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Top Stories

Ten killed in train crash in northern Victoria, Australia

At least ten people have been killed, and more than fifty injured, when a V/Line passenger train and a semi trailer collided at a level crossing on the Murray Valley Highway in northern Victoria, Australia.

U.S. President Bush Responds to Russian Criticism

United States President Bush responds to Russian Criticism in a speech from the Czech Republic.

Featured story

U.S. Congressman William Jefferson faces 16-count indictment for corruption

United States Department of Justice has indicted Congressman William Jefferson of Louisiana on charges of bribery, racketeering, and money laundering, among others. His lawyer maintains his innocence.

Wikipedia Current Events

- •A Guyanese suspect who allegedly planned an attack on New York's JFK Airport has surrendered in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.
- •"Scooter" Libby, the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, is sentenced to 30 months in prison for lying to investigators about what he told reporters about CIA operative Valerie Plame.
- United States Navy dock landing

Wikipedia Current Events

ship USS Carter Hill confronts pirates off the coast of Somalia after they board the Danish merchant vessel Danica White.

- •The President of the USA George W. Bush begins his tour of Europe in Prague before the G8 summit in Germany. During his visit he intends to address the deployment of interceptor rockets and the establisment of radar bases in Poland and Czech Republic, and then related tension which has arisen between the United States and Russia.
- •Basque separatist group, ETA, announces it will end its 15-month ceasefire tonight at midnight (CEST).
- •Thailand's interim government removes a ban on political party activities.
- •Ten people are killed and around 40 injured, 12 seriously, in a train crash 10 kilometres north of Kerang, Victoria, Australia.

U.S. President Bush responds to Russian criticism

Just one day before the G8 summit, a battle in the media between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President George W. Bush continued as President Bush criticized Russia for "derailing" its promised democratic reforms.

In a speech from the Czech Republic, where he plans to implement a missile defense system, Bush said: "In Russia, reforms that once promised to empower citizens have been derailed, with troubling implications for democratic development." He also described the relationship with Russia as complex, a major difference from just five years ago when Bush and Putin had pet names for each other.

President Bush also criticized China in this speech, saying that "[China's leaders] believe that they can continue to open the nation's economy without also opening its political system".

"Part of a good relationship is the ability to talk openly about our disagreements, so the United States will continue to build our relationships with these countries and we will do it without abandoning our principles or our values," Bush said of Russia.

Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said Russia "cannot agree on his declaration about the derailing of democratic reforms", adding that "Russia is a democratic country that shares common world and common European values."

Bush stated that Russia is not an enemy and that "the Cold War is over."

In this speech, Bush also listed Belarus, Burma, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran and Syria as the "worst dictatorships" and criticised Venezuela, Uzbekistan and Vietnam for rolling back earlier "freedom". President Bush is scheduled to meet with President Putin at the G8 conference which begins tomorrow.

Scooter Libby gets 30 months in Plame case

Today, Tuesday, United States District Judge Reggie B. Walton, presiding at the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse in Washington, D.C., sentenced I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby to 30 months in prison. He also fined Libby US\$250,000.

Libby's defense team submitted a sentencing memo to Judge Walton on Thursday last week. The memo asked for leniency and a "downward departure" in the court's ruling that could impose jail United States Department of time on Libby. The memo urged the court to consider "the more than 160 heartfelt letters" submitted on Libby's behalf. It also charges that included bribery, urged the court to consider Libby's extraordinary commitment to public service. "The fundamental command that the sentence be sufficient, but not greater than necessary to serve the purposes of specifically with "solicitation of punishment, makes clear that a sentence of probation is warranted here," according to the memo.

"The Probation Office calculated the applicable [sentencing] Guidelines at 15 - 21 months and identified several grounds for downward departure from that range."

-Lawyers for Libby's defense

Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald has called Libby unrepentant and unremorseful at Libby's sentencing hearing on May 25. Fitzgerald asked the federal judge to sentence Libby to 30 - 37 months in jail.

The Libby defense team seems to be preparing to have an appeal

ready sometime by December 2007. Libby has been previously convicted of perjury, obstruction of The FBI was involved in the justice, and making false statements to federal investigators a raid on Representative after Libby lied to investigators and the grand jury looking into the May, 2006. "The FBI has made Plame affair in which Valerie Plame's identity as a CIA operative was leaked to the press.

Although there was early speculation that President Bush might pardon Libby, at this time that seems unlikely while the legal battle continues.

U.S. Congressman William **Jefferson faces 16-count** indictment for corruption

In a press release Monday, the Justice (DOJ) detailed a federal grand jury indictment against Congressman William Jefferson on racketeering, and money laundering, among others.

The grand jury out of Alexandria, Virginia, charged Jefferson bribes, honest services wire fraud, money laundering, obstruction of justice, violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, racketeering, and conspiracy." The indictment stems from corruption that is alleged to have taken place between August 2000 and August 2005.

Representative Jefferson, 63, a Democrat from Louisiana, is alleged to have "used his position and his office to corruptly seek, solicit and direct that things of value be paid to Jefferson and his family members in exchange for his performance of official acts to advance the interests of people and businesses who offered him the bribes." Jefferson has represented Louisiana's 2nd

congressional district since 1991.

investigation, which culminated in Jefferson's congressional office in combating public corruption its top criminal investigative priority because American citizens deserve honest and ethical public officials representing their interest," said Kenneth W. Kaiser, Assistant Director, FBI Criminal Investigative Division. "As it is alleged, Congressman Jefferson violated the public's trust and used his official position and office as a RICO enterprise to corruptly solicit bribes, to pay off a foreign official, and to illegally benefit from overseas business transactions during a five-year period."

A complex series of transactions was alleged to have taken place, involving Jefferson and at least two other co-conspirators. Along with Jefferson, Vernon L. Jackson, a Louisville, Kentucky businessman, and Brett M. Pfeffer, a former Jefferson congressional staff member, "allegedly discussed and solicited bribes in return for being influenced in the performance of certain official acts, including receiving things of value from iGate [Inc.], Jackson's company."

Jackson plead quilty to charges of conspiracy to commit bribery and the payment of bribes to a public official, and was sentenced to 87 months in prison. Pfeffer plead guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit bribery and aiding and abetting the solicitation of bribes by a member of Congress, and was sentenced to 96 months in prison.

Also detailed in the indictment, Jefferson allegedly offered

payments to a foreign official to further his own business interest as well as that of his family. Jefferson was allegedly responsible Lao Army general Vang Pao, 77, for "negotiating, offering and delivering payments of bribes" to Nigerian officials. In an August 2005 raid on Jefferson's home in Washington, D.C., law enforcement authorities with the Bureau of officials found US\$90,000 cash from an undercover operation in his freezer. The cash had been wrapped in aluminum foil and hidden inside frozen food containers.

Representative Jefferson has not responded directly to the indictment, but his lawyer, Robert Trout, stated that his client was innocent and would "fight this indictment and clear his name." Acknowledging the comprehensive investigation carried out against his client, as detailed in the 94page indictment, Trout pointed out by blowing up the government's that legislative action was not involved. "There is no suggestion that he promised anyone any appropriations," said Trout. "There were no earmarks. There were no government contracts."

Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi expressed some concern over the allegations. "The charges in the indictment against Congressman Jefferson are extremely serious," said Pelosi. "While Mr. Jefferson, just as any other citizen, must be considered innocent until proven guilty, if these charges are proven true, they constitute an egregious and unacceptable abuse of public trust and power."

If found guilty of the charges ultimately, Representative Jefferson faces a maximum sentence of 235 years.

Ten charged with plot to overthrow Laos government

Ten people, including former Royal and a former United States Army officer Harrison Jack, 60, were arrested Monday in six different cities in California, USA after Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), uncovered a plot to bring down the government of Laos.

Suspects were arrested in Chico, Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Stockton and Woodland.

The plot, said prosecutors, involved obtaining C-4 explosives, AK-47 rifles, rockets, land mines and Stinger missiles, which were to be shipped to Thailand, and then used to take down the main branch of the Laotian government main buildings in Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

The bombs would be deployed using "special operation mercenaries," but undercover agents working with the ATF foiled the plot when the suspects were tricked into buying the weapons and supplies they needed from the charges, Jack, is a former undercover agents. The government's investigation was dubbed "Operation Tarnished Eagle".

"These defendants had developed an audacious plan to overthrow the government of Laos, and were seeking to arm themselves with automatic rifles, rockets and surface-to-air missiles," said the assistant to the U.S. Attorney General, Kenneth Wainstein in a statement to the press.

"The individuals arrested today thought an arms dealer would provide the necessary weapons and personnel to assist them in the violent overthrow of another government. An undercover ATF agent led them to believe he could fulfill their needs," said acting ATF director Michael Sullivan in a statement to the press.

According to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court, the plot was put together by a Lao liberation movement known as Neo Hom, led in the U.S. by Vang Pao, and had conducted extensive fundraising activities, surveillance operations and an insurgent force within Laos.

Vang Pao led Hmong forces backed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency against the communist Pathet Lao in the "Secret War" in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s. He served in the Royal Army of Laos, holding the rank of major general. After the fall of Laos to the communists in 1975, Vang Pao immigrated to the U.S., where he is a folk hero among Laotian refugees. There were plans to name an elementary school after him in Wisconsin, which is home to many Hmong people.

Another man named in the California National Guard lieutenant colonel and a 1968 West Point graduate. He was involved in covert operations during the Vietnam War. Jack acted as an arms broker and organizer of the plot, according to the criminal complaint.

Most of the remaining suspects had fought in Laos with Vang Pao, the complaint said. Among those named in the complaint are seven prominent members of the Hmong community in California's Central Valley. They are:

> Lo Cha Thao, 34, of Clovis in Fresno County. Had

worked as an aide to a former Wisconsin state senator.

- Lo Thao, 53, of Sacramento County, president of United Hmong International (also known as the Supreme Council of the Hmona 18 Clans).
- Youa True Vang, 60, of Fresno, founder of Fresno's Hmong International New Year.
- Hue Vang, 39, of Fresno, a former Clovis police officer. Director of United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom, and Reconstruction.
- Chong Yang Thao, 53, a Fresno chiropractor.
- Seng Vue, 68, of Fresno, member of United Hmong International.
- Chue Lo, 59, of Stockton, member of United Hmong International.

A tenth person arrested, but not yet charged, was Nhia Kao Vang of Rancho Cordova, California.

The Laotian government welcomed the arrests. "We praise the U.S. government as the group committed wrong doing against the Laos government which has good relations with the US," said Yong Chanthalangsy, Laotian Foreign Ministry spokesman.

Thailand, which was to be used as a transit country for the arms, said it would investigate the plot as well. "Thailand has a clear policy not to allow any party to use our territory as a lunching pad against our neighbors," said Tharit Charungvat, Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman.

In the past year, Thailand has had to deal with a stream of Hmong refugees, and has been forcibly repatriating them to Laos. Many of opposite direction of the path that

the refugees said they were associates of Secret War veterans and were fleeing from persecution. They hoped to follow other Hmong refugees to the West.

Laos spokesman Yong said the Hmong in Thailand were not fighters but victims of human traffickers, and that dissident groups had been long ago been suppressed in Laos. "The arrest of Vang Pao and his group might not have direct impact to Laos as we have nothing to do with them, but it would be a good news for Hmong minorities since the traffickers would have no excuse to lure them to Thailand to seek resettlement in the U.S. with Vang Pao," Yong said.

On Monday, Thai and Laotian officials met in Bangkok to discuss border security issues, and the two northern Victoria, Australia countries agreed to deport the Hmong in Thailand to Laos, Yong

Both Laos and Vietnam remain under communist governments. In 2005, the U.S. normalized trade agreements with Laos.

ETA ends year-long cease-fire with Spain

Basque separatist group ETA will end their cease-fire as of June 6, the group said in a communique released in Basque newspaper Berria on Tuesday.

"The minimum conditions for continuing a process of negotiations do not exist," ETA said, adding that the Spanish government of Prime Minister Zapatero responded to its ceasefire "with arrests, torture and persecution."

Zapatero condemned ETA's move. "ETA's decision goes totally in the

Basque and Spanish society want, the path of peace," he said.

ETA declared a cease-fire in March 2006 and had insisted that it still held despite killing two people with a bomb in Madrid airport late in December, ETA had warned about the attack but the two victims were not evacuated. In a series of communiques before its last fatal attack in December, ETA had complained of a lack of progress in the talks with the government and police pressure on its supporters. The atmosphere was further soured by the authorities with exclusion of pro-independence politicians from local elections in the Basque country last month. ETA's supposed political wing, Batasuna, remains banned.

Ten killed in train crash in

At least ten people have been killed, and more than 50 injured, when a V/Line passenger train and a semi trailer collided at a level crossing on the Murray Valley Highway in northern Victoria, Australia. At least 13 more are still missing and are believed to be trapped in the wreckage.

The collision, which occurred at 1:40 p.m. local time, was approximately 10 km north of the town of Kerang, on the Swan Hill railway line.

The train involved in the accident was a service from Swan Hill, which departed at 1:00 p.m. from Swan Hill railway station, and was destined for Melbourne. The train was comprised of a locomotive and three carriages.

Witness reports say that the semitrailer collided into the second of the three carriages, and then detached the third carriage from the remainder of the train and

causing it to derail.

The whole side of the second carriage has reportedly been ripped open from the direct impact of the semi-trailer. The train's two engines derailed and flipped on their sides and are completely separated from the remaining four cars as a result of the accident, according to witnesses.

The injured have been transferred from the scene to hospitals in the area, including Kerang and Mildura, by ambulance. Helicopters regained some of their freedoms, and light aircraft have been used to transfer patients to Melbourne, as local hospitals struggle with the sudden influx of patients. The driver of the semi-trailer has been moved to the hospital in Mildura in "critical condition", according to police at the scene.

The train had 39 people on board the 1:00 p.m. service, according to parties remains in effect, until at train documents. This included three staff employed by the train operator V/Line, who have all been accounted for and are not injured. Of the 36 passengers on the train, it has been reported that 23 have suffered injuries.

Reports say six people were airlifted to Melbourne for treatment, however one has since died. The remaining 17 have been moved to regional hospitals, including the temporary relief centre in Kerang, according to a Rural Ambulance Service spokesperson.

Although there are still 13 people unaccounted for, police say it is possible that some had bought tickets and were therefore listed on the train manifest, but did not end up catching the service.

Premier of Victoria Steve Bracks is expected to fly to the crash scene

this evening. He has ordered a full for five years. Thai Rak Thai was investigation into the incident. Federal Minister for Transport Mark April 2006 general election. Vaile has offered Federal government assistance from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau also on trial, but was allowed to to help with the investigation. The Prime Minister John Howard has offered the Victorian government any additional aid that is requires in the aftermath of this incident.

Thai junta partially lifts political ban

Political parties in Thailand have following an agreement on Tuesday by the government's military-appointed Cabinet.

As a result of the deal, parties are now allowed to meet and hold activities, opening the way for elections that are tentatively planned for December. However, a ban on forming new political least next week. Government spokesman Nattawat Suthiyothin said a bill on new parties would be forwarded to the National Legislative Assembly. And the Cabinet says that the ban on leaders of dissolved political parties remains in effect.

Political gatherings and activities had been banned by the junta since the military's overthrow of the civilian government in September of last year. But in the face of recent protests, the military's ruling body, the Council for National Security, agreed on Monday to recommend that political activities be allowed.

The move by the Cabinet comes six days after a Constitutional Tribunal in which the former ruling party, Thai Rak Thai was ordered dissolved and its leaders, including ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra banned from politics

found guilty of violations in the Another prominent party, the opposition Democrat Party, was remain intact.

Though the junta has outlawed political gatherings, demonstrations have still been tolerated in Bangkok. One of the largest came on Saturday, when 6,000 supporters of a satellite television station, PTV, held a rally. The pro-Thaksin PTV has been taken off the air by the junta, as have several pro-Thaksin websites. The junta also ordered that text messages be sent to mobile-phone subscribers, asking them to stay away from demonstrations.

But the junta has shown signs of moving the nation back towards the democratic process, with the leader of the coup, Council for National Security chairman General Sonthi Boonyaratglin suggesting an amnesty for the banned political leaders. The idea was widely criticized, though, and Sonthi later retracted his statement, saying the amnesty notion had been proposed by the National Legislative Assembly.

U.S. Senator Craig Thomas of Wyoming dies at age 74

U.S. Senator from Wyoming Craig L. Thomas (R), 74, has died of acute myeloid leukemia at the National Naval Medical Center located in Bethesda, Maryland. He died just hours after doctors had said that his chemotherapy was no longer having an effect on the cancer.

"At this difficult time, all we can do is give him as much love and support as possible," said his wife Susan in a statement released by the Senator's office.

"Wyoming had no greater advocate, taxpayers had no greater watchdog, and rural America had no greater defender than Craig Thomas. The Senate is a lesser place without Craig here, but the state of Wyoming and our nation are much better places because he was here," said Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate leader in a statement to the press.

Thomas won his Senate seat in 2006 with 70% of the voters supporting him, despite canceling the last half of his campaign trail due to medical issues. He announced his condition just two days after the election. He began to receive chemotherapy after winning the election and returned to work in December, a month before he was scheduled to do so.

Thomas, who supported domestic energy and minerals production, helped to federal money to be spent on building a coal gasification plant in the state to keep jobs there, rather than overseas.

"[Thomas] is a very big loss to the people of this state. He carried the values that we treasure in Wyoming to Washington and had many successes," said Wyoming state Governor Dave Freudenthal.

While Freudenthal is a Democrat and will be selecting a replacement one game previously in the 2007 for Thomas, the seat is not likely to shift party hands since Freudenthal must select one of three candidates offered by the Republican state central committee.

Thomas was serving his third 6 year term in the Senate.

NHL: Anaheim's Chris Pronger suspended from Game 4 of playoff finals

The National Hockey League (NHL) handed down a one-game suspension to Anaheim Ducks defenceman Chris Pronger on Sunday for a hit he laid on Dean McAmmond of the Ottawa Senators during Game 3 of the playoff finals Saturday night.

Although there was no penalty call on the play, replays showed Pronger's forearm hitting the head of McAmmond, who had to be helped from the ice. McAmmond didn't return for the remainder of the game. The hit occurred at 2:01 Moderate earthquake shakes of the third period.

The league was swift in rendering judgment on Pronger. "A variety of factors were considered in reaching this decision," said Colin Campbell, NHL Vice President and Director of Hockey Operations. "Mr. injuries or damage. Pronger used his forearm to deliver a forceful hit to the head of his opponent. Also, his actions caused injury to his opponent."

Ottawa's coach Bryan Murray was not surprised at the suspension. "I think the history of Chris Pronger comes into play a little bit," commented Murray. "There was a very obvious elbow to the head."

Pronger had been suspended for playoffs for a similar hit on Tomas Holmstrom of the Detroit Red Wings, which may have influenced the league's decision on the latest hit.

McAmmond agreed with the suspension verdict. "I think it should have been a suspension because it was a blow to the head," said McAmmond. "It wasn't incidental. It's not like that couldn't have been avoided."

Whether McAmmond will be fit enough to return for Monday's game is not clear. "I'm feeling pretty much the same as I was yesterday, a little bit headachy, not feeling quite right," explained McAmmond. "I'm going to do everything I can, or as little as I can, to feel good tomorrow. I want to play, but at this point in time, I'm not sure."

Despite the injury to McAmmond, Ottawa went on to win Game 3 with a score of 5 to 3. The next game is scheduled for Monday night in Ottawa.

central Greece

A 5.3-magnitude earthquake struck near Patras and its surrounding areas in central Greece on Tuesday afternoon, just before 3 p.m. local time (1200 GMT). There were no reports of

"The strong earthquake was measured at 5.3 with the epicenter on the edge of Trichonida lake, some 110 kilometers [70 miles] west of Athens," an Athens Geodynamic Institute official said.

Flemish Minister-President will not call Armenian massacre 'aenocide'

Minister-President of Flanders Yves Leterme in an interview with the Turkish newspaper Zaman refused to call the deportation and killing of hundreds of thousands of Armenians a genocide.

"Before a politician can judge if something is a genocide, the international institutions must speak out about it. ... As a politician it is not wise to speak about a genocide until experts have judged it. I don't stand alone with my view and I have nothing to add to this," Leterme said.

The matter of the so-called Armenian Genocide lies very sensitive with some Dutch voters of Turkish descent. The situation reminds of the Dutch elections, when Wouter Bos from the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) refused to speak of an "Armenian genocide". The polls project that Leterme's party CD&V is to become the biggest political party of Flanders in the upcoming federal elections in Belgium next Sunday.

Mudslide buries Valley of Geysers

Russia's Valley of Geysers, Eurasia's only geyser field and the second largest concentration of geysers in the world, was largely destroyed by a mudslide on Sunday.

Millions of cubic metres of mud and rocks fell into the 6-kilometrelong basin, wiping out about twothirds of the valley, which which contains around 90 geysers and many hot springs. Located in the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Kronotsky Nature Reserve, the valley wasn't discovered until 1941, and had only opened to foreign tourists in 1991.

Back to the wild for pygmy kangaroos

Indonesia's foresty ministry said Tuesday it will release 17 endangered Dusky Pademelons into the wild in the remote Papua province on New Guinea.

Also known as pygmy kangaroos (similiar Red-Necked Pademelon pictured), the animals have been rescued over time from illegal animal traders and from people's homes, where the little kangaroos were kept as pets. The species, Latin name Thylogale brunii, belongs to a family of seven kangaroo-like mammals that are

found in forests of Papua, Western New Guinea and Papua New Guinea.

Today in History

1523 - Gustav Vasa became King of Sweden, marking the end of the Kalmar Union.

1683 - Oxford University's
Ashmolean Museum, the world's
first university museum, opened.
1894 - Colorado Governor Davis H.
Waite ordered his state militia to
protect and support the miners
engaged in the Cripple Creek
miners' strike.

1933 - The first ever drive-in theater opened in Camden, New Jersey, United States.

1944 - The Battle of Normandy began with 155,000 Allied troops landing on the beaches of Normandy in the largest amphibious military operation in history.

1982 - A war in Lebanon began when Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon to root out members of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

June 06 is National holiday of Sweden observed.

Quote of the Day

Opinions cannot survive if one has no chance to fight for them. ~ Thomas Mann

Word of the Day

epicede; n

1. An elegy; an ode to the deceased.

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