



Top Stories

Bali Nine ringleaders sentenced to death



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Pennsylvania man named in alleged terror plot



Michael Curtis Reynolds is suspected by the FBI of attempting to plot attacks against oil refineries in the United States. As of the moment, Reynolds has not been charged with terrorism.

Featured story

Study says people don't understand the emotional tone of emails, but think they do

People only understand the intended tone of an e-mail message correctly 56% of the time, not much better than chance, according to a recent study. But people think they've accurately interpreted the tone 90% of the time.

Wikipedia Current Events

• The House of Commons votes by 384 to 184, on a free vote, to implement a full smoking ban in all pubs and clubs in England from Summer 2007.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Kenyan Police instruct 20 leading figures not to leave the country as investigations into two corruption scandals continue. Among the people told to hand in their passports is George Saitoti whose resignation as education minister was announced by yesterday. Meanwhile, 80 Members of Parliament have demanded the resignation of Deputy President Moody Awori, who is accused of involvement in the Anglo Leasing affair.
- A top Iranian official confirms that Iran has resumed small-scale enrichment of uranium at one of its main nuclear facilities last week.
- Iran's veterinary organization said the first cases of the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu had been detected in wild swans in the Islamic Republic.
- The New York Times reveals the existence of a "destabilization plan" of Hamas, winner of the Palestinian legislative elections, so that elections will be called again, according to Israeli officials and Western diplomats. The plan which would cut all funds from the Palestinian National Authority (PA), while Israel would refuse to give back to the PA perceived taxes, and blocks movements between the West Bank and the Gaza strip. According to the New York Times, a third of the Palestinian population would suffer from the Quartet's decision to cut funds to the PA.

Wikipedia Current Events

- A moderate earthquake shakes east India, recording a 5.7-magnitude.
- Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein tells the court during the latest session of his trial that he and his seven co-accused are on hunger strike to protest at their treatment.
- The Tel Aviv Magistrates Court sentences Omri Sharon to a nine-month prison term, a nine-month suspended sentence, and a NIS 300,000 (USD 65,000) fine after he is convicted of violating political fundraising law and providing false testimony.

Man shot by Vice President suffers mild heart attack

The Hunter shot by Dick Cheney suffered a mild heart attack Tuesday due to a pellet moving to his heart. Doctors have decided to leave the pellet rather than risk surgery in the 78 year old man. They are still optimistic that Whittington will make a full recovery.

He is currently in stable condition.

Body found on a Kingwood Street in Houston

A body was found on a Kingwood Street in Houston, Texas today. Police said the unidentified man appeared to have no signs of injuries from a car, but police said there was a large amount of blood. He was taken to a local morgue for a autopsy as detectives question people in the neighbourhood on

the man's death.

The man was found lying in the middle of a intersection at 2:20 AM local time.

Israeli group announces anti-semitic cartoons contest

In response to the Iranian newspaper Hamshari's announcement of an anti-semitic cartoon contest inspired by the Jyllands Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy, an Israeli group announced its own anti-semitic cartoon contest yesterday.

From their February 13 release: Amitai Sandy (29), graphic artist and publisher of Dimona Comix Publishing, from Tel-Aviv, Israel, has followed the unfolding of the "Muhammad cartoon-gate" events in amazement, until finally he came up with the right answer to all this insanity - and so he announced today the launch of a new anti-Semitic cartoons contest - this time drawn by Jews themselves!

Mr. Sandy said, "We'll show the world we can do the best, sharpest, most offensive Jew hating cartoons ever published!" :said Sandy "No Iranian will beat us on our home turf!"

Already organizers have received mixed responses to their contest and have published a number of them, including the following: "This is a fantastic idea: A people or religion that can laugh at itself is a confident, strong and self secure. It can show the Islamic world that humor and self deprecation is a healthy psychological exercise. The one who can face his demons can overcome his weaknesses" Ash, NJ

"I know that unemployment is low in Israel, but does not justify your new venture. This will be my last

time visiting your site, and assure you, that this business will not succeed.

the next time you start a new venture, please try to focus on what good will your product deliver to anyone. in your case it only makes me sad to see Israelis like you turn against an entire nation to make an extra buck. You are a LOOSER!"

Not hesitating to set an example, the group has adopted three logos showing three anti-semitic figures. They set a deadline of March 5, 2006 but due to an unexpectedly large response are considering extending it.

Pennsylvania man named in alleged terror plot

Michael Curtis Reynolds, 47, from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is accused of trying to work with al-Qaeda, according to the FBI.

The Philadelphia Inquirer has reportedly obtained court transcripts from Reynold's Rule Five hearing, before a federal magistrate judge in Pocatello, Idaho that revealed a "convoluted plot" that also includes cyberspace intrigue, an FBI sting, and then an exchange of money in Idaho. Reynolds was represented by Federal Defender, Nick Veith, at the hearing.

According to the transcripts, FBI agents say that Reynolds was plotting to blow up the Alaska pipeline, another pipeline in Pennsylvania and a refinery in New Jersey, with a person who he thought was an al-Qaeda operative. It is also reported that he had planned an attack against Standard Oil Co. in Perth Amboy, New Jersey and Williams Refinery in Opal, Wyoming. However; the Standard Oil refinery, now Chevron does not exist anymore.

The refinery had closed more than a decade ago. All that remains in its place is an empty field. Armada Hess is the only active refinery in Perth Amboy.

So far, Reynolds has not been charged with terrorism.

However, a prosecutor in Reynolds' December hearing said that, "he tried to provide material aid to al Qaeda." The prosecutor also said the case "involves a federal offense of terrorism."

A municipal judge from Conrad, Montana, Shannen Rossmiller, 36, led the FBI to Reynolds by posing as an al-Qaeda operative. Reports say that Rossmiller was looking through terrorist websites when she came across a post by Reynolds who was seeking \$40,000 that he would use to buy fuel trucks that would blow up refineries in New Jersey, Wyoming and part of the Alaska Pipeline. After six-weeks of e-mailing each other, Rossmiller agreed to pay the money, and set up a meeting with Reynolds in Pocatello, Idaho. It is reported that after the plans were made, Rossmiller then contacted the FBI who then set up a sting operation, two months ago, against Reynolds. "I feel compelled to do what I can and I know that I have an ability to do something. I'm out for the hunt," said Rossmiller.

Rossmiller started to look through terror websites just after the September 11, terrorist attacks in NYC. She has read the Koran, studied the radical Islamist lifestyle, and learned just enough Arabic to lurk around in terrorist related chat rooms and "ensnare" the extremists. She also said that he has "assumed several the identities of more than two dozen male personae on the Internet,"

and was also part of "a large number" of cases involving the hunting of terrorists. Court records also show that Rossmiller had posed on the Internet as an Algerian terrorist to "befriend" Ryan Anderson, a Muslim convert and a member of the National Guard from the state of Washington, who wanted to hand over information to al-Qaeda on how to destroy Army tanks and humvees.

Assistant U.S. Attorney John C. Gurganus Jr. said, according to transcripts, "he (Reynolds) was doing it as a plan to disrupt governmental function, to change the government's actions in foreign countries, and to impact on the national debate about the (Iraq) war."

Reynolds denies trying to work with al-Qaeda and stated that he was "a patriot seeking to expose an al-Qaeda cell inside the United States." Philip Gelso, Reynolds's attorney, has not commented on the case.

Authorities searched Reynolds' home and took his computer as evidence, and some documents allegedly spelling out his terror plots. According to Gurganus, in e-mails on his computer, Reynolds "described what explosives should be used (in the attacks) and where they should be placed." Gurganus also told the judge that Reynolds, "knew the plots could get him the death penalty as a traitor and that he would have to leave the country immediately once they were carried out."

According to the British The Inquirer, Microsoft was issued a subpoena last month to allow the Department of Justice access to Reynolds' hotmail account.

Reynolds has been in Lackawanna County jail, held without bail, since December 5, 2005, when he was arrested about 25 miles from the Thunderbird Motel in Pocatello, Idaho for an unrelated weapons charge. He was charged with possession of an unregistered explosive device when authorities found a grenade in a duffel bag that was inside a home in Pocatello that Reynolds was staying at before he came to Idaho. The grenade charge carries a minimum sentence of three to seven years, to be served in a federal prison. On December 20, a jury indicted and charged Reynolds with two counts of unlawfully possessing hand grenades.

Reynolds also tried to blow up his parents house in North Salem, Pennsylvania in 1978. Yesterday Drew Outhouse, the North Salem Highway Superintendent and a Croton Falls Fire Commissioner, recalled that authorities were notified of a propane smell coming from the house and when they arrived, they found a device upstairs that was supposed to set a spark, but didn't because the propane ended up settling on the lowest level of the home. "I remember thinking it was right out of Rod Serling, and 'The Twilight Zone.' It was one of those situations that was just weird. You're surprised when it's someone local in (a plot such as) this. But at the same time, seeing what he was trying to do that one night, it doesn't surprise you that he could move on to something like that."

Reynolds pleaded guilty to attempted arson, a misdemeanor and menacing. He was sentenced to a conditional discharge. He has also been previously convicted of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest

and breach of the peace.

GAO reveals \$1.6 billion spent on public relations by the Bush administration in 2003-2005

A new 154-page Government Accountability Office report says 7 federal departments together spend \$1.6 billion on 343 contracts with public relations firms, advertising agencies, and media organizations, as well as individuals involved in such activities.

Congressional Democrats requested the report after several incidents surfaced in which journalists or commentators were paid to promote the Bush administrations programs, but did not disclose the financing, so called "payola". In one case, Armstrong Williams was paid \$186,000 for promotions of President Bush's No Child Left Behind law. The administrations position was that an agencies' mission includes spreading information about federal programs.

At that time, the GAO had independent objections to the ready-to-air news stories the administration's provided to TV stations in order to promote it policies. The administration claimed the burden of disclosure falls to the TV stations.

Congress has now inserted a provision into an annual spending bill requiring federal agencies to include "a clear notification" within the text or audio of a prepackaged news story that it was prepared or paid for by the government.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.) said "Careful oversight of this spending is essential given the track record of the Bush administration, which has used

taxpayer dollars to fund covert propaganda within the United States."

The seven agencies covered by the report are Commerce, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs.

The New Tribes Missions forced to leave Venezuela

In October 2005, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in a resolution gave the US-based New Tribes Missions organization 90 days to leave tribal areas of Venezuela.

Described as a fundamentalist mission and "pseudo-evangelist" a Prensa Latina report says that the members of that sect have left their settlement peacefully, "without any kind of violence or outrage and the National Armed Force occupied that huge territory of imperialist penetration". New Tribes' web site claims the group is being forced to relocate within Venezuela.

In early February The Venezuela Supreme Court handed down a preliminary decision not to suspend the effects of the November 14 resolution on the case of New Tribes Mission of Venezuela.

Trainee police officer shot in Nottingham

A policewoman in England has been shot while on a "routine" call-out.

The 23-year-old officer was with a male colleague on her way to the scene of an attempted burglary when she was confronted by a male suspect. As soon as trainee officer Rachael Bown challenged him, he pulled a firearm and shot her in the stomach before making

off.

Ms Bown is recovering in hospital where her condition is described as "stable". The incident happened just after midnight in a district of Nottingham. Her commanding officer, Chief Superintendent Marcus Beale told London-based Sky News earlier this morning that emergency surgery "looks to have gone very well and, God willing, she'll be OK."

He added: "She was on a routine call out to a burglary and it's ended up having fairly serious consequences. Thankfully, she's stable. We expect her to be in hospital for several days." PC Bown was wearing her body armour when she was shot.

Police embarrassed after car stolen from station

German police are embarrassed after a 27 year old man who they had just booked for burglary, walked out of the police station and stole an unmarked police vehicle. "It's not just unusual, it's embarrassing," said a spokesman for police in the town of Eschwege.

It is thought that the man stole the key from an officer at the station. When he was booked and released, he was observed by officers getting into the unmarked police car. The officers gave chase resulting in the man's re-arrest. Three vehicles (including the stolen police car) were damaged during the pursuit. The stolen vehicle was recovered upon arrest of its unlawful driver.

Bali Nine ringleaders sentenced to death

The ringleaders of the so-called Bali Nine were today sentenced to death by a Denpasar court. Andrew Chan received the news via translators at about 3:45pm

AEDT, and Myuran Sukumaran was sentenced at about 4:50pm AEDT. The two were charged with attempting to smuggle 8.3kg of heroin from Bali to Australia.

The Australian Federal Police have been criticised for allowing the Bali Nine to travel to Indonesia, where it was known they could face the death penalty. Yesterday two other drug mules, Renae Lawrence and Scott Rush, were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Prosecutors asked for the death penalty for both men. Chan was alleged to be the mastermind of the operation, and Myuran was alleged to be an enforcer. Chan, who claimed to have rediscovered his Christian faith, prayed for divine intervention prior to the sentence being handed down. Outside the court Indonesian protesters shouted "Death! Death!". Chan fell over after jostling with a media scrum, and Sukumaran threw a bottle of water at the media.

Donald Rothwell, a Professor of International Law at the University of Sydney, has said that, unlike countries such as Singapore, it may not be long before the two are executed.

"The Indonesian judicial system is one in which death sentences are often carried out very quickly," he said.

"So unlike the situation of Van Nguyen in Singapore, where an appeal process and a clemency process played out over quite some time, this may not be the situation in Bali."

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer told parliament today that he had made a direct request to the Indonesian government that

the death penalty not be imposed. "On the 18th of December last year, I wrote to the Indonesian Attorney-General reminding him that the Australian Government was opposed to the death sentence and we didn't want to see, in the context of the Bali nine, any of the Australians sentenced to death," he said.

In Bali the death sentence is carried out by firing squad.

Study says people don't understand the emotional tone of emails, but think they do

People only ascertain the intended tone on an e-mail message about 56% of the time, not much better than chance, according to a study led by Prof. Nicholas Epley (University of Chicago) and Prof. Justin Kruger (New York University). The research also found that people think they've correctly interpreted the tone 90% of the time.

Epley and Kruger discovered that not only were the receivers of the e-mails overconfident about their understanding of the message's tone, but the senders were as well. About 78% of the senders thought that the receiver would correctly interpret the tone of their e-mail message.

Epley explained that "People in our study were convinced they've accurately understood the tone of an e-mail message when in fact their odds are no better than chance."

He observed that "people often think the tone or emotion in their messages is obvious because they 'hear' the tone they intend in their head as they write." Kruger likened this to findings from previous research by Elizabeth Newton that people vastly

overestimated their ability to convey a tune by tapping out its rhythm. "It's impossible not to hear the song as you're tapping away," he said. "So you have a hard time separating yourself from your own perspective and realizing how impoverished the listeners' data really are."

Epley stated that similar misunderstandings of emotional tone play a major role in starting online flame wars.

The study has been published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Today in History

1898 - The USS Maine exploded and sank in Havana, Cuba, killing more than 260 people in a tragedy that precipitated the Spanish-American War.

1942 - General Tomoyuki Yamashita led the Japanese forces to capture the so called "impregnable fortress" of Singapore.

1971 - The British pound sterling and the Irish pound were decimalised on what is called Decimal Day.

1989 - The Soviet Union officially announced that all of its troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan (pictured).

2003 - Millions around the world took part in the largest mass protest movement in history against the impending invasion of Iraq.

February 15 is Flag Day in Canada, National Day in Serbia.

Quote of the Day

"I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use." ~ Galileo Galilei

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