



Top Stories

Canadian federal elections underway



The last polls in the Canadian election have closed in BC, and so far reporting polls are indicating a Conservative lead, which would end a 12 year long Liberal Government in Canada.

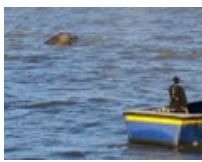
Ford Motor Company cutting 30,000 jobs by 2012



A phased-in cut back will eliminate 20 to 25% of the car maker's work force and close production plants in a major restructuring plan.

Featured story

London whale dies



A Northern Bottlenose whale died at approximately 19:00 GMT in London on Saturday despite rescue efforts.

Wikipedia Current Events

- An archeological expedition from Johns Hopkins University uncovers a statue of Queen Tiye, wife of Pharaoh Amenhotep III and mother of Akhenaten, at the temple complex at Karnak.
- Kuwait emir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah has agreed to abdicate his position.

Wikipedia Current Events

- After its brakes fail, a train crashes near Bioče, a village nine miles northeast of Podgorica in Montenegro, killing at least 39 and injuring more than 130 people, in the country's worst train disaster.
- Another case of mad cow disease has been confirmed in Canada but officials don't expect international borders to close to Canadian beef as a result.
- U.N. says eight Guatemalan special forces soldiers deployed as U.N. peacekeepers in eastern Congo were killed and five wounded in a battle with Ugandan rebels.
- A collapsing five-storey building in River Road, Nairobi, Kenya, kills at least eight people and buries dozens more. Rescuers used their bare hands to dig through the rubble.
- Azerbaijan has started supplying Russian natural gas to Georgia, the Georgian gas company says, helping compensate for a fuel cutoff caused by explosions in southern Russian pipelines that brought a new energy crisis to the region this weekend.
- The U.S. Supreme Court rejects an appeal from RIM, which had asked it to reverse a lower-court ruling that found its BlackBerry wireless email device in violation of patents held by NTP, Inc., a Virginia patent-holding firm. The case now moves to a federal district court in Virginia.

Greenpeace, Sea Shepherds end Southern Ocean whaling protest

Anti-whaling activists are heading home after a month of pestering the Japanese whaling fleet near Antarctica. With dwindling food and fuel supplies, the Greenpeace ships Arctic Sunrise and Esperanza are heading for Cape Town. The Sea Shepherd's Farley Mowat has also left the area due to a refuelling cancellation.

The three ships were in the Whale Sanctuary where the controversial Japanese whaling fleet continue to hunt and kill hundreds of Minke whales, including the endangered Fin whales - for what Japan calls "lethal scientific research."

Greenpeace say they will now switch the focus of the campaign to shed light on the corporate entities behind the commercial whaling industry. Greenpeace New Zealand whales campaigner, Pia Mancia, said the two ships exposed the reality of the Japanese commercial whaling operation to the world. She said: "it is now time to focus action on those controlling the whaling fleet."

Greenpeace Southern Ocean Expedition Leader Shane Rattenbury said, "Logistically we cannot remain in the Southern Ocean any longer, but this certainly isn't the last you'll hear of us... We now need the public to focus their attention on the corporates linked to the commercial whaling."

"For a month now we have dogged, delayed and disrupted the whaling fleet in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, and have no doubt that they have fallen far behind in their bid to slaughter 935 minke whales and 10 endangered fin whales. It is our hope that this struggle will inspire people to help us defend whales, so that it goes down in history as the last time the peaceful silence in the Sanctuary is broken by the sound of a grenade-tipped harpoon," Mr Rattenbury said.

Japan has welcomed Greenpeace's decision to leave the Southern Ocean. Hideki Moronuki from Japan's Fisheries Agency is pleased the whaling mission will no longer be obstructed: "Although Greenpeace say that they're activities are peaceful, their activities are really dangerous and illegal," he said.

Protesters spent much of their time in the Southern Ocean in inflatable Zodiac boats, placing themselves precariously between harpoons and whales. They escaped serious injury when the Japanese allegedly rammed their vessel, and when a protester was pulled overboard by a harpoon rope. Activists were also blasted out of boats by water cannons.

The incidents caused slanging matches between Greenpeace and Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research, both arguing they had evidence the other was at fault. The Japanese say their whale cull is scientific research and that they will continue their whaling.

Greenpeace Expedition Leader Shane Rattenbury has defended the risks taken by activists during the protests. "We feel it's been a justifiable risk somebody had to come down here and do

something, politics and diplomacy have failed." he said.

Japan says it's too early to tell what effect Greenpeace has had on its current research mission. The Japan Whaling Association (JWA), which promotes and protects Japan's whaling culture says, "The moratorium on commercial whaling is an anomaly."

Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) says the whale research programs are conducted in accordance with the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

The ICR say they "do not, in any way, involve illegal whaling... under the IWC's no waste rules the by-products of the research program, including whale meat, are required so far as practicable to be processed. It is this aspect of the program which is often inaccurately sensationalised as illegal commercial whaling, reads a statement on their website.

A second protest group - The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society - has also left the Southern Ocean. Their ship, the Farley Mowat is also headed for Cape Town. Captain Paul Watson said: "Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd together have completed the most intensive and ambitious campaign ever mounted against Antarctic whaling activities. For 15 days, whales were prevented from being killed."

Captain Watson said he made the decision to stay in the Southern Oceans for as long as possible to continue to chase the "illegal Japanese whaling fleet across the bottom of the world," he said. "After a 4,000 kilometre chase, the Farley Mowat had reached its

limit."

The Sea Shepherds had made arrangements to refuel from a tanker scheduled to supply a fishing fleet near the French Kergulen Islands. However, the South African company supplying the tanker cancelled the tanker rendezvous, citing extreme weather conditions.

"At that point, there was no choice," said Captain Watson. "We were 2600 miles from the nearest port... We had to drop out of the chase and make for South Africa. We had no safety margin, in fact, we were short of fuel. The figures were ominous. Our chase suddenly became a race to survive."

After fuel conservation measures paid off the Farley Mowat is expected to make it to Cape Town. "We have just completed the longest voyage that this ship has made in its entire 48-year career," said 1st Officer Alex Cornelissen.

Whilst the Sea Sheperds and Greenpeace were not officially working together, 1st Officer Alex Cornelissen of the Farley Mowat said, "we believe we were working in cooperation with ...(Greenpeace). We had different roles, different tactics, and different strategies but the bottom line is that we were both opposing illegal whaling by Japan."

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society says it will return to the Southern Ocean next year with a another, faster vessel to confront the Japanese whaling fleet. The Farley Mowat may also return to Antarctica as a secondary confrontation vessel.

The whale hunting season will continue until the middle of March. Greenpeace say they targeted this

particular hunt because Japan had decided to double its quota of minke whales this year in the internationally recognised Southern Ocean whale sanctuary.

"This is supposed to be a whale sanctuary and the Japanese government is the only one in the world which is defying the ban on whaling here," Rattenbury said. "Unfortunately so far we have seen 123 whales killed or brought back to the mother ship."

The Japanese Institute of Cetacean Research has a quota of 935 minke whales and 10 Fin whales. Fin whales are the second biggest animal on the planet, after the Blue whale. Greenpeace say they saw none killed during their actions. "So far we have only seen minkes slaughtered, we have seen no fin whales being killed," Rattenbury said.

The Greenpeace ships are expected to arrive in Cape Town around February 5th. The Sea Shepherd ship Farley Mowat is expected to arrive in Cape Town on January 25th 2006.

Ford Motor Company cutting 30,000 jobs by 2012

American-base car manufacturer, Ford Motor Company, the second-largest in America behind General Motors will cut 30,000 jobs and 14 plants as part of a restructuring plan to relieve Ford after a \$1.6 billion (USD) loss last year in North American sales.

The plan, called "Way Forward", the brainchild of Ford's Chief Executive Officer, William Clay Ford Jr. is to end Ford's North American losses by 2008. To accomplish this 30,000 jobs which make up 20 to 25 percent of Ford's North American workforce of 122,000 people will be cut and

14 plants will be closed in order to bring Ford's production capacity in line with demand.

By the end of this year, the Atlanta and St. Louis plants will be closed. Atlanta makes the Ford Taurus sedan, which is being phased out. The St. Louis plant is one of two plants that manufactures the Ford Explorer, whose sales had a 29% decline in 2005. It will also close it's Wixom, Michigan plant, Batavia Transmission in Ohio the Windsor Casting plant in Ontario which was previously announced by Ford that it was to be closed after contract negotiations with the Canadian Auto Workers union.

The plant in St. Thomas, Ontario plant will have one shift cut from it. The plant makes the Crown Victoria and Grand Marquis cars. On this cut of the one shift, Whitey MacDonald, chairperson of Local 1520, Canadian Auto Workers union said "There is alot of anger here today, there is no doubt about it. Any time a plant goes to one shift, it puts them in limbo. This car has made the company millions of dollars over the years they have invested in other products and locations - we are entitled to some new investment given our track record."

Positive news for the plant is that Ford is still committed to invest \$200 million (USD) into the plant to upgrade the appearance of the two cars manufactured there. On the contrary, according to Automotive analyst Dennis DesRosier believes that the factory is still "likely" to close. DesRoiser said, "The St. Thomas plant is old, the product is old, it make sense it is on that list. This may be just a short-term reprieve, it may be look at permanent closure in two to three years."

Two more plants will close in 2008, another two in 2012. Two more plants to be closed are to be announced later this year. Also, Ford will cut 12% of it's currently 53 executive officers.

Due to the company's current contract with the United Auto Workers union, workers at the idled plants will still be reciving their pay and benefits until Ford negotiates a new contract with the union. However, the workers may not earn what they earn today because they will not be eligible for overtime.

The UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and Vice President Gerald Bantom called say the plan is "extremely disappointing." The UAW issued statement saying "The impacted hourly and salaried workers find themselves facing uncertain futures because of senior management's failure to halt Ford's sliding market share. The announcement has further left a cloud hanging over the entire work force because of pending future announcements of additional facilities to be closed at some point in the future."

NASA Postpones Stardust Mission Briefing, Not Re-scheduled Yet

NASA cancelled a media briefing on its Stardust mission, expected to provide an update about analysis of both the "Comet Wild 2" particles and interstellar particles gathered during the nearly six year mission. In "MEDIA ADVISORY: M06-016," issued earlier today, the space agency announced postponement of the briefing, originally scheduled for Tuesday, January 24, 1 p.m. EST. No announcement has been made about when the briefing will be re-scheduled. NASA's stated reason for delay was to, "allow the

Stardust science team additional time to assess and distribute cometary samples."

House of Supreme Court Justice threatened

In the town of Weare, New Hampshire, a movement is under way to force Supreme Court Justice David Souter to sell his home for "public benefit," an expansion of eminent domain the Supreme Court legalized in a 5-4 decision with Souter on the majority side. In the June 2005 decision, it was ruled that private property could be seized not only for "public use," but also for "public benefit," leaving many worried that homes would be seized for commercial enterprises.

The campaign to have Souter's house removed is headed by Logan Clements, who is petitioning to replace it with the Lost Liberty Hotel, a tongue-in-cheek name for what he says will be a memorial to lost freedom. Clements already has 188 signatures to put the issue on a ballot, and only 25 are needed. Once it is on the ballot, the measure can be approved as soon as March. Weare has 8,500 residents.

So far, neither Justice Souter nor Kathy Arberg, Supreme Court spokeswoman, have commented on the matter.

New case of Mad Cow disease found in Canada

A cow in the Province Alberta, Canada, has tested positive for Mad Cow disease, said Canadian Food Inspection Agency officials on Monday.

Officials also stated that the six-year-old cross-bred cow did not make it into the human or animal feed chain.

"Last evening the...laboratory for BSE located in Winnipeg confirmed the presence of BSE in a cross-bred cow born and raised in Alberta," said CFIA chief veterinarian Brian Evans. "The animal was detected on the farm where it was born and no part of this animal entered the food for human consumption or feed for animal consumption purposes."

It is the fourth case to turn up in Canada since 2003.

Evans also stated that it is too early to tell whether or not export markets would ban Canadian cows and beef.

The United States has seen two cases of Mad Cow disease. The first was discovered in December of 2003 in the state of Washington. Officials later linked this case to Canada because the cow was born on a farm in Alberta. The second infected cow was discovered in Texas in 2005. The later case was diagnosed in England after earlier samples tested had shown conflicting results.

Vladivostok fire witnesses dispute official death toll of nine, claim at least 50

At 11:45am on January 16, in Vladivostok, Russia, a fire broke out on the three upper floors of the Sberbank building.

Photographs taken by eye-witnesses show people, who were trapped, dropping from 8th floor windows to their deaths. According to some reports the firemen who were dispatched to the scene were pre-occupied at the rear of the building. They had apparently been ordered to evacuate the bank and its management from the area that was not under immediate

threat.

Official Russian media initially denied the fire, accusing the reports of being false.

Russian media later confirmed 7 and then, 9 dead. Witnesses and those rescued from the burning building have claimed that the figure exceeds 50.

A maintenance employee who worked in the building was quoted as saying, "I know at least about 13 dead inside ... that's the least I've noticed, not to consider those who've dropped down ... 8 of them dropped, looking at the three already dead on the ground, but they went through the windows without hope to be rescued ... They collected and hid the dead bodies inside. I work at this building! I know its layout very well! To declare, as it become clear, a less number of the dead later."

"My daughter worked in a justice department," - Natalia, one of the witnesses said. "She said that there were actually much more dead - up to 70. She went on the dead bodies, getting out from the building ... some of them were so scorched, that it was impossible to identify them... 9 victims? That's a lie!"

Georic, a witness: "The cops ("menty"), whom I know, say that they've been loading the dead bodies all night long."

Lelya has posted her evidence on January 21, 2006 on the web-site <http://news.vl.ru/vlad/2006/01/18/tragedy/> "My brother worked in that building, on the 6th floor. So, the night after the fire they visited the building to collect the documents, etc. and they saw how workers transported the dead

bodies. He said, there were 50-60.."

Eugenia, a witness said, "who has told you, that fireteam arrived in 3 minutes? Or in 20 minutes? My uncle worked on another side of the building. He personally gave a call to the fire department. They said, "ok, ok, take it easy, here we go..." as it were just some fun for them, "nothing serious!"

Reports from the scene say the fire-brigade arrived at least 40 minutes or more from the time the call about the fire was placed.

The Fire-safety Department officials state that firemen had the "objective obstacles" which hampered rescue efforts. Among them were, barred emergency exits, and a congestion of cars in front of the burning building.

The mayor of Vladivostok in reply to a plea "to rescue those who are still in fire, does human life really cost nothing?" replied saying that, "human life costs nothing in Russia."

Law-enforcement authorities arrested the inspector who had checked the building in July 2004, and exposed a number of irregularities, such as barred windows in stairwells, but failed to control the elimination of these shortcomings.

Lyudmila Feofanova, CEO of the Primorye branch of "Sberbank", was arrested in Vladivostok in conjunction with the case of the fire which has killed, according to official reports, 9 and seriously wounded 17 last Monday.

The Office of Public Prosecutor accuses L.Feofanova on failure to provide the bank with a fire-prevention system.

The Russian official news agencies and mass-media report only 9 victims, several bank employees.

Five days following the fire, people have launched dozens of forums and web-sites, trying to tell their side of the story. They have created lists of those believed to be killed or those that are unable to be indentified.

Unmanned spacecraft leaves for Pluto

NASA has launced an unmanned space craft off for Pluto. The 3-billion mile journey for the New Horizons spacecraft began January 19. It will take the spacecraft 9 1/2 years to arrive at Pluto. This was the fastest a rocket had ever been launched and traveled, moving at 36,000 miles per hour. The spacecraft will not land on Pluto, but will take pictures of the planet. Pluto is the farthest planet away from the sun in our solar system.

As the probe was powered with 24 pounds of Uranium, some anti-nuclear activists feared that the launch could end in an accident with radioactive material being spread over a wide area. The chances of such a disaster were calculated by NASA and the United States Department of Energy at 1 in 350.

The probe is also carrying some of the ashes from Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of Pluto.

Sample from Turkey patient show mutated Bird Flu virus

A mutated form of the Avian (Bird Flu) virus has been found in a sample taken from a Turkish patient.

The mutated form is said to make the virus easier to attach itself to humans rather than animals says

a report in the Nature journal.

The situation is being monitored by the World Health Organization but says "it is too early to know whether the virus is changing in ways that would signal the start of a human flu pandemic," says Maria Cheng a spokeswoman for the WHO. "It's one isolate from a single virus from Turkey. The sample suggests the virus might be more inclined to bind to human cells rather than animal cells, but there's no evidence that it's becoming more infectious. If we started to see a lot more samples from Turkey with this mutation and saw the virus changing, we'd be more concerned."

However, the Nature report says there is a second mutation that also "signals adaptation to humans."

Cheng also said that "flu viruses mutate all the time. For us to assign public health significance to a genetic change we need to match it to what is happening epidemiologically — how the virus is behaving — and clinically — if it's more or less virulent."

In Turkey the fatality rate from the Bird Flu is 50% where elsewhere in the world reports of infection were only scattered. Entire families have been affected in Turkey and more reports come out almost everyday of mild symptoms.

So far four have died in Turkey and twenty-one have been infected. In addition to those cases the WHO reports 145 cases and 80 deaths in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

"When this outbreak (in Turkey) was first reported, there was a lot of concern it was behaving differently," said Cheng.

However since investigators arrived in the region they have discovered that was not the case.

"The team there told us that after two weeks of investigating, they haven't found substantial differences in the pattern we've seen in Southeast Asia," said Cheng.

The mutations were discovered by scientists in London England in a lab.

Cheng said this may "signify the virus is trying different things to see if it can more easily infect humans. So far, we haven't seen that the virus has the ability to do this. But it's important that we continue monitoring. We would be concerned if we were seeing successive generations of spread of the virus. We haven't so far. All these people had a very clear history of contact with diseased birds."

Health officials say that so far they do not see any evidence yet that the virus can spread easily in humans.

The Bird Flu virus, strain H5N1, first started to infect humans in 1997 in Hong Kong. In 2003 it re-emerged and it has, so far, not been able to be stamped out.

Four Australian states ablaze, two dead, homes lost

Bushfires are burning across Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania assisted by very hot conditions.

Victoria is the hardest hit with a single blaze burning out over 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) and destroying 20 homes.

There are around a dozen fires

burning in Victoria, with others in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

Police are investigating whether or not two people found dead in their car near Moyston in South-West Victoria died as a result of the fire or died when their vehicle struck a tree.

Firefighters in the south of New South Wales have been placed on high alert as the hot weather moves North.

Firefighters across the affected states are hoping to take advantage of a cool change expected today.

Earlier this month bushfires damaged property in New South Wales and Victoria.

Vladivostok: Witnesses of Fire Under Investigation

Nearly 300 people turned out at a protest meeting held in Vladivostok on January 21st. Relatives and friends of the victims and survivors of the recent fire, as well as ordinary citizens were there and full of anger. They had come to protest against the authorities, whom they say mishandled the rescue operation in the terrible fire and have withheld the truth about the real number of dead.

The slogans at the protest read, "Who will tell us the truth?", "We want to know the truth!", "Our lives cost nothing!", "Authorities should respond!", and "Firemen are those who should be set on fire!"

The Chief of Vladivostok City Police Department colonel Nikolay Panchenko commented: "The meeting participants are sure, that the authorities hide a true number

of the dead and refer to the web-site fire.zloe.net."

The web-site "Truth about the fire in Vladivostok" has been created to spread information about the fire.

Panchenko said "We verified the publised messages, but none of them was confirmed. We have detected the two authors of the messages. One of them has already denied everything he wrote, another is still hiding out".

Today, a news agency in Vladivostok, which maintains another web-site where information about the fire is collected, reports they recieved an official order from the government services. Additional information about people who post comments on news.vl.ru (IP, logs and other secret info) has been requested.

Some human rights experts warn that the witnesses may be persecuted in a situation where the authorities want to hide the truth, and thus to escape responsibility.

No evidence of dead terrorists in US bombed Pakistan village

In an interview with CNN, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said "There is no evidence, as of half an hour ago, that there were any other people there". United States officials have previously stated that as many as eight al-Qaeda operatives were dining in Damadola when struck by United States missiles. As many as eighteen individuals were killed in the strike.

In the interview Prime Minister Aziz labelled a U.S. report that senior al Qaeda leaders were killed in a CIA attack as "bizarre".

Mr Aziz said "The area does see movement of people from across the border. But we have not found one body or one shred of evidence that these people were there."

"If you just reflect on what happened; first, we heard that there was a dinner meeting with all the seniors," the Prime Minister said; "I think that's a bizarre thought, because these people don't get together for dinner in a terrain or environment like that."

The U.S. network ABC News reported January 18 on its Web site that the attack killed Khabab, quoting "Pakistani authorities." However a number of Pakistani officials have told CNN they cannot confirm the ABC report.

J.D. Crouch, the USA's Deputy National Security Advisor to President Bush told CNN on January 19, that there was no confirmation that any senior al Qaeda operatives were killed in the bombing.

Sri Lankan attack disrupts peace envoy

Suspected Tamil Tiger rebels have ambushed and killed three soldiers in Sri Lanka's volatile eastern region, as a Norwegian peace broker flew in to the country in a last-ditch peace bid.

The patrol was ambushed with a fragmentation mine - the most recent in a series of attacks which have killed over 70 military personnel since December.

The attack came after Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim arrived in Sri Lanka for truce talks. As he arrived, three soldiers were killed in a landmine explosion in the east, which the army blamed on the Tamil Tigers. Rohan Abeywardene, deputy inspector

general of police said the Tamil Tigers were responsible for the attack.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have threatened to resume their armed struggle this year unless President Mahinda Rajapakse grants independence - which he has refused to do. The Tamil Tigers want a separate state in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The rebels have fought the government since 1983 to create a separate homeland for ethnic minority Tamils, accusing the majority Sinhalese-dominated state of discrimination.

The rebels say they are ready to use suicide bombers, as in the past, if war resumes. The Sri Lankan army is preparing for the worst with analysts say both sides are already engaged in an undeclared war. The Tigers, accuse the military and government-backed paramilitaries of a litany of abuses, including rape and executions of Tamil civilians and rebels.

About 65,000 people were killed in the conflict before the cease-fire. Peace talks broke down in April 2003, when the Tigers withdrew, demanding autonomy in the Tamil-majority northeast region.

Over 100 people have been killed in the escalating violence since December.

Bali Nine refused access to federal police files

The Bali Nine have been dealt another blow with the Federal Court of Australia dismissing an application for them to gain access to documents held by the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

The application was bought to

court on behalf of Scott Rush, Renae Lawrence, Martin Stephens and Michael Czugaj, four of the nine Australians being held in Indonesia for allegedly attempting to smuggle heroin out of Bali.

Their lawyers have claimed that the AFP may have acted illegally by passing information onto Indonesian authorities, which led to their arrest. In Indonesia, convicted drug smugglers may face the death penalty, which Australia is opposed to.

The basis of the argument is that the AFP provided information knowing that Australians could be sentenced to death if the information was correct.

When handing his ruling down in Adelaide, Justice Paul Finn said "It is now the applicants' position that each of them, in their capacity as Australian citizens, has a substantive legitimate expectation that the Australian government, its agencies and public officers will not act in such a way as to expose them to the risk of the imposition of the death penalty,"

"(But) there would be no arguable basis at all for any contention that AFP officers had a legal responsibility to warn any of the applicants either that they were under police surveillance or that they were exposing themselves to the foreseeable risk of the death penalty.

"Having been prepared for whatever reason to engage in criminal activity, the applicants would properly be regarded as the authors of their own harm.

"And the police would have been entitled to have treated them as no more than subjects of an

ongoing criminal investigation which fell clearly within the mandated functions of the AFP."

U.S. army interrogator convicted in Iraqi generals death

A military court found Chief warrant officer Lewis Welshofer guilty of negligent homicide in the death of Iraqi Maj. Gen. Abed Hamed Mowhoush during an interrogation in al-Qaim in Iraq, near the Syrian border, in November 2003.

The Iraqi general died after Welshofer shoved the general head-first into a sleeping bag, sat on him and occasionally covered the general's mouth with his hands. Welshofer's supervisor had approved this technique except that Welshofer did not tell his supervisor that he sat on prisoners.

The prosecution described the techniques Welshofer used to obtain information from Mowhoush as "torture".

The defense argued that Welshofer's interrogation methods were covered by official policy. His unit's commander Captain William Ponce wrote in an email three months before Mowhoush died that there were no rules for interrogations yet and that "the gloves are coming off, gentlemen ... we want these individuals broken. Casualties are mounting." Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the commanding officer in Iraq, authorized new interrogation techniques which according to Welshofer included the sleeping bag method.

The jury consisting of six military officers also found Welshofer guilty of negligent dereliction of duty, but acquitted of the more serious

murder and assault charges.

Two days before his death, Mowhoush was beaten with rubber hoses, allegedly by CIA subcontractors, in the presence of Welshofer and on the next day Welshofer held Mowhoush while water was poured on this face.

Welshinger testified that he had used the sleeping bag technique a dozen to two dozen times in Iraq.

The sentencing is scheduled for Monday when Welshofer faces a maximum penalty of three years in a military prison. Last year U.S. army reservist Lynndie England was convicted of one count of conspiracy, four counts of maltreating detainees and one count of committing an indecent act and is currently serving her sentence of three years in prison. None of the charges levied against her involved the death of a detainee and her defense also argued that she was acting with consent of superiors.

Indian city of Bangalore to be renamed Bengaluru

Marking the growing trend in the rise of Indian nationalism, the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Karnataka, Dharam Singh has announced that the state government will rename Bangalore to its pre-colonial name, Bengaluru, taking effect from November 1, 2006. The change was suggested by U. R. Ananthamurthy, best known for winning the Jnanpith literary award.

Many industrial leaders in Bangalore have declared opposition to this name change. "I am absolutely opposed to the name change. The Karnataka government should concentrate on spending money to bring about

constructive change rather than wasting a huge amount of money in funding a petty, parochial political initiative," said Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Biocon Chairperson and managing director and India's richest woman, and also made a statement of possible explanation with the comment "The truth is that whenever a government considers itself weak in certain regions and thinks it is falling down, it whips up parochial sentiments." She described the basis of her objection with the comment "Bangalore has a global brand name worth billions of dollars," and further stated that "As it is the Karnataka government says it is short of funds. Why waste it on meaningless things?"

Bangalore has a reputation as "India's Silicon Valley."

Other cities to be renamed recently were Chennai (formerly Madras), Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta).

The move follows other cities in India being reverted to their traditional Indian names, following independence from the United Kingdom

Canadian teen faces disputed US military tribunal

19 year old Canadian citizen Omar Ahmed Khadr attended a pre-trial hearing on Wednesday, January 11, in front of a military tribunal at the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay in his case involving charges of murder, attempted murder and aiding the enemy.

Khadr was 15 when on July 27, 2002, following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, he was present in a compound near Khost which was

surrounded by US soldiers. After a fierce firefight and U.S. bombings of the compound, U.S. special forces Sgt. Christopher Speer, who has training as a medic, led a group of US soldiers searching the compound in the belief that everybody inside had been killed. According to U.S. army reports, Omar Khadr, who was wounded by the bombings and the only survivor in the compound, fired his pistol and threw a grenade which killed Christopher Speer and wounded three others. In response, Khadr was engaged by U.S. forces and shot three times, which left him nearly blind in one eye.

While still 15 years old, Khadr was transferred to the U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, where he was kept together with adult detainees, separate from other children who received better treatment and some formal education. Now Khadr is 19 and is facing the tribunal operated exclusively by the US military.

The tribunal is referred to by different media organizations as a "war crimes court", a "military commission" or a "military tribunal". Its legality is presently under dispute. The USA has not ratified the international treaty creating the International Criminal Court, so the nature of the tribunal under international law is unclear. The Miami Herald reports that "military defense lawyers and legal observers [condemn] the so-called military commissions as stacked against the defendants", but that the chief Pentagon prosecutor, Air Force Col. Morris "Moe" Davis defended the tribunal, stating that the purpose of the tribunals is to provide a fair trial while addressing an enemy whose actions had not been anticipated under the Geneva Conventions.

"We have nothing to be ashamed of, and I'm proud of everybody involved in the process," he said.

The Supreme Court of the US is expected to decide on the constitutionality of this type of military tribunal in the next few months, with oral arguments in March, to consider charges that the "tribunals" violate US obligations under the Geneva Conventions.

Khadr has requested an upgrade to his legal team. The military defense lawyer appointed to him by the tribunal is a 31-year-old army captain, who has never before handled a trial defense and just recently returned from his tour of duty in Iraq.

'Australian Values' to be taught in NSW schools

The New South Wales government will make it compulsory for schools to play Advance Australia Fair, Australia's national anthem before class this year.

Teachers at primary schools in NSW will also be required to introduce "Australian values" lessons from the beginning of this school year. The lessons are expected to teach children "what it means to be Australian" and include topics such as family values, community harmony, national heritage, national identity, cultural differences and Australian history.

The Three Rs will also be extended to five and include the topics of respect and responsibility. The NSW government claims that it needs to ensure people respect authority within the community.

Adults will not escape the government's plans to foster respect for authority with the

government announcing it plans to create a new law enforcement package with new laws to make it easier for police to crack down on anti-social behaviour.

Fines and penalties for a range of offences such as damaging public property, including transport and housing, will also be reviewed

Today in History

1438 - Pope Eugenius IV was suspended by the Council of Basel.

1848 - James W. Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California, leading to the California Gold Rush.

1891 - Prime Minister John Ballance began his term with his Liberal Party the first political party in power in New Zealand.

1924 - Petrograd, founded by Peter the Great of Russia in 1703, was renamed Leningrad three days after the death of Vladimir Lenin.

1984 - The first Apple Macintosh went on sale, as advertised on television two days earlier during Super Bowl XVIII.

Quote of the Day

"To minimize suffering and to maximize security were natural and proper ends of society and Caesar. But then they became the only ends, somehow, and the only basis of law — a perversion.

Inevitably, then, in seeking only them, we found only their opposites: maximum suffering and minimum security." ~ Walter M. Miller, Jr.

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