



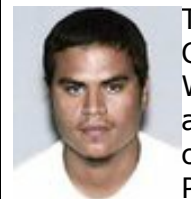
Top Stories

Israeli PM Sharon rushed to hospital



Ariel Sharon, 77, the Israeli Prime Minister has been admitted to Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem after suffering what doctors are calling a serious stroke.

U.S. Supreme Court orders Padilla to civilian custody



The U.S. Supreme Court ordered Wednesday that accused "enemy combatant" José Padilla be transferred

from military to civilian custody, in order to face charges of supporting terrorism. This latest move comes after much criticism from civil rights groups, several court rulings, and a request from the Bush administration.

Featured story

Australia records hottest year on record



According to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, 2005 was the hottest year

since since reliable, widespread temperature observations became available in 1910. The Bureau say the result is more evidence of global climate change, and an indicator of things to come.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Peru recalls Carlos Urrutia, the ambassador to Venezuela, after Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez praises Peruvian presidential hopeful Ollanta Humala for his left-leaning policies. A spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry stated, "There are concerns of political meddling in Peru's electoral affairs and comments by President Chavez were out of place."
- The leader of Britain's Liberal Democrat Party, Kennedy, admits being treated for alcohol-related problems for the last 18 months but has not drunk for the last two months. The revelation, open knowledge in political and media circles for some time, comes amidst mounting criticism of his leadership. He calls a party leadership election, in which he will stand.
- At least 130 people have died following insurgent attacks on the Iraqi cities of Kerbala and Ramadi.
- At least 15 people have died following the collapse of a five story hotel in Mecca. The death toll is expected to rise. Most of the dead are Arabs from neighbouring nations who had made their way for Hajj.
- Hewlett-Packard, a computer manufacturing giant, and a private equity firm, the Blackstone Group, may bid for Computer Sciences Corporation, according to anonymous sources cited by The Wall Street Journal.

Microsoft releases emergency patch for WMF exploit

Breaking with the scheduled Patch Tuesday cycle of bugfix releases, Microsoft has released an emergency patch for the flaw in Windows Metafiles that allows a remote compromise of a computer.

The effectiveness of this patch has not yet been confirmed.

Microsoft has made available patches for all currently supported versions of their Windows operating system. However, the Windows 98, Windows 98 Second Edition, and Windows Millenium Edition versions have not – at this time – had patches issued for this vulnerability. According to Microsoft, these versions contain the vulnerable software component but, "the vulnerability is not critical because an exploitable attack vector has not been identified that would yield a Critical severity rating for these versions."

Current versions of Windows, including Windows XP and Windows Server 2003, depending on configuration, may prompt users to download or install this update automatically for those computers currently connected to the Internet. This is the preferred method of protecting your computer from this vulnerability.

Other users are advised to visit Microsoft Windows Update to obtain this security patch, if they are unable to obtain the patch or are unsure whether they have it.

Previous methods of protection included unregistering shimgvw.dll to disable handling of Windows MetaFiles, as per Microsoft's security advisory. Since it does not correct the underlying problem, it is unlikely that this method is recommended any longer.

Other methods included Ilfak Guilfanov's unofficial patch, which was not advised by Microsoft, but served as a measure to mitigate the immediate effects until an official patch was released. Guilfanov has now noted that the patch is no longer needed.

VP Cheney role surfaces in U.S. domestic spying

United States Vice President Dick Cheney, in a speech to the Heritage Foundation on Wednesday, admitted to a key role in the domestic spying program. In a ringing defense of the warrantless eavesdropping authorized by President Bush, Cheney said he had "personally presided" over most briefings of selected Capitol Hill lawmakers about the program, which was begun in response to the 9/11 attacks and after Congress passed a September 2001 resolution authorizing the use of force to combat terrorism.

The National Security Agency (NSA) has been monitoring numerous telephone calls and emails, under condition that one end of the message must be overseas, the White House has admitted. In addition, the New York Times has reported that the agency has been conducting a widespread data-mining operation of such messages, hoping to identify patterns that might tip off the U.S. government to terrorist operations. Bush quickly backed up the decision by Michael

Hayden, then NSA chief and now deputy national intelligence director, repeatedly authorizing the NSA to conduct warrantless searches, according to published reports.

Cheney vigorously defended the program, arguing that it could have prevented the 9/11 attacks, though a Washington Post report of his speech notes flaws in his reasoning. Cheney avoided mention of words such as "warrantless" and gave no explanation of why the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court, which normally issues national security warrants, needed to be bypassed. He asserted however that "the civil liberties of the American people are unimpeded" by the "wartime measure."

Cheney may face pressure by some in Congress, such as Republican Senator Arlen Specter, who has pledged to investigate the eavesdropping program, to testify on Capitol Hill, though Cheney is known to be a major proponent of executive privilege and may well resist. The vice president, anticipating a "spirited debate" on the necessity of the program, said the leak of "highly classified" data to the NYTimes had been a "clear detriment to our national security."

The Justice Department launched a probe last week to seeking the source of who leaked information about the secretive program. No report has emerged that the Justice Department is making a formal inquiry into possible illegalities that might have occurred on the part of the NSA or White House. Many in Congress are interested in this point, as some see this surveillance of U.S. citizens as a violation of their Fourth Amendment right guarding

against unreasonable searches.

The Justice Department head and former White House counsel, Alberto Gonzales, has defended the NSA program as legal and constitutional.

Deaths on South African roads at 1215 for December 2005

According to the South African government's Department of Transport, the number of fatalities on the country's roads during December 2005 was 1,215. This is compared with 1,234 the previous year, where the total number of deaths in traffic accidents was 10,530.

Department of Transport spokeswoman, Collen Msibi, stated that 512 of the fatalities were pedestrians, 414 passengers, and 289 drivers. 2005 saw the number of vehicles on South Africa's roads rise by nearly half a million to just under eight million with 779,000 new drivers adding to the dangers on the country's roads.

"To deal with this high level of unsafety, traffic authorities will increase the number of patrol vehicles on the road, law enforcement officers and unmarked vehicles to do more sport checks and roadblocks," Msibi said.

"Our analysis has revealed that most accidents are preceded by offences such as ignoring road signs, driving drunk, speeding, vehicles cutting in front of others, driving defective vehicles and fatigue."

The road toll in South Africa is similar to that of South Korea, Mexico, Japan and Thailand. However, except for South Korea these countries have significantly

larger populations.

The worst country in the world for deaths in road traffic accidents, is currently accepted to be China. Figures released for 2002 reveal that 250,007 people were killed in that year.

The South African government have acknowledged the problem since 2001. At that time they launched their "Arrive Alive" campaign, targeting vehicle condition, driver fitness, speeding and drink driving.

Teen post officer hides 400 New Year cards in Japanese snow

Japan Post apologized yesterday after an eighteen year old school student, employed part-time to deliver New Year postcards (known as nengajō), had instead discarded 430 of them along with 170 other postal documents in the snow.

The papers, letters, and postcards -- many hand-written -- were damaged as a result. He had also reportedly considered hiding the cards at his house or taking them to a vacant lot.

"Since there were too many and it seemed a tiresome [job] for me, I hid them", said the boy to his bosses at Obanazawa-city, Yamagata Prefecture Post Office, who enforced disciplinary penalties and said they will pursue legal charges.

The issue started on January 1st when dozens of local residents started complaining to the Obanazawa Post Office that they hadn't received their traditional and regular New Year cards. Yesterday, the post office released their apology to citizens and the media after discovering that the

boy had hidden more than 600 postal documents, including 429 New Year postcards, which weren't delivered to their intended recipients.

Australian Labor Party announces new Climate Change Policy

The Labor Party of Australia has today launched "Our Drowning Neighbours", a Pacific Climate Change strategy. The strategy was announced at 11am today, at Parliament House, Canberra, by Bob Sercombe MP (Shadow Minister for Pacific Island Affairs and Overseas Aid) and Anthony Albanese MP (Shadow Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Water).

Senator Bob Brown of the Australian Greens party welcomed aspects of the statement but suggested that the policy as stated was weak and pointed out that Labor had voted against Greens Senator Christine Milne's motion calling for recognition of Pacific climate change refugees just two months previously.

Turkish teenager dies from bird flu

A 14 year old Turkish male has died from bird flu in Turkey. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is most likely the teenager died from the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus.

The teenager's sister has also been infected with another sibling also suspected to have the virus. Eight other people, mostly from the same family have been hospitalized in the city of Van, Turkey with flu-like symptoms.

The children were from Dogu Beyazit, a farming town in eastern

Turkey. It is believed that the children raised poultry on a small farm and may have been in contact with sick birds. The family also ate diseased poultry.

The young male was originally thought to have died from a pneumonia related infection. Later tests revealed that the male had in fact died from bird flu.

According to Huseyin Avni Sahin, the head doctor of the hospital in Van where the teenager was treated, "(The boy) died of the H5N1 strain of bird flu". Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag gave no specific details and said samples had been sent to the WHO and Britain for more tests.

If the teenager is confirmed to have had H5N1, it would be the first death from H5N1 in Europe.

Huseyin Avni Sahin has requested more ventilators to treat the ill people.

While H5N1 remains difficult for humans to contract, authorities fear it may mutate into a form that is passable among humans. Such a mutation could kill millions of people around the globe.

13 dead when roof crashes over ice-skating ring

This is an excerpt translation of a text found on the German wikipedia site, with an update.

Bad Reichenhall, Germany. The roof over the local ice and tennis court crashed shortly after the end of the official skating time on 2 Jan 05, at about 16.50 hrs. At the time, there were about 50 people inside, mostly families with children. By 10 pm, five had been found dead, one child among them. 20 to 25 people have been

injured, just as many are missing.

The reason for the cave-in of the roof was most likely massive snowfalls. Earlier that afternoon, measurements had been taken to determine its stability. Icehockey training had been cancelled for that day. Continuing snowfalls hinder the rescue efforts.

Update on 4 January, 15:42 GMT:
So far, 14 bodies have been found.

Today in History

1661 - Thomas Venner and the Fifth Monarchists unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of London from the newly restored government of Charles II.

1838 - Samuel Morse (pictured) successfully tested the electrical telegraph for the first time.

1907 - Maria Montessori opened her first school and daycare center for working class children in Rome.

1995 - A suspicious fire in a Manila flat led to the unfoiling of Oplan Bojinka, a precursor to the September 11, 2001 attacks.
January 06 is Epiphany (Western Christianity)

Quote of the Day

In the future days which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way — everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want... everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear... anywhere in the world. That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.

~ Franklin Delano Roosevelt

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