



Top Stories

Australian governments to meet for first COAG meeting of 2006 today



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for its first meeting of 2006. On the agenda is a wide range of issues such as health, economic reform, regulation and education.

Tomb discovered in Valley of the Kings



Archaeologists have discovered a tomb, referred to as KV63, in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. It

is the first such discovery since Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Featured story

Berlin court repeals preliminary injunction against Wikimedia Germany



The Amtsgericht Berlin-Charlottenburg has repealed an injunction that it had issued in January against

Wikimedia Deutschland, the German chapter of the Wikimedia Foundation.

Wikipedia Current Events

- National Hockey League great Wayne Gretzky has denied placing any bets with an illegal sport gambling operation.
- Finance chiefs of the G8 countries meet this weekend in Moscow with energy security at the top of their agenda.
- Israel has criticised Russia's decision to invite Hamas leaders to Moscow for talks, following the militant group's victory in Palestinian elections.
- A tomb from the 18th dynasty in Egypt, dating back more than 3,300 years, has been uncovered in the famed Valley of the Kings, an ancient desert burial ground near the southern city of Luxor.
- United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan wishes editors to stop reprinting the controversial Muhammad cartoons.
- A medium-sized earthquake, registering 4.9, shook central Chile, rattling buildings, but there were no immediate reports of injuries or damages.
- The deadly strain of H5N1 avian flu has been found in wild birds in Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coast.
- Two Indonesian women from an area just east of the capital are in hospital after local tests showed they had the H5N1 bird flu virus.
- At least eight people are killed and 22 wounded by a car bomb in the southern Doura district of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad.

Wikipedia Current Events

- An atheist who sued a small-town priest for saying that Jesus Christ existed has had his case thrown out of court by a judge in Italy.

New Zealand Labour party spending in question

The New Zealand Electoral Commission has referred the Labour Party to the police for allegedly overspending NZ\$418,603 in last year's general election.

Labour asserts that the money was not spent on an election related activity.

The Electoral Commission chief executive, Dr Helena Catt says "Election expense provisions exist to help ensure a fair contest".

Catt says it is unusual for the police to investigate a party for overspending. "It's the first one that I'm aware of under MMP".

Meanwhile, election expense returns are still been sorted out. Only 13 of 22 parties met the 19th December deadline to have all returns in.

Thai ministry orders work halted on much-delayed Ongkharak reactor

According to a report by Thailand's The Nation, the Science Ministry has ordered a halt to work on the much-delayed Ongkharak reactor.

The reactor, first commissioned

from U.S. firm General Atomics in 1997 by Thailand's Office of Atomic Energy for Peace (OAP) has had prolonged delays in the project and faced threats from activists.

Despite calls in 2002 for the reactor to be completed within two years, the reported position of the government now is to seek advice from the office of the Attorney General on how to proceed. Irregularities uncovered by the State Audit Commission may lead to cancellation of the contract and legal action taken against people believed to have been involved in corruption or abuse of authority.

2006 Olympic Winter Games open in Italy

The 20th Olympic Winter Games are set to start today in Turin, Italy.

Producers of the Olympic's have promised, "rhythm, passion and speed," as an estimated 35,000 people will pile inside the stadium and nearly 2 billion will turn out for the events.

Dancers, abutting the majestic Alps, paid a tribute to seven nations, including Austria, Germany and France, in the opening ceremonies wearing green sheaths and pulling fake cows on wheels. It was to pay homage to livestock and mountain life, and so the audience could cheer both, everyone was supplied with cowbells. Dancers then brought out big white bubbles which were stuck to their heads. Bacilli, who has performed in concerts for U2 and The Rolling Stones said the balls signify snow.

Eight women, Italian actress Sophia Loren, Chilean writer Isabel Allende, American actress Susan Sarandon, Nobel Peace-prize

winner Wangari Maathai of Kenya, and three Olympic medal winners carried the Olympic flag. This was the first time ever that only women carried the flag.

At least 6,100 volunteers who worked an estimated 10,000 hours helped to organize and run the ceremonies.

Unfortunately, in the hours before the games were to start, eight cross-country skiers, a former gold medalist from Germany, and two Americans, were suspended for five days each after they failed blood tests. The tests say that they had elevated levels of hemoglobin, an enzyme within red blood cells that can increase endurance. However, the positives results could be due to the body's acclimation to mountain air, or dehydration. The American skiers are Kikkan Randall of Anchorage Alaska, and Leif Zimmermann of Bozeman, Montana.

"World Can't Wait" protesters rally outside the White House

Several thousand protesters march on the White House in the rain to deliver antiwar, anti-Bush demands.

On a rainy Saturday, February 4, 2006, several thousand protesters gathered in a corner of the Ellipse in Washington, D.C. to protest the current administration's stance on the War in Iraq and to demand that President Bush be impeached or resign as Commander-in-Chief.

Saturday's demonstration that lasted through five hours of rain ended with a march around the White House was organized by a group called World Can't Wait – Drive out the Bush Regime. The group organized a smaller rally near the Capital during the State of the Union.

Demonstrators came from as far away as Hawaii; New York sent 12 buses. However the crowd was significantly less than the 30,000 protesters that organizers had anticipated. The actual numbers were more like 2,000 to 3,000 and varied with the strength of the rain. Park Police refused to comment on the size of the crowd.

After a series of speakers that included a 96 year old great grandmother and a Georgetown law student that lead a protest against a speech given by Attorney General Gonzales ended with the dropping of a 30 foot wire effigy of Bush off the stage. The crowd which had already been in a frenzy, chanted in unison: "Bush step down! Bush step down!" After it fell, protesters kicked and cursed at the fallen mass of chicken wire and construction paper.

Some protesters got more visual and burned a mock US flag that contained corporate logos instead of stars as at least one protester yelled that the flag burners were "FBI Plants."

The rally ended with a march around the White House through closed streets escorted by the Capital Police and the Uniformed Division of the United States Secret Service. A group of ten to fifteen counter-protesters waited in front of the White House and although cursing was traded, the obvious police presence kept the scene peaceful.

Greek government's phones tapped for a year

The phones of more than 100 people including the Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis and key ministers were tapped for a period of almost a year starting

before the 2004 Olympics. The illegal wiretapping was carried out by spy software installed in phone provider Vodafone's central system and discovered when the company started receiving complaints from customers about their phone service last March. The case, as well as the government investigation that followed, became public last Thursday in the Greek press.

While the government refutes main opposition party's PASOK accusations of mishandling the investigation by keeping it secret, the identity of the culprits remains unknown, although both American and MI6 agents are widely blamed. The Greek government has said four antennae near the US embassy in Athens were used to transmit the conversations recorded. The embassy is located at approximately the center of the surveillance triangle. On Thursday approximately 800 protesters in Athens marched peacefully to the US embassy and shouted anti-CIA slogans while about 400 protesters in Thessaloniki clashed with the police, after trying to smash traffic cameras.

The death of Vodafone employee Kostas Tsalikidis contributes to the espionage-mystery nature of the case. Tsalikidis, who was Vodafone Greece's head of network design at the time, was found hanged in his Athens apartment on March 9, 2005, two days after the illegal taps had been discovered. While his death was at first ruled as suicide, his family has filed a lawsuit claiming he was murdered. The lawsuit calls for his body to be exhumated, an autopsy to be performed and his apartment investigated. A check of emails on Vodafone's server was also requested in order to locate evidence of their deletion, and the

company to give details on why they were deleted. His brother Panagiotis Tsalikidis has already given testimony quoting his brother's fiancée claiming that a few weeks before his death Tsalikidis told her that "Vodafone is in danger of closing down," and "leaving Vodafone is a life and death matter."

While the case continues to unfold, a poll shows a great majority of the Greek public believe the government has not revealed all the evidence pertaining to this case. Most also believe that foreign secret services, governments, and embassies are most likely responsible for the wiretaps.

The government has not released all the names of the people that were victims of the illegal wiretapping. Government figures that were targetted include the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, public order and justice.

Australian governments to meet for first COAG meeting of 2006 today

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), will meet in Canberra today for its first meeting of 2006. Members of COAG are the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Australian Capital and Northern Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. COAG is chaired by the Prime Minister.

On the agenda is a wide range of issues such as health, economic reform, regulation and education.

The state leaders (all of whom are members of the Australian Labor Party), met last night to develop a strategy for dealing with John Howard, Australia's Prime Minister.

Health

COAG is expected to agree on a AU\$1 Billion health package. The centrepiece of the package will be reforms to mental health care. Other elements of the package include the introduction of the national health call centre network, accelerating the implementation of a national electronic health records system, and reducing the number of disabled young people living in nursing homes

Mr Howard said yesterday "I want all of the heads of government of this country to understand it's a serious issue and the Australian public will expect no less than a coordinated genuine commitment by all of us to try and solve the problem."

Mr Howard told federal parliament yesterday part of the problem can be attributed to the closing of mental health institutions. "There is abundant evidence that that process went too far, and whilst I do not advocate and I do not believe Australia would benefit from turning back the clock to the institutions of old, nor can we as a decent society tolerate having people with mental illnesses out in the community unsupported and untreated." said Mr Howard.

The Mental Health Council of Australia's Chief Executive, John Mendoza said there needs to be a massive injection of funds into mental health care and it needs to happen quickly.

"Any Australian who has attempted to access mental health services through the public system will have found that unless they are extremely unwell, and that is a danger to themselves or the community, they probably won't

gain admission to those public mental health services, and that simply is not good enough." said Mr Mendoza.

The Prime Minister has also accused cannabis of playing a role in Australia's mental health problems. "I think we are paying a dreadfully heavy price for the abuse of what was so called recreation and socially acceptable drugs despite the clear evidence, unaccepted until a few years ago, that these things were doing massive damage within our community," Mr Howard told parliament yesterday.

"I will ask them (the state premiers) to agree with me that part of the solution to the mental health problem is a tougher line on marijuana, and I imagine they will agree with me," said Mr Howard.

Mr Howard signalled that he supported the move in New South Wales to increase penalties for cannabis, especially hydroponic cannabis which the NSW government claims is stronger. "I welcome the change in direction of many of the states," he said.

The Mental Health Council of Australia has warned the government of over-estimating the role of cannabis in mental health. John Mendoza told ABC "I don't think we should overstate the role of cannabis in the nation's mental health crisis. It is a factor, but it is not the reason that we now face a mental health crisis."

"The real reason is that governments collectively have under-funded the investment in community services for well over a decade and hence we have a large unmet need in the community." said Mr Mendoza.

The national health call centre network was announced by the federal government in January as a means of reducing the number of people going to hospital emergency departments for treatment. Under the plan call centres would be set up with trained nurses who could advise people on the best cause of action to take for a wide variety of health problems.

Under the health package the introduction of an electronic health records system known as HealthConnect will be fast tracked. Governments promise that HealthConnect will improve the quality and safety of health services by providing timely and accurate medical history on a patient. Participation in HealthConnect will be voluntary and patients may withdraw at any time.

Education
COAG will also discuss setting up a national inquiry into early childhood education. The inquiry is expected to explore the possibility of free access to pre-school education. COAG documents warn "By the time Australian children enter formal education, they have very different levels of preparedness for life and learning,"

"Australia's investment in early childhood development before school entry remains low by international standards." says the documents.

COAG is also to explore how to implement a system to ensure trade qualifications gained in one state can be used in another. Under the current system, the majority of trade qualifications gained through state technical colleges are not recognised in

other states. Only the small percentage of courses which award certificates under the Australian Qualifications Framework are recognised nationally.

The federal government has also indicated that it wants \$11 million spent over four years ease skills shortages in trades such as plumbing and electrical. Federal opposition education spokeswoman, Jenny Macklin said "Eleven million over four years will have little or no impact on the raging skills crisis which is hurting Australian businesses and families,"

"It will provide just 900 training (places). The Australian Industry Group has predicted that by 2010 we will need 100,000 extra skilled tradespeople if we are to address the skills crisis."

Economic Reform and Regulation
The topic of economic reform is expected to arouse debate at the meeting today as the federal, state and territory governments argue about how to fund it.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has been one of the key figures behind the plan which has been worked on by state and federal officials over the past past six months.

From 1995 until 2004, the federal government made payments to state and territory governments for reaching milestones in deregulating their economies. If a state failed to meet a required reform as determined by the National Competition Council payments were withheld until the milestone was met. John Howard abolished the scheme stating that the states and territories already received enough revenue through the GST.

The states are said to be arguing that the federal government should be sharing the revenue achieved through their reforms.

It is expected the plan will fail to reach agreement and will have to be considered by a working party.

Federal treasurer Peter Costello has said that economic reform should be bought about by abolishing eight state and territory port and export authorities and create a single national regulatory authority.

The treasurer also indicated he would like to see utility regulation become a federal responsibility.

"Australia would be better served if it could get a uniform system of regulation in relation to ports and port access, in relation to access regimes generally, and in relation to utilities," Mr Costello said.

Tomb discovered in Valley of the Kings

Archaeologists have discovered a tomb, referred to as KV63, in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. It is the first such discovery since Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The discovery was made by a team from the University of Memphis. Zahi Hawass, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities said in a statement that five intact sarcophagi that all contained mummies and 20 large storage jars that were sealed with pharaonic seals had been recovered.

American archaeologist Kent Weeks, who was not part of the team but had seen photographs of the site, told the Associated Press that "It could be the tomb of a king's wife or son, or of a priest or

court official". The find refutes the long held belief that the Valley of the Kings has little left to discover. According to Weeks: "It's ironic. A century ago, people said the Valley of the Kings is exhausted, there's nothing left," he said. "Suddenly Carter found Tutankhamun. So then they said, 'Now there's nothing to find.' Then we found KV5. Now we have KV63."

KV63 is located in the area between KV10 (Amenmesse) and KV62 (Tutankhamun), in the very centre of the Valley's eastern branch and near the main crossroads of the network of paths traversed by thousands of tourists every day. The tomb was found at a depth of some three metres beneath the ground. The burial site is believed to date from the latter portion of the 18th dynasty (ca. 14th century BC), but the occupants have not yet been identified.

Today in History

- 1873 - King Amadeo I of Spain abdicated, proclaimed at the Cortes Generales that Spanish people were "ungovernable," and left the country.
- 1919 - Friedrich Ebert (pictured) became the first Reichspräsident of the Weimar Republic.
- 1929 - The first Lateran treaty was signed, establishing Vatican City as an independent sovereign enclave within Italy.
- 1963 - The Beatles began recording for their first album, Please Please Me.
- 1979 - Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini seized power in Iran, and eventually became the Supreme Leader of the Islamic republic.

February 11 is National Foundation Day in Japan

Quote of the Day

"When writing about

transcendental issues, be transcendently clear."
~ René Descartes

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
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