



Top Stories

85 rescued, thousands feared dead in Philippine landslide



At least 85 people have been rescued after a massive landslide buried

three villages in Saint Bernard, Southern Leyte province, in central Philippines, Friday. It is believed that the disaster was caused by a combination of heavy rains over the previous two weeks and a small earthquake of magnitude 2.6. 19 have been confirmed dead; officials say between 1,500 and 2,500 are still believed to be missing.

UN alleges torture at Guantanamo Bay



The United Nations special envoys on torture reported their findings regarding the

U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo bay in a 40 page report.

Featured story

Hotel development proposal could displace Buffalo, NY business owners



Savarino Construction Services Corp. has proposed a 7 million dollar hotel

to be placed on the Forest and Elmwood intersection. If the development goes through, several business will be forced to close and residents will have to find a new place to live.

Wikipedia Current Events

• Hamas-Palestinian Authority. Interim Israeli Prime minister Ehud Olmert postpones until Sunday official discourse which would ban Palestinian movements between Gaza and the West Bank, bar Palestinians from working in Israel and stop transfer of \$50 million tax receipts to the Palestinian Authority. All these measures, criticized by Labour leader Amir Peretz, follows the victory of Hamas over Fatah during the January 2006 legislative elections.

• International demands grow that the United States close Guantánamo Bay prison camp. The European Parliament votes overwhelmingly for a resolution urging that the prison be closed and inmates given a fair trial. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair calls Guantánamo an anomaly . UN General Secretary Kofi Annan calls for the camp to be closed "as soon as possible". Former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson urges the US to act on the findings of the UN report (RTÉ), while Northern Ireland Secretary of State Peter Hain also calls for its closure. This follows a United Nations report which calls for it to be closed.

• In Libya, at least eleven protesters are killed in riots protesting the Muhammad cartoons in Tripoli outside the Italian consulate in Benghazi.

Wikipedia Current Events

• Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony narrowly escapes an attempted assassination by Ugandan troops attacking in Sudan. Several of his bodyguards are killed as he flees to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Cheney gets ovation, shooting victim apologizes to Cheney

Harry Whittington, the person who was shot by Vice President Dick Cheney in a hunting accident, was released from the hospital today. He said to reporters that "My family and I are deeply sorry for all that Vice President Cheney and his family have had to go through this week."

Only minutes later, Cheney received a standing ovation from Wyoming lawmakers. "I want to thank you for that welcome home," Cheney said in his first public appearance after the shooting, when he was addressing the Wyoming state Legislature.

The chief of emergency care Dr. Blanchard, who treated Whittington explained that the reasons for the discharge are Whittington's "excellent health". He added that Whittington was "a lucky person" to survive the shooting.

85 rescued, thousands feared dead in Philippine landslide

BBC News is now reporting that at least 83 people were rescued after a massive landslide buried three

villages in Saint Bernard, Southern Leyte province, in central Philippines, Friday. 19 people have so far been confirmed dead. Up to 1,500 are thought to still be missing. The Red Cross has dispatched a plane with rescuers and basic equipment; they have also appealed for \$1.5 million for relief supplies for the affected area.

It is believed that the slides were triggered by heavy rains of up to 200cm (79 inches) in just 10 days and an earthquake of magnitude 2.6. Some residents had already left the area previous to the disaster fearing landslides but had returned following easing of the rain.

Houses and an elementary school packed with children were buried, officials and witnesses said. Photographs and footage show only coconut trees and a few tin roofs sticking out of the soil after part of a mountainside collapsed on the farming village of Guinsaugon in Southern Leyte province.

Rescue efforts are being hampered due to continual rock falls, washed out bridges, chest deep mud and a lack of heavy equipment.

"Rescuers are scared because they can still hear the mountain rumbling," said Maria Lim, the mayor of Saint Bernard, where a minor earthquake was felt on Friday morning. President Gloria Arroyo has ordered the navy and the coast to the area to assist with relief efforts when conditions improve. Two US vessels are also on their way to help.

McGovern calls for whistleblowing before alleged US attack on Iran

Ex-CIA agent Ray McGovern, of Veteran Intelligence Professionals

for Sanity, has called for people with inside information on the alleged US-Israeli threats to launch an attack on Iran to become whistleblowers by revealing this information. McGovern is strongly critical of the George W. Bush administration of the USA.

He claims that he personally had missed a chance to try to stop the Vietnam War by failing to whistleblow about a cable sent by General Abrams on August 20, 1967 regarding a significant underestimate of Vietnamese troop numbers. He called for "shedding light on what the Bush administration is up to beneath the spin" and asked that "Those of you clued into Israeli plans and U.S. intelligence support for them might clue us in too."

McGovern alleges that an attack on Iran is likely to happen in March, saying "Anyone who has been near a TV in recent weeks has heard the drumbeat for war on Iran. The best guess for timing is next month."

He recommended from his personal experience "Don't bother this time with the once-independent congressional oversight committees... Nor should you bother with the once-independent New York Times. Find some other way. ... just be sure you get the truth out - information that will provide the oxygen for democracy."

McGovern also claims that whistleblowing could have stopped the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, saying "Any number of people would have had a good chance of stopping the Iraq war, had they the courage to disclose publicly what they knew BEFORE it was launched." Just five days before the attack on Iraq

officially started, McGovern and his colleagues called for whistleblowing and claimed that the Bush administration was misrepresenting the case for an attack on Iraq. McGovern described the administration's information on March 15, 2003, saying "It's been cooked to a recipe, and the recipe is high policy."

In September 2004, McGovern along with Daniel Ellsberg, who had precipitated a national uproar in 1971 when he released the Pentagon Papers, the US military's account of activities during the Vietnam War, to The New York Times, along with several other colleagues had already announced that they would form a whistleblowers' support network for revealing possibly classified information regarding the conduct of the occupation of Iraq.

British Parliament bans smoking in pubs, workplaces and clubs.

MPs at the British Parliament have voted by large majority of 200 to bring in legislation banning smoking in all pubs, clubs and workplaces in a landmark free vote. The ban is expected to come into force from summer 2007.

The originally proposed fine of £200 was raised to £2500 for failing to stop people smoking in banned areas in the late stages of the parliamentary process. Other fines include a fixed penalty notice of £50 for lighting up in banned areas and spot fines of £200 for failing to display no smoking signs in banned areas.

Smoking may also be banned in "substantially enclosed" venues such as railway stations and football stadiums; this may also include cars carrying passengers

but no decision has been taken on this as yet. Ministers will finalise precise regulations after a three month consultation.

The vote was politically fraught, as the Labour Party in government had proposed a 'compromise' bill, in line with their election manifesto, which would allow pubs not serving food to be exempt from the ban. With many Labour MPs threatening to rebel against this compromise however, in favour of a full ban, Labour granted its members a free vote. MPs then voted for the full ban by a margin of 453 votes to 125, a majority of 328.

MPs then debated a last-minute amendment to exempt private members clubs, which was also rejected, by 384 votes to 184, a majority of 200. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, voted for a complete ban along with his health secretary, Patricia Hewitt.

The ban will bring England in line with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, which will all be introducing a full smoking ban for pubs and clubs. The bill also gives ministers powers to increase the age for purchasing cigarettes from 16 to 18 which ministers will begin the consultation process upon shortly.

U.S. looking for asylum for some Guantanamo prisoners

Some men imprisoned at Guantanamo are not considered a threat by the Pentagon. For months US officials have been trying to find a country which will grant these men asylum.

"What's clear here is that the military had its own military secret tribunal. There were no lawyers there, I wasn't there," said a Boston attorney who represents

two of the detainees in question. "They determined at this tribunal that these men were not al Qaeda, they were not Taliban. They were not criminals, they were not enemies. They were a mistake."

Three months ago, the US Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Jan Krc, asked that country to give asylum to a group of Guantanamo detainees which would have set them free in Europe. The U.S. request to the Czechs about asylum was "a humanitarian request because we clearly need to place these people somewhere," Krc said.

US Judge James Robertson said in December, 2005 that "nothing ... establishes that the government has or could reasonably have a concern that these petitioners would return to the battlefield if released."

The U.S. State Department told ABC News yesterday in a written statement, "It is the long-standing policy of the United States not to transfer a person to a country if it is determined that it is more likely than not that the person will be tortured ... we are looking into resettlement ... outside China." However, the US government has denied granting asylum within the USA to these men.

With regard to Guantanamo Bay prisoners in general, the White House spokesman, Scott McClellan said yesterday, "These are dangerous terrorists that we're talking about that are there and I think we've talked about that issue before and nothing's changed in terms of our views." McClellan added, "We know that these are dangerous terrorists that are being kept at Guantanamo Bay. They are people that are determined to harm innocent civilians or harm

innocent Americans. They were enemy combatants picked up on the battlefield in the war on terrorism."

Graffiti game banned in Australia

The Office of Film & Literature Classification Review Board in Australia has refused to classify Marc Ecko's *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*. The computer game's premise is a future world where freedom of expression is suppressed by a tyrannical city government and to win the game the player has to express his message through graffiti. The decision was made by 5 members who voted 3/5 against the classification of the game; Ms Maureen Shelley, the convenor, broke the deadlock on the grounds it encourages crime. The game cannot be sold, demonstrated, hired or imported without a classification. Australia is the only country to ban the game so far. The decision comes even though OFLC guidelines state that adults may hear, read and see what they wish.

The game was originally rated MA15+ for Strong violence, and strong themes on 18 November 2005.

Other games to be banned in Australia include *Postal* and *BMX XXX*, while *Combat: Task Force 121*, a game which premise involves shooting people to defend US interests from Marxist rebels [1] was rated M (below the maximum rating of MA for a video game in Australia) and is therefore available to buy by anyone of any age.

Atari Australia, the games local distributor has said it strongly disagrees with the outcome and they defend the original MA rating

"We are definitely investigating all our options at the moment. If we can appeal it we will," said Mr David Wildgoose, public relations manager at Atari. Any action to be taken would take place after they receive the Review Board's written decision. Mark Ecko has been also expressed his point of view "I am extremely disappointed in the Australian Government Classification Review Board's move to ban my video game ... based solely on a perceived notion that it somehow will promote the crime of graffiti"

Ms Maureen Shelley, when questioned on her decision by the ABC's Lateline, said she didn't need proof that video games encouraging crime—only that she thought it could.

Hotel development proposal could displace Buffalo, NY business owners

Savarino Construction Services Corp. has proposed a \$7 million hotel project at the Forest and Elmwood Avenue intersection, according to The Buffalo News. The proposal calls for a 5-story, 45,000 square-foot 80-room hotel with underground parking for at least 50 vehicles, and 4,500 square-feet of retail space on the lower level.

Hans Mobius, the owner of the five properties to be purchased in the plan (1109 to 1121 Elmwood), reportedly signed a contract with Savarino to assemble the development.

"We saw a huge opportunity to bring something to the Elmwood Village that will make sense and bring a service that's currently not available," said Eva Hassett, vice president of Savarino. "Elmwood is such a wonderful place to eat, shop, walk and spend time. We

believe this project will add to that vibrant environment."

Some business owners in the area see it differently. Wikinews interviewed 2 of the 4 owners whose business's would be demolished if the development goes through.

Nancy Pollina, of Don Apparel at 1119 Elmwood, who found out about the development only yesterday, said she is "utterly" against the proposal. Her apparel shop has stood at the same location for nearly 14 years. She has volunteered in the community, and helped create several gardens around bus shelters in the city, and served on Forever Elmwood Board for six years as head of Beautification. Patty Morris co-owns Don Apparel with Pollina.

"To say this is a good looking project, I want to say the emperor has no clothes. This [project] does not take into consideration the needs of the college students. I have been told by college students, these shops here, are the reason they leave the campus," said Ms Pollina.

Buffalo State College is 500-feet from the intersection.

Michael Faust, the owner of Mondo Video said, "Well, I do not really want to get kicked out of here. The landlord was very open, and the deal he made with me when I moved in here was 'the rent is cheap and I [the landlord] will not fix anything and that will not change.'" Faust said he first learned of the development plan, "about 48 hours ago. I found out on Tuesday when the Buffalo News called and asked for my opinion on this." Faust has not said if he will make plans to relocate. "We have to see if this [house] is going to

get knocked down first," said Faust.

An "informational" meeting, where citizens can voice opinions and learn about the proposal will be held on Tuesday February 21, 2006 at 5:00pm (eastern) at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center Gallery at Buffalo State College, Rockwell Hall.

Executive director of Forever Elmwood Justin P. Azzarella would not comment on whether or not the organization supports the development, saying, "you will just have to come to the meeting."

Forever Elmwood is designed to preserve and protect the unique and historic nature of Elmwood Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods and encourage neighborhood commercial revitalization. The organization was founded in 1994.

Same area was up for previous developments

Nearly two years ago, the Forever Elmwood Association assisted in the blocking of the demolition of the Edward Atwater house at 1089 Elmwood next to Pano's Resturant which is at 1081 Elmwood. Pano Georgiadis wanted to expand his resturaunt onto the property where the house now stands but the Common Council denied his permit to demolish saying the house is a historical landmark and needs to be protected. Georgiadis, who has a bleeding ulcer, said that all the court cases landed him in the hospital. "I got a bleeding ulcer, and since then, I don't care about this house anymore, or this city. I just go to work every day. I think [preservationists] are parasites," said Georgiadis.

Georgiadis will not be attending Tuesday's meeting saying, "I will

be out of town."

In 1995 Hans Mobius proposed a plan to develop a Walgreens, that was to be placed in the same location, but residents and business owners shot down the proposal. Walgreens eventually withdrew its request for a variance after pressure from the community.

Colombia's Uribe orders the bombing of a Natural National Park

After 6 policemen who supervised the manual eradication of coca plants were killed in the Serrania de la Macarena National Park, 270 km south of Bogotá, President Alvaro Uribe announced this Thursday (16) from Washington that he authorized the Colombian Air Force to bombard the area, where according to the authorities, they found eight sites with tents and equipment belonging to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), allegedly responsible for the death of the police officials.

"We are going to define the way to evacuate the area of Macarena to bomb it before the coca eradicators enter again" said the president. "This is a difficult confrontation, which represents an important effort to defeat terrorism once and for all", stated the Minister of defense Camilo Ospina.

Even though the bombing started this Thursday, the authorities confirmed that the manual eradication in the Macarena area will continue. Some coca eradicators, most of whom are peasants, decided to give up the job due to the difficult security conditions. However, General Jorge Daniel Castro, director of the National Police, stated that since

January 20th when the operation started more than 140 ha of coca crops have been eradicated.

The announcement made by Uribe has outraged environment activists who warn about the ecological damages that the military actions may cause in the area which was declared national park in 1971. The Macarena area has been saved from fumigations.

Australian bird flu vaccine trial results "promising"

The Australian based pharmaceutical company CSL has announced that despite promising human trials of their bird flu vaccine, more research is needed before the final formula can be developed.

Late last year the Australian federal government gave CSL AU\$ 5 million to speed up research into the bird flu vaccine.

The vaccine was tested on 400 Australians aged between 18 and 45 in October last year to determine its safety and effectiveness. The strain of bird flu used for the trials was taken from a bird flu victim in Vietnam and neutralised to prevent it from being contagious.

The next phase of the trial will include 700 people from varying age groups.

CSL has previously indicated that once their vaccine is approved, it could take between three and six months to manufacture enough of the vaccine to inoculate every Australian.

Bird flu could kill between 1.4 and 140 million people - Australian researchers

Two Australian researchers at the Australian National University

estimate that a global pandemic of the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu could kill between 1.4 and 140 million humans and cause a global recession. They will formally present their research to the Lowy Institute in Sydney today.

Professor Warwick McKibbin, a well respected economic modeller and member of the board of the Reserve Bank of Australia and health expert, Dr Alexandra Sidorenko modelled the effect of a bird flu pandemic on human health and the global economy. Their study looks at four possible scenarios - mild, moderate, severe and extreme.

Under the mild scenario, they predict that 1.4 million people worldwide and 2,100 Australians would die. The extreme scenario predicts 140 million worldwide deaths with 214,000 Australians among them. 30 percent of the Australian population would be expected to become infected should a pandemic occur.

In the extreme case, the global economy would suffer losses of US\$4.4 trillion or 12.6 percent.

Prof. McKibbin says that his economic estimates do not only include the cost of death but also for lost productivity. In an interview with ABC, Professor McKibbin said "Firstly, there's a reduction in the labour force. Now, interestingly it's not just that people die which is causing economic loss, but actually there is a substantial amount of illness in any influenza pandemic. "

"And so we try and capture both the death and the impact of that on the economy as well as illness during the pandemic, and including the fact that different economies have different labour

market structures and that it's not just workers that get sick but also children, and we try to model the fact that carers will be taking time off work. " said Prof. McKibbin.

Pandemics have broken out every 10 to 40 years since the 19th century. The last pandemic was in 1968 caused by the Hong Kong flu.

"It is 37 years since the last pandemic and many argue that another pandemic is overdue," warns the report. The report advises investment in Asia, where health systems are less developed.

Today in History

1861 - Jefferson Davis was inaugurated as the first (and only) President of the Confederate States of America.

1885 - The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain was first published. It was both praised and banned shortly thereafter.

1932 - The Empire of Japan established Manchukuo, a puppet state in northeastern China during the Sino-Japanese War.

1943 - Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, delivered the Sportpalast speech to motivate the German people when the tide of World War II was turning against Germany.

2003 - An arsonist in Daegu, South Korea started a fire aboard a subway train, killing two hundred passengers.

February 18 is Independence Day in The Gambia (1965)

Quote of the Day

"At some point in life the world's beauty becomes enough. You don't need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough. No record of it needs to be kept and you don't need someone to share it with or tell it to. When that happens — that letting go — you let go because you can." ~ Toni Morrison

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