



Top Stories

"No H5N1 virus" found in blood tests of suspected human Bird Flu cluster

Preliminary tests performed on samples taken from six villagers in the Kabanjahe District of Sumatra in Indonesia have tested negative for the deadly H5N1 Avian Flu virus.

FDA to move on approval of over-the-counter sale of "Plan B" birth control

The US drugs regulator has announced that it will work to approve over-the-counter sale of the emergency contraceptive pill Plan B after the confirmation of the FDA Commissioner nominee stalled at the Senate over the matter.

Featured story

Citywide strike being discussed in Buffalo, N.Y.

The Buffalo News is reporting that leaders of unions representing city employees in Buffalo, New York, met on Wednesday to discuss a possible 'citywide strike.' If the unions decided on a strike, firefighters, police officers, teachers and many other city employees would not show up for work.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Four US soldiers charged with murdering three detainees in Iraq smiled before shooting them, a military court has heard from a fellow soldier.

Wikipedia Current Events

- In the centre and south of the country, Shiites waved Iraqi flags and chanted "Death to America! Death to Israel!" as they boarded convoys of buses bound for Baghdad's Sadr City. These and other Shiite protesters were summoned to the capital by cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to protest against Israel's attacks on Lebanon. The protest is timed to begin after Friday prayers.
- The top US commander in the Middle East, Gen John Abizaid, has said Iraq could move toward civil war if the sectarian violence is not stopped.
- Civil war is a more likely outcome in Iraq than democracy, Britain's outgoing ambassador in Baghdad has warned Tony Blair in a confidential memo.
- Jewish organisations have denounced a declaration made by French foreign minister Philippe Douste-Blazy who said while visiting Beirut on Monday that Tehran was "a stabilising element in the Middle East."
- Tropical Storm Chris weakens and is now expected not to become a hurricane.
- Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko nominates his political rival Viktor Yanukovich to become prime minister.
- Clashes between Sri Lanka's army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam escalates into the worst violence since they agreed a cease-fire in 2002.

Hezbollah leader both threatens Tel Aviv and offers ceasefire

Hizbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said in a taped 45 minute televised speech the group would target Tel Aviv if Israel attacked central Beirut. Nasrallah confirmed for the first time that Hizbollah has longer-range missiles capable of hitting Tel Aviv 130 km (80 miles) from the border. "If you bomb our capital Beirut, we will bomb the capital of your usurping entity... We will bomb Tel Aviv."

Nasrallah also offered his first gesture toward ceasefire. "Any time you decide to stop your campaign against our cities, villages, civilians and infrastructure, we will not fire rockets on any Israeli settlement or city," "The only choice before you is to stop your aggression and turn to negotiations to end this folly."

Nasrallah said he held President Bush responsible for the war in Lebanon and claimed the U.S. was blocking the path to a cease-fire. "Lebanon will never be pro-American or pro-Israeli. Lebanon will not be part of the 'new Middle East' that Bush and Condoleezza Rice want,"

The statement was broadcast on Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV and on all other Lebanese and Arab satellite channels and parts of the speech was sent on Israeli television channels.

A highly-positioned IDF officer said

Israel will retaliate harshly against an attack on Tel Aviv and will destroy the entire infrastructure in Lebanon according to Channel One's Mabat news program.

David Baker, an official in the Prime Minister's Office said today "The Israeli government, along with the Israeli people are fully determined to break this Hezbollah threat and to restore quiet to Israel's north. We will seek and pursue Hezbollah without relenting and we will put an end to these murderous attacks,"

Though the official position of the Israeli government do not support a cease fire between Israel and Hizbollah the leader of the Degel HaTorah political party as well as the ultra-Orthodox Lithuanian community in Israel expressed his support of a cease fire. Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv said recently "the decision makers must take into account the position of the world nations. They shouldn't ignore or take lightly the ideas raised by other nations. If the United States raises solutions that could bring about the end of the war and save Jewish lives, they should be heeded. No offer or idea should be dismissed offhand. We mustn't anger the nations of the world."

Capitol Hill fries and toast French again

With an absence of fanfare, the foodstuffs renamed three years ago to "Freedom fries" and "Freedom toast" have reverted to their previous names of "French fries" and "French toast" respectively, for food service of the United States Capitol and White House.

In March 2003, House Representatives Bob Ney of Ohio and Walter B. Jones of North

Carolina instituted changing food references of "French" to "Freedom" as a propaganda response to the refusal of France to participate in the U.S.-initiated invasion of Iraq in 2003. Calling great public attention to the name change on March 11th of that year, Ney said, "This action today is a small but symbolic effort to show the strong displeasure of many on Capitol Hill with the actions of our so-called ally, France." At the time Ney chaired the House Committee on House Administration, which controls those cafeterias.

Currently, Rep. Vernon J. Ehlers of Michigan chairs the House Administration Committee, and his spokesman has responded to the return of French fries and French toast with: "Officially the committee has no comment on the matter. I really don't see how this is a story."

FDA to move on approval of over-the-counter sale of "Plan B" birth control

The United States Food and Drug Administration has announced that it is moving forward in approving over-the-counter (OTC) sale of the emergency contraceptive pill, "Plan B" to women above 18 years of age. The delayed approval of this drug has been raised in the Senate confirmation hearings for President Bush's nominee for the head of the FDA, Dr. Andrew C. von Eschenbach.

Emergency contraceptives, also known as "morning-after pills" are used to prevent an unintended pregnancy, after unprotected intercourse has occurred. They usually contain high doses of the same drugs that are used in regular contraceptive pills.

While they are considered as

contraceptives by the medical establishment and by law, and classified as such by the FDA, some abortion opponents object to ECs as they believe that they constitute abortion. Some groups object to emergency contraception believing that it encourages sexual exploitation of young girls and some religious conservatives object to it as they believe that it promotes promiscuous behavior. Proponents of its use contend that it is merely a form of contraception, and point out that other forms, such as condoms or birth-control pills are widely used and that its use serves an important purpose, in cases where other contraceptives have failed (eg. a condom is torn) or to prevent conception in a rape victim. Approval for OTC sale would make the drug more easily available, which is considered important as the drug must be taken within 72 hours of intercourse to be effective.

The FDA's approval process for the Plan B pills, which contain the drug Levonorgestrel and are manufactured by Duramed, a subsidiary of Barr Laboratories has been mired in controversy for many years now. Last year, the FDA rejected the manufacturer's request to approve the pill for OTC sale, citing concerns over "potential behavioral implications for younger adolescents". The decision was criticised by advocates of EC as being based on political considerations rather than scientific reasons. The Government Accountability Office, a congressional watchdog also faulted the decision process. The FDA has also revised the minimum age of customers from 16 to 17 to now, 18.

Currently, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Committee is holding hearings on the confirmation of the FDA Commissioner nominee, Dr. von Eschenbach. Senators Patty Murray(D) and Hillary Clinton(D) have held up the approval pending progress on the pill's approval process. Plan B was endorsed by a F.D.A. committee three years ago but had been denied approval for OTC sale by higher officials in the FDA. During the nomination of the last FDA Commissioner, Dr. Lester M. Crawford, Senators raised the issue and went ahead with the nomination after getting assurances that the drug's approval would be given in a timely manner. The deadlines set then were not met.

Senator Clinton was reported as saying: "Like so much of this government in the past five and a half years, it has been turned into a political football, and you're on the field. This is not just about Plan B. Once we start politicizing the F.D.A. there is no stopping. It is essential that we draw a line, and we are drawing a line right here."

In the confirmation hearings, Dr. Von Eschenbach said he would not take political orders on scientific matters. "No one told me what I could or should do," he said.

The FDA statement said that its latest decision was to approve OTC sale was "the result of a thoughtful and comprehensive scientific and public policy process undertaken by the Agency to resolve the novel and significant issues presented by the Sponsor's amended application."

"No H5N1 virus" found in blood tests of suspected human Bird Flu cluster

Preliminary tests performed on samples taken from six villagers in

the Kabanjahe District of Sumatra in Indonesia have tested negative for the deadly H5N1 Avian Flu virus.

"Investigations by the ministry of health lab and Namru, too, on August 2 and 3 on all specimens collected from the suspected cases in Kabanjahe district came up negative," said Indonesia's health minister, Siti Fadilah Supari.

Final test results are expected in at least seven days from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. "The World Health Organization (WHO) requires human samples to be sent to one of WHO's six collaborative centres. So, we only need to send them to CDC Atlanta as it has worked with the U.S. NAMRU-2 lab here," added Supari.

Supari also stated that all individuals are suffering from the "common flu."

"Big Box" Ordinance in Chicago

This Chicago city council has passed an ordinance requiring retailers such as Target, Home Depot, and others to pay a higher wage than the state minimum and offer benefits to their employees within Chicago city limits. The mayor of Chicago, Richard M. Daley, opposes the ordinance, though he has yet to state whether or not he intends to exercise his veto power. Because of the ordinance, Target has already put on hold the building of one store in Chicago's south side and other new developments are in jeopardy.

The ordinance applies to stores of at least 90,000 square feet operated by companies with more than \$1 billion in annual sales. Starting in July of 2007, employees of these stores have a

minimum wage \$9.25 per hour and \$1.50 per hour in benefits. By 2010, this will rise to \$10 and \$3, respectively. After 2010, the increases will be tied to the cost of living.

Citywide strike being discussed in Buffalo, N.Y.

The Buffalo News is reporting that leaders of unions representing city employees in Buffalo, New York, met on Wednesday to discuss a possible 'citywide strike.' If the unions decided on a strike, firefighters, police officers, teachers and many other city employees would not show up for work.

The News is reporting that employees are upset about the wage-freeze which was put into effect when the Control Board took control of the city's finances 27 months ago. Some employees even call the wage freeze "working class genocide."

"Genocide of the working class is also illegal," president of the Police Benevolent Association, Robert P. Meegan Jr., said to reporters when told that a strike would be illegal, after the meeting.

"We don't expect to see any job actions with the bargaining units directly under the city administration. The fact that their legal counsel wouldn't let [unions] comment any further speaks for itself," said mayor of Buffalo, Byron W. Brown in reference to New York state's Taylor Law which makes striking illegal.

Members of the Control Board have refused to comment to the press about the option to strike.

A lawsuit has been filed by the Police Benevolent Association's union which would allow workers

to strike if a judge grants permission to do so.

New Zealand policeman charged with drunk driving

Taranaki, New Zealand policeman, Constable Jonathan Erwood, has been charged with drunk driving after responding to a double fatality emergency call on July 9, his day off. He had been giving the driver first aid and then after 20 minutes at the scene another police officer turned up and breathalysed him.

He appeared in court today and entered no plea to the charges laid against him.

He was then taken to the police station and undertook an elected blood test, which he failed. The limit is 80-milligrams per 100-millilitres and Erwood had 106-milligrams of alcohol per 100-millilitres.

The crash was between Taranaki and Waikato, which is on State Highway 3.

Supporters of Erwood said he had no choice but to go to the scene of the crash.

Greg O'Conner, Police Association President, said that he does not condone drink driving, but these are exceptional circumstances, adding "The association will be actively advocating that the officer should keep his job."

Today in History

- 1578 - King Sebastian I disappeared in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, leading to a dynastic crisis in Portugal.
- 1790 - A newly passed tariff act in the United States established the Revenue Cutter Service.
- 1914 - World War I: Adhering to the terms in the 1839 Treaty of

London, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany in response to the German invasion of Belgium.

1964 - Gulf of Tonkin Incident: Two destroyers of the U.S. Navy were reportedly attacked by North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin.

1983 - A coup d'état led by Blaise Compaoré made Thomas Sankara President of Upper Volta.

Quote of the Day

If you divide suffering and dross, you may

Diminish till it is consumed away; If you divide pleasure and love and thought,

Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not

How much, while any yet remains unshared...

~ Percy Bysshe Shelley ~

Word of the Day

haunch; n

The hips, buttocks and upper thigh of a human or primate.

Wikipedia Current Events

8 Israeli civilians are killed and at least 28 wounded as more than 150 rockets hit Israeli towns. All 27 civilian Israeli fatalities in the ongoing conflict were killed by Hezbollah rocket attacks, which have caused no military fatalities.

Israel resumes bombing Beirut.

The IDF investigation into the attack on Qana that killed a number of civilians has been completed. It states that the IDF was not aware that there were civilians in the building and assumed that they had evacuated. The IDF also blamed Hezbollah for using civilians as human shields, and pointed out that over 150 rockets have been fired from the Qana area since the current conflict began.

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