "There are a few logging operations in the country which are deemed beneficial to both local landowners and the country, but they are lost in a sea of bad operators. The Government needs to support these companies, or risk having the international community boycott all of PNG's exports."

Natural forests are being chopped down unsustainably, mostly by Malaysian companies, the organisation says.

It reports that much of the labour is imported, and says that Papua New Guineans are not getting an acceptable return for the logging while one of the country's precious natural resources is dwindling. Most of the timber is exported to China, and is often turned into products for export to Western countries.

If foresting continues in this manner, they warn, Papua New Guinea could be bereft of its natural cover in a decade.

"The system must be fixed," said Michael Jenkins, President & CEO of Forest Trends. "The nexus between the logging companies and the political elite needs to be broken. One way to do this is to help local landowners better understand their rights and to establish a legal fund so that they can be defended. Papua New Guinea's legal system does exist outside of political control and the courts have a track record of ruling against illegal logging."

Intelligence agencies warned about growing local insurgency in late 2003

Knight Ridder reports that "U.S. intelligence agencies repeatedly warned the White House beginning more than two years ago that the insurgency in Iraq had deep local roots, was likely to worsen and could lead to civil war, according to former senior intelligence officials who helped craft the reports."

This is in stark contrast to public statements made by the Bush administration. In his November 1 radio address President Bush said "Some of the killers behind these attacks are loyalists of the Saddam regime who seek to regain power and who resent Iraq's new freedoms. Others are foreigners who have traveled to Iraq to spread fear and chaos. ... The terrorists and the Baathists hope to weaken our will. Our will cannot be shaken."

In a May 2005 interview Vice President Cheney said "I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency."

According to Robert Hutchings, the chairman of the National Intelligence Council from 2003 to 2005, and now diplomat in residence at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, there was a "steady stream" of intelligence reports warning Bush and his administration that the insurgency was intensifying and expanding, including a major study, called a National Intelligence Estimate, which was completed in October 2003.

Hutchings said that from early 2003 on the intelligence reports reflected that there were "signs of incipient civil war".

"Frankly, senior officials simply weren't ready to pay attention to analysis that didn't conform to their own optimistic scenarios," Hutchings told Knight Ridder.

The office of Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte declined Tuesday to comment for the Knight Ridder article.

Mayor Ken Livingstone's suspension frozen pending appeal

The four week suspension of London Mayor Ken Livingstone has been frozen by a High Court judge pending his appeal.

Ken Livingstone spoke out against the ruling, saying it had "been blown out of all proportion". He also attacked the newspaper group that owns the Evening Standard, around whose reporter the row has erupted.

"It is Associated Newspapers that has a long history of anti-semitism and support for facism. It welcomes the blackshirts in the 1930s and it has admitted that as recently as the retirement party of the last editor of the Daily Mail, two of its staff dressed in Nazi uniforms and were not asked to leave. Associated Newspapers has never apologised for this or for its record of support of facism."

Mr Livingstone also responded to claims made in The Independent newspaper that there had been 11 anti-semitic attacks following his comments, saying the CMA "in fact claimed there had been 11 incidents following my speech, in which the worst was an offensive letter to a member of parliament".

Photoessay: Fat Tuesday Easy in DC

Arlington, Virginia – Proving that

Mardi Gras isn't confined to New Orleans, thousands of people came to chilly Arlington, Virginia for the annual Mardi Gras Parade Tuesday night. This high energy, low key celebration of Fat Tuesday brought out families and friends to this suburb of Washington, D.C. Although there was a heavy police presence throughout the evening, revelers were after the beads and other throws from the low tech floats. According to Arlington Police there were very few problems through out the entire evening.



King Rex of the Arlington, VA Mardi Gras



Queen of the Arlington, VA Mardi Gras



Revelers throw beads from a float during the Arlington, Va Mardi Gras Parade 3 year old Margaret of Arlington waits for her beads at the annual Arlington, VA Mardi Gras Parade



3 year old Margaret of Arlington waits for her beads at the annual Arlington, Va Mardi Gras Parade



Revelers march in the annual Arlington, Va Mardi Gras Parade



Canine marchers in the annual Arlington, Va Mardi Gras Parade



Revelers march in the annual Arlington, Va Mardi Gras Parade

Quote of the Day

"In mathematics the art of asking questions is more valuable than solving problems." ~ Georg Cantor

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Today in History

- 1776 - Samuel Nicholas and the Continental Marines successfully landed on New Providence and captured Nassau in the Bahamas.
- 1878 - The signing of the Treaty of San Stefano established Bulgaria as an autonomous principality in the Ottoman Empire.
- 1918 - Bolshevist Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers and exited from World War I.
- 1931 - "The Star-Spangled Banner" officially became the national anthem of the United States.
- 1958 - Nuri as-Said became the Prime Minister of Iraq for the 14th time.
- March 03 is Hinamatsuri in Japan, Liberation Day in Bulgaria.