



Top Stories

Striking NYC transit workers will return to jobs

Under an agreement reached on Thursday, striking New York City transit workers will return to their jobs in 12-24 hours.

Greenpeace activists clash with Japanese whaling fleet in Southern Ocean

The environmental activist group Greenpeace has attempted to disrupt Japan's Southern Ocean scientific whaling fleet.

Featured story

Drug website surveys LSD users and culture

Erowid, a website with the stated mission of "Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans & Psychoactives" has over the past few months been gathering data through a series of surveys about the drug LSD to present at the LSD Symposium, scheduled for January 2006 in Basel, Switzerland.

Wikipedia Current Events

- An Azeri passenger jet crashes after taking off from the Azerbaijan capital, Baku.
- Chad says it is in "a state of war" with Sudan following a recent rebel attack in which around 100 people were killed.
- The 2012 Summer Olympics may have been given to London by a voting error, a senior IOC official reveals.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Astronomers discover new moons and rings around Uranus using the Hubble Space Telescope.
- Lech Kaczyński is sworn in as President of the Republic of Poland.
- U.S. News and World Report claims that the United States government has been monitoring mosques in the United States since September 11 for traces of radiation.

Some candidates for president may be involved in drug trafficking

According to the Miami Herald, sources in the United States and in Haiti are saying that at least 2 of the potential presidents who are running in the upcoming Haitian elections have ties to the trafficking of cocaine, and 3 candidates for all positions. About 8 percent of Colombian cocaine on its way to the U.S. goes through Haiti.

The Miami Herald names the 3 candidates as Guy Philippe, the rebel leader who participated in the 2004 Haitian rebellion which ousted former president Aristide. Philippe has long been thought to be part of the trafficking of cocaine through Haiti, back to his days a police chief in Cap Haitien. Two top U.S. officials say that Philippe was once recruited to be an informant but he turned them down due to the traffickers paying him more. Philippe denies the rumors and

claims that there is no evidence of his involvement in any smuggling activities. The other presidential candidate suspected of ties is Dany Toussaint. Toussaint also has long been linked to the trafficking business, dating to his time as a chief of police under Aristide's government, however he has always denied the allegation.

The last suspect is Youri Latortue, a candidate for Senate in Gonaives which is a major drug smuggling area. Youri Latortue is also the nephew of interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue and is currently working as security chief. He is nicknamed Mr. 30 Percent due to the fact that he charges 30 percent in exchange for government contracts. The Prime Minister has defended his nephew saying that he trusts him. Youri allegedly has ties to smugglers in Gonaives who control the trafficking at the seaport.

Azeri passenger plane crashes

An Azerbaijan passenger plane has crashed after taking off from the country's capital, Baku, officials say. There was no immediate confirmation of casualties, but the plane is thought to have been carrying at least 18 people. The Azerbaijan Airlines (Azal) aircraft was heading to Aktau in Kazakhstan, according to Russian news sources.

The Ria news agency said the plane took off at 2119 (1819 GMT) but disappeared from radar screens 20 minutes later as it flew

along the Caspian Sea coast. It is reported to have come down near the village of Kyurdakhany, about 15km (10 miles) from Baku, Ria said. An interior ministry official told the AFP news agency that the plane had crashed with 23 people on board.

U.S. soldier may be charged in shooting of Italian agent

On December 22, 2005 the special prosecutors of the Roman Magistrate's service announced that they were considering charging U.S. soldier Mario Lozano with manslaughter.

Lozano shot and killed Major General Nicola Calipari during a disputed incident at BP 541, a blocking position for a mobile roadblock located behind a ninety-degree turn on the ramp that joined Route Vernon to Route Irish (the road between the heavily fortified Green Zone and the Baghdad International Airport). Some international observers claim that if Lozano is charged, relations between the Italian government and the United States government will deteriorate, because the US government prefers to have immunity from criminal prosecution for its citizens carrying out military actions around the world.

Canadian Conservatives vow to defend Arctic sovereignty

The Conservative Party of Canada leader Stephen Harper today made bold claims about the Canadian arctic region at a campaign stop in Winnipeg, "The single most important duty of the federal government is to protect and defend our national sovereignty." . The prime minister-hopeful stated, "There are new and disturbing reports of American nuclear

submarines passing though Canadian waters without obtaining the permission of -- or even notifying -- the Canadian government."



Members of a Canadian naval boarding party during a sovereignty exercise in the Canadian Arctic.

Harper promised a significant increase in military presence in the Canadian region, which has had notable sovereignty disputes with the United States, Russia, Denmark and Norway. "You don't defend national sovereignty with flags," Harper said. "You need forces on the ground, ships in the sea, and proper surveillance."

Among other promises, Harper stated he would station three armed naval heavy ice breakers in the area of Iqaluit with 500 regular force personnel, recruit 500 more Canadian rangers, and build a new army training center in the area of Cambridge Bay on the Northwest Passage.

"As prime minister, I will make it clear to foreign governments -- including the United States -- that naval vessels traveling in Canadian territorial waters will require the consent of the government of Canada," Harper stated.

The Conservative Party Website states this "'Canada First' Northern Strategy will increase surveillance, navy, army and air

force presence".

The Liberal Party of Canada, the Conservatives' most powerful rival in the election, quickly posted a rebuttal on their website. They claim Stephen Harpers stated defense budget of \$5.3(CAD) billion over 5 years is not enough to afford the two polar icebreakers, which the Liberal party claims will cost \$3(CAD) billion with the party estimating an upkeep of \$150(CAD) million per year. "Where does Mr. Harper plan to find another \$1 billion?" the party asked in their rebuttal.

The Arctic may be an important issue in the future for Canadians, as scientists expect the fabled Northwest Passage of the Arctic to open up for year round shipping by 2050 as a result of global warming. According to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, trade routes from Europe to the Far East could save 4000 km through the passage, as compared to the current routes through the Panama Canal

Canada last flexed its muscle in the Arctic in 2004 in its most massive Arctic exercise ever, with six hundred personnel from the three services (army, air force, navy) involved in a large exercise in the Baffin Islands.

Canadians are scheduled to go to the polls on January 23, 2006 in an early election as a result of a non-confidence motion in parliament against the former ruling Liberal party.

Kaczyński takes the office of Polish president

Lech Kaczyński, conservative politician from Poland, internationally controversial for having refused, as mayor of

Warsaw, to authorize the Equality Parade for gay rights on June 11, 2005 in Warsaw, has taken the office of President in the country today, after swearing an oath before the National Assembly (joined houses of Sejm and Senate).

For the first time since 1989 the former presidents of Poland, Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, have been invited to the swearing ceremony. Kaczyński hasn't got the insignia of authority of the Second Republic of Poland, as they were relayed to a museum by Lech Wałęsa, when he ended his term as the president of Poland in 1995.

In his speech, Kaczyński stated that Poland needs a new constitution. Its effect would be the end of the process of building up the new Republic of Poland, called "IV Rzeczpospolita", according to new president. Kaczyński promised also that he will do everything, what he is allowed to, to help lawmakers introduce essential political reforms.

Kaczyński is closely related to the Peace and Justice party, led by his twin brother Jarosław. For the last three years he was a mayor of Warsaw. He's also professor of law at University of Warsaw.

Two Australians charged after burning flag during riot

Two Australian men have been charged with entering a building with the intent of committing an indictable offence and malicious damage by fire, as a result of the 2005 Sydney race riots. Police have alleged that one of the men, a 17 year old from Hurstville, climbed a telegraph pole in Brighton-le-Sands and took the flag from the RSL club. With the

assistance of the second man, a 24 year old from Penshurst, he set the flag alight.

The man from Hurstville will appear in Bidura Children's Court, and the man from Penshurst will appear in Sutherland Local Court.

Evo Morales hoaxed by a Spanish Church-owned radio station

Evo Morales has fallen foul of a "bad taste joke" by a Catholic radio station joker who posed as the Spanish Prime Minister Jose Rodriguez Zapatero. The voice imitator telephoned Evo Morales to congratulate him for "joining the Cuban-Venezuelan axis" and asked him to make Spain his first international destination as president of Bolivia.

The journalist involved in the hoax is said to be an anti-socialist activist very critical of Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and the government of Rodriguez Zapatero.

Erick Torrico, chairman of the Area of Communication and Journalism for the Andean University Simon Bolivar has called the action "an offense that goes beyond the person" [...] "It is an insult against the people of Bolivia, a major blunder which is also an attack against the dignity of the Spanish Prime Minister" and demanded a "clear explanation from the Government of Madrid about the incident that seems aimed to undermine the credibility of the president elect".

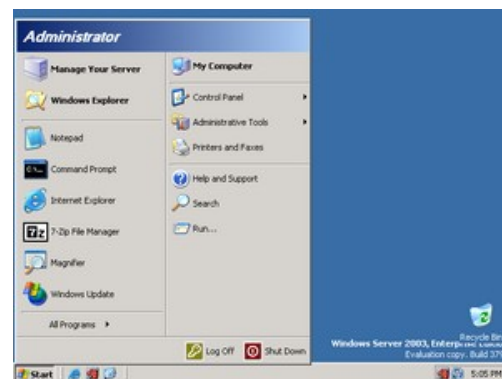
Raul Penaranda, chairman of the weekly magazine "Epoca" said that the joke was "wrong, unethical, ill intentioned and irresponsible"

Rodriguez Zapatero later spoke to

Morales to transmit to him a genuine message of congratulations from the Spanish government and stated that the call made by the imitator was "unacceptable."

The Spanish government backed up the formal complaint made by the Bolivian embassy in Madrid to the Director of the Catholic Church as they considered that the call was an "offense to the Bolivian People".

EU threatens to fine Microsoft for failing to open Windows Server



On Thursday the European Commission threatened to fine Microsoft €2 Million per day if the corporation does not comply with a ruling made in March 2004, stating that Microsoft must provide interoperability with its protocols and other competing services. Microsoft has until January 25, 2006 to respond to the charges, and may also be fined for days after December 15, 2005 as well.

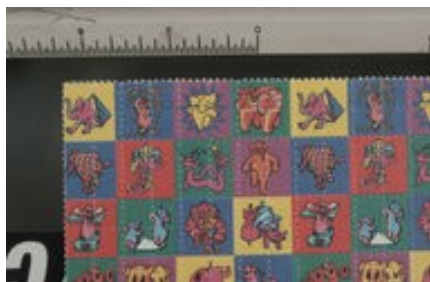
Microsoft is alleged to have failed to comply with an order to supply competitors with "interoperability information" for the protocols implemented in Windows Server operating systems. These include those used to "deliver file and print services and group and user administration services, including the Windows Domain Controller

services, Active Directory services and Group Policy services" according to page 299 of the European Commission's decision.

Microsoft argues to do this breaches its intellectual property rights as it would be opening Windows Server up for cloning. It has previously appealed to the European Court of First Instance, a bid which failed and where Microsoft was given until December 15, 2005 to comply with the original decision. Microsoft has launched a second appeal attempt.

The decision in March 2004 also forced Microsoft to provide a version of Windows XP without the eponymous Windows Media Player and to pay fines of €497 million (US\$586 million).

Drug website surveys LSD users and culture



Erowid, a website with the stated mission of "Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans & Psychoactives" has over the past few months been gathering data through a series of surveys about the drug LSD to present at the LSD Symposium, scheduled for January 2006 in Basel, Switzerland.

The website, a popular resource of information about psychoactive plants and chemicals, recently posted its fifth survey, querying

users about their age, the number of times they've taken LSD and how that would be affected if LSD was legal. Past surveys have been longer and more thorough, asking users about the availability of the drug, positive and negative experiences, and if they've ever experienced LSD related "flashbacks".

The LSD Symposium website states that it will include a panel of over sixty experts from around the world discussing a wide range of topics regarding LSD. Topics scheduled include, "The Discovery of LSD-25", "Appraisal of Albert Hofmann's life work" and "The History of Drug Policy" and several others.

LSD is a psychedelic drug known for its mind altering effects, including both visual and auditory hallucinations. LSD was first synthesized by Albert Hofmann in 1938. Hofmann, a Swiss chemist discovered the psychedelic effects of LSD on April 16, 1943 when he accidentally absorbed it in its liquid form through his finger tips. Since then, it has been made illegal in most countries as a result of the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances which requires all parties of the convention to criminalize it in their countries.

Erowid, based in California, was created in October 1995, and is hailed by many as a reliable resource for information on drug and drug culture. The website includes information on legality issues, chemical information, user submitted experiences, positive and negative effects of individual drugs and other information.

New South Wales road safety campaign begins

New South Wales Police have begun their holiday Operation Safe Arrival holiday road safety campaign overnight. The campaign runs from 12:01AM December 23, 2005 until 11:59PM January 2, 2006.

In an attempt to keep the number of deaths on NSW roads at a minimum police will target speeding, seatbelt, helmet and drink driving offences. According to the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority, 495 people have died on NSW roads between January 1 and December 11. This figure will surely climb over the holiday period.



A pair of NSW Police Highway patrol vehicles near Albury

The RTA has also begun double demerit points for speeding, seatbelt and helmet offences. The double demerit points will run for the same 11 day period as Operation Safe Arrival. The minimum penalty for any double demerit offence is 6 points. Provisional drivers need to be particularly mindful of these as P1 licence holders (those who have had a licence 12 months or less) can only incur 3 points. P2 licence holders (those who have held a licence for 12 to 36 months) have 6 and unrestricted licence holders have 12.

According to the RTA, 23,624 drivers in the 2003/4 holiday

season were issued with fines carrying double demerits and 2,150 motorists had their licences suspended due to speeding or exceeding their demerit point limit.

The RTA introduced double demerits in 1997 in an attempt to force drivers to be more mindful of speeding, wearing seatbelts and motorcycle helmets. Double demerit points are now introduced over each major holiday period when a large proportion of road-related deaths occur.

Other jurisdictions in Australia which have double demerit points over holiday periods are South Australia, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory.

Today in History

1777 - Christmas Island, the oldest atoll in the world, was discovered by Captain James Cook.

1865 - Confederate veterans founded the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group.

1906 - Reginald Fessenden (pictured) transmitted the first radio broadcast.

1914 - British and German soldiers interrupted World War I to celebrate Christmas, beginning the Christmas truce.

1974 - Cyclone Tracy destroyed most of Darwin, Australia.

December 24 is Christmas Eve

Quote of the Day

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.
~ "A Visit from St. Nicholas"

~

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