



Top Stories

Coretta Scott King passes away



Coretta Scott King, tireless crusader for civil rights, and wife of slain civil rights leader

Martin Luther King, Jr, has died at the age of 78. Coretta King died in her sleep. Dubbed the "first lady of the civil rights movement", Mrs King suffered a debilitating stroke and heart attack last year. She was last seen in public on January 14 on Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, where she received a standing ovation.

Scientists shocked at Great Barrier Reef bleaching



Scientists say Australia's hot summer has had a devastating effect on Queensland's Great Barrier Reef.

Coral reef specialists are comparing the severity of the damage to the worst case ever recorded in 2002.

Featured story

Congressional staff actions prompt Wikipedia investigation



Edits by Massachusetts congressman Marty Meehan's staff on his Wikipedia article spurred a Lowell Sun story and a subsequent Wikipedia investigation of all Internet addresses assigned to the Congress of the United States.

Wikipedia Current Events

- A leaked memo in the UK, detailing a conversation between American President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2003 has revealed that Blair intended to follow the US into Iraq even without a UN resolution, and that Bush considered provoking a response from Iraq using falsely marked Lockheed U-2 spy planes to provide an excuse for war.
- Venezuela has expelled a US diplomat for alledged spying.
- Representative John Boehner of Ohio becomes the U.S. House Majority Leader, beating out acting majority leader Roy Blunt in a house vote.
- Royal Dutch Shell breaks the record for the highest ever annual profit for a British (or Dutch) company with a total of £13.12bn .
- An unprecedented mobile phone tapping case was made public in Greece.
- The oil tanker Seabulk Pride, carrying approx 100,000 barrels (approx. 16 million L) of oil, runs aground in the port of Nikiski, Alaska.

Estonian oil spill kills 5,000 birds

An oil spill in north-west Estonia has, according to scientists in the country, killed an estimated 5,000 birds across the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The oil spill, which occurred on

January 31st, killed 2,000 birds just off the coasts of the nearby Vormsi and Osmussaar islands. Finnish authorities have also reported that birds in the Nordic countries have also been affected.

The oil spill occurred on the coast of the northern Harjumaa region of Estonia, and as of yet the spill remains unexplained. By the end of the first 24 hours following the spill, authorities had already picked up 400 dead birds, killed by contact with the oil.

The coasts of Estonia have historically been a Winter flocking place for birds from across North and Central Europe, due to the suitable climate for many species. The spill could endanger numbers, especially if the death toll continues to increase in the next few days.

United States Department of Justice workers among government Wikipedia vandals

Congressional edits: In response to the recent Wikipedia vandalizing by the staffers of U.S. Congressmen, Wikipedia has set up its own page listing each edit all congressional IP addresses have made, as well as those of other branches of government. Because of valuable contributions by House of Representatives and the Senate staffers alongside vandalism, Wikipedia administrators decided to lift the ban on the Congress IP addresses on January 30.

On January 31 and February 1, however, the IP address that had previously made headlines, 143.231.249.141, was banned again for three hours for vandalism. Although it had been known for being used by Marty Meehan's staff previously, because it is owned by the House, and because most edits after the unbanning seem to be in favor of Republicans, it is uncertain that the IP address is being accessed by the same users from before.

Although some edits since the unbanning have been positive, examples of negative contributions included removing, "In 2005, he has come under scrutiny [sic] for accepting campaign contributions from embattled former house leader Tom Delay," from the article on Thad McCotter, removing election statistics from the article on Dan Lungren, and, in the article on Marilyn Musgrave, changing the paragraph

"As a state legislator, Musgrave spent much of her time on social issues, particularly authoring bills to deny marriage rights and parental rights for gay and lesbian families. One of her final, failed bills would have made it much more difficult for same-sex parents to see their children in the hospital during an emergency. Musgrave also cast the only vote against legislation to give battered spouses paid leave from work."

to

"As a state legislator, Musgrave spent much of her time on social issues, particularly authoring bills to protect children and the traditional definition of marriage, as well as gun owner's rights."

CIA, the Department of Justice,

Marines, and Naval vandalism: IP addresses from the CIA, the Department of Justice, the Marines, and the Navy are listed on that page for having made several cases of vandalism. Cases of vandalism from the Department of Justice IP ranges usually consists of negative contributions from disgruntled, or otherwise misbehaving employees such as vandalizing articles on TV shows, a baseball player, or just complaining about their work, but cases of introducing bias, political spinning, or misinformation to an article have arisen.

These cases include articles on an Irish politician, and in the George W. Bush article, introducing accusations of Hugo Chavez being a dictator, and removing a paragraph covering the George W. Bush substance abuse controversy. The article most negatively edited from a Department of Justice IP address, however, was that of indicted former Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay. The vandal had removed two paragraphs stating a judge ruled Tom DeLay had broken state law by not disclosing over \$600,000 of fundraising money, a quote from Tom Delay in which he stated that it drives the Democrats crazy wondering why the Republican Party institutes pro-Israeli policy, and a subsection on controversies involving relatives.

From the CIA, the only questionable edit was vandalizing the article on the current president of Iran. Questionable edits from the IP addresses from the Marines and Navy based in Pensacola, Florida included vandalizing an article on a rock song and on former U.S. president Bill Clinton, adding racist comments to articles on an actor and Martin Luther King, Jr., and criticizing the men

and women in the Navy reserves.

The IP addresses of the Department of Justice, the CIA, and the Navy and Marines stationed in Pensacola, Florida were found using the American Registry for Internet Numbers at the official website. None of them, nor Wikimedia, have released an official statement.

The U.S. House of Representatives is not the first government entity to have been blocked from Wikipedia for disruption. The government of Alberta has had a subdivision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development blocked for three months since late 2005. An IP belonging to the German Bundestag has been repeatedly blocked from the German Wikipedia for vandalism, including sexually explicit comments.

Puppies used to smuggle heroin

Ten puppies with bags of liquid heroin surgically implanted into their bellies were seized in a drug bust in Medellin, Colombia, said authorities.

"They utilized a wide range of smuggling, the most repulsive of which was the use of puppies," said John P. Gilbride, head of the DEA's New York office.

"There have been cases of animal cruelty that have led to the discovery of drug labs, but not to the extent of an animal being used to carry drugs, especially a puppy," said ASPCA spokeswoman Jo Sullivan.

Investigators believe that the dogs were used to smuggle heroin into New York on commercial flights. The drugs were then to be distributed and sold along the East

Coast.

"Ten puppies, including Labrador retrievers, were rescued during a 2005 raid on a farm in Colombia," said the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) on Wednesday. The Agency also announced that they had made more than 30 arrests.

Authorities believe that a veterinarian, Andres Lopez Elorez (who is also believed to be a fugitive in Spain), opened the bellies of at least six of the ten puppies, inserted 3 - 3KG bags of liquid heroin, and then stitched them back up. Three puppies had died due to infections after the drugs were removed. A total of 14 bags, which were found using ultrasound, were recovered in six puppies.

"The surviving dogs are still alive and well, we're told," said Gilbride. "I think it's outrageous and heinous that they'd use small, innocent puppies in this way. This investigation identified the individuals who were responsible for overseeing and smuggling millions of dollars worth of heroin from Colombia to the East Coast."

The investigation revealed that the smugglers, whose ring was based in Medellin, not only used people and puppies to conceal their drugs, but also body creams, aerosol cans, and the linings of purses and luggage.

A tipster is said to have led authorities to the puppies.

It is not known how many puppies were actually used in the smuggling operation.

Three dogs were adopted by Colombian police. At least one of those puppies will be trained to

sniff for drugs.

About 24 kilograms of heroin was seized in recent raids in Colombia which have resulted in more than 20 arrests and another 10 in custody in New York. A total of at least 24 kilograms have been seized in these raids.

Israeli PM Ariel Sharon receives feeding tube

On Wednesday, doctors inserted a feeding tube into Ariel Sharon's stomach.

"Tonight Prime Minister Ariel Sharon underwent a gastrostomy, a process in which a tube is inserted into the stomach for feeding. The procedure was carried out under anesthetic and was successful," said Ron Krumer, a spokesperson for Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital where Sharon is continuing to be treated for a major stroke he suffered on January 4, 2006. He then added that, "the Prime Minister is still in a critical but stable condition."

Doctors say that the chances are slim that he will return to consciousness or return to a meaningful level of activity. As a result it is expected Sharon will be unable to serve as Prime Minister anytime in the future. Currently his position is being filled on an interim basis by Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Sharon, who had been Prime Minister of the State of Israel since 2001, suffered a massive stroke on January 4 during the run up to a new series of Israeli parliamentary elections. His centrist Kadima Party faced fierce competition from the conservative Likud Party (which he split off from in late 2005) and the democratic socialist Labour Party.

Ruddock hints at Australia Card

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock says he may introduce plans to make Australian citizens carry an identity card to avert terrorist attacks. "I'll make an announcement soon and that could be this week," Ruddock said. "It depends upon when I'm fully satisfied about the issues that we want examined."

According to a recent poll of 1200 people, over 50 percent would support a national identity card. A Newspann in The Australian newspaper found that 31 per cent of voters were opposed to the ID card.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard refloated the possibility of an "Australia Card" after the July 7 London suicide bombings. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government is considering introducing cards identifying Britons by fingerprints and iris scans.

Australia last debated a national ID card (to cut down on tax avoidance), the Australia Card, in 1987, but was defeated in the Senate after public outrage. Mr Howard, then in opposition, opposed the card, but now says times have changed. "This is an issue that ought to be back on the table...in the wake of something like the terrible tragedy in London," Howard told a news conference in June last year.

Australia has been on medium terror alert since 2001. While there hasn't been a major terrorist attack on Australian soil, Prime Minister John Howard says it's a "possibility."

Mr Ruddock is expected to announce this week the terms of

an independent inquiry into an ID card, citing national security and fraud prevention as key concerns. The inquiry will investigate the possible benefits of such a card in combating terrorism and fraud, and whether it could be introduced at a reasonable cost.

Opposition public accountability spokesman Kelvin Thomson said he was unsure whether it would help Australia's fight against terrorism as there was no great evidence to suggest ID cards assisted those countries that already had them.

Australian Privacy Foundation chief Anna Johnston said the poll was good news for those who opposed the ID card. She said the lower level of support for the ID card compared with 1986 showed that people were better informed.

"I would suggest that this shows the Government is already on very shaky ground on this proposal if there is only this very small majority of people in favour of it," Ms Johnston said. "Because as more details emerge about what is actually being put forward, support will drop."

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, said that policy should not be dictated by public opinion.

Advocacy groups say that work had already started on creating a coalition of lobby groups in readiness for a campaign. "We're starting to marshall our resources now," Ms Johnston said. "Like the Australia Card debate, we are looking to establish a broad coalition of people across the political spectrum and from all walks of life."

Ruddock's comments have been slammed by security experts, who

say national ID cards do not make Australia any safer and could have the opposite effect.

James Turner, security analyst at Frost & Sullivan Australia, said: "ID cards cannot protect us from terrorism because an ID card cannot indicate intention. It's like signature based anti-virus, the AV signature can only point out the currently known viruses; and an ID card can only identify currently known baddies."

Jo Stewart-Rattray, director of information security at Vectra Corporation said: "As far as its goal being to protect us from terrorist attacks, I don't think so. The bad guys will always find a way to propagate their own version of these cards. It is not protecting us against terrorist attacks by any means."

Stewart-Rattray's comments echoed those of ex-MI5 chief Dame Stella Rimington, who recently said ID cards were "useless" at fighting terrorism. "If we have ID cards at vast expense and people can go into a back room and forge them they are going to be absolutely useless. ID cards may be helpful in all kinds of things but I don't think they are necessarily going to make us any safer," said Rimington.

Bruce Schneier argued that ID cards will not help improve security and would have the opposite effect. He says the card will require an "immense database" with "enormous" security risks.

"The security risks are enormous. Such a database would be a kludge of existing databases; databases that are incompatible, full of erroneous data, and unreliable. As computer scientists,

we do not know how to keep a database of this magnitude secure, whether from outside hackers or the thousands of insiders authorised to access it," wrote Schneier.

Roger Clarke, of the Australian Privacy Foundation asked whether the "billions it would cost would be worth it", especially considering the "enormous intrusions into the affairs of the majority of law-abiding citizens".

According to Privacy International, around 100 countries have compulsory identity cards. They also stated that "virtually no common law country has a card".

FBI to begin investigation into shooting of US Air Force MP

The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation is currently investigating if a possible civil rights violation was committed by a sheriff's deputy of the San Bernardino County after the shooting of an unarmed U.S. Air Force Security Force officer.

The military policeman, Senior Airman Elio Carrion, 21, was shot while on leave after serving a six month deployment in Iraq. The incident took place on Sunday, in Chino, California, after a short police chase. Carrion was the passegner of Luis Fernando Escobedo, 21, when police began chasing Escobedo's blue Chevrolet Corvette for speeding. The car reached over speeds of 100mph (160 km/h) during the short five minute chase.

After the chase ended in a crash near his house, Jose Luis Valdez began taping the accident aftermath. The grainy, low-quality videotape shows Carrion laying on the ground with the officer standing over him. The deputy

appears to say, "Stay on the ground." The deputy then seems to say "Get up" several times. Carrion then said, "I'm going to get up." As Carrion begins to rise, the deputy fires three shots which hit Carrion in the chest, leg and side. After Carrion is hit he said, "I mean you no harm." The deputy responded by shouting "Shut the fuck up" twice, and then "You don't get up!" A neighbor is heard saying, "You told him to get up." The video shot by Valdez was given to police, with a copy sold by him to television station KTLA.

Carrion is now in the hospital and in good condition.

Cindy Beavers, a spokesperson for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department stated the deputy has been put on paid leave. Beavers also mentioned that Sheriff Gary Penrod had invited the FBI to join the investigation. The FBI released a statement confirming this.

Penrod issued a statement on Monday saying, "As with all investigations, the circumstances involved in this shooting will be reviewed, it would be inappropriate for me to make any additional comments until the investigation is completed."

Experts say the video is open to interpretation.

Last week, in a similar but unrelated incident, a news helicopter caught footage of St. Louis, Missouri police officers using what appears to be excessive force on a suspect in detaining him.

Bathurst, Australia's new hospital to be almost doubled in size

Bathurst Regional Council, the local government responsible for

the city of Bathurst and its surrounds in Central Western New South Wales, Australia yesterday revealed it had received a development application for the new Bathurst Base Hospital.

The new hospital is to be built behind the current hospital on the same site and is expected to cost the New South Wales government \$96 Million dollars. The Bathurst Hospital will be the first in the Bathurst-Orange-Bloomfield redevelopment project.

The new hospital will have 149 beds, up from 85 for the current hospital. The hospital will also feature a mental health unit - previously psychiatric patients had to travel to Orange to the Bloomfield Hospital for treatment.

The Bathurst Hospital is expected to have state-of-the art facilities and will share some services with the to be constructed Orange Base Hospital.

The Bathurst Regional Council has approved the demolition of 12 buildings on the hospital site for enabling works. The hospital site is heritage listed although council decided that as the buildings do not contribute to the streetscape they may be demolished.

The demolitions are expected to take place late next month and will take around 6 weeks to complete. A temporary driveway will then be built to replace the current service entry for food and linen as it will become part of the work site.

Upon completion of the new hospital, the current ward block will be demolished leaving the original building from the late 19th century intact. The original building is expected to become an

education centre and consulting rooms.

The original building was opened in 1834. Since then the facility has undergone numerous upgrades and add-ons, with the present ward block being opened in stages from 1978 to 1982.

Other buildings expected to be retained include the Daffodil Cottage (a cancer care centre) and the original Nurse's quarters known as Poole House.

Australia to send 200 more troops to Afghanistan

Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the Federal government will contribute another 200 troops to assist the Dutch military in a former Taliban stronghold. Australia also pledges \$150 million in aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

"We have 190 at the moment, special forces, we've got another 110 going there to provide additional support for them with two helicopters, and this would be another 200 on top of that." Mr Downer said.

Speaking outside a two-day international donors conference in London, Mr Downer said Australia's commitment to Afghanistan was not as large as some countries, but it would nevertheless make a big difference.

He said Australia would build on the millions it has already spent in Afghanistan, with a new pledge of \$150 million over 5 years through aid agency AusAID. Canberra has spent 110 million dollars in the war-torn country since the coalition invaded in late 2001.

Mr Downer joined world leaders in

London for the signing of the Afghanistan Compact: "a road-map for international donors and the Government of Afghanistan to work together to rebuild the country into a stable and democratic state."

Australia's latest troop commitment, for a provincial reconstruction team in conjunction with the Netherlands, will take its total in Afghanistan to 500 troops. Downer said that the troops would probably be sent to take part in a proposed provincial reconstruction team with Dutch soldiers in the southern province of Uruzgan as early as July.

"July, August would be the pencilled-in planning at the moment, so that would involve Australia sending around 200 troops over and above the troops we already have in Afghanistan," he said.

Mr Downer said Afghanistan still had a security problem but things were going in the right direction.

"We know how important it is for the new democratic government in Afghanistan and the new free and democratic processes there to survive, and every country that possibly can needs to give support to Afghanistan," he said.

Under the compact, Afghanistan has pledged to meet targets in security, governance, rule of law and human rights, and economic and social development in return for military and financial aid from its international partners.

Australia also has about 900 troops in Iraq. About 450 of the soldiers are guarding Japanese forces in southern Samawa, which Japanese media reports said could end by May.

Downer said Australia would "wait and see" what Japan would do before deciding whether to bring its Samawa troops home or redeploy them elsewhere in Iraq.

Australia has already committed some 300 troops and support personnel to Afghanistan.

Today in History

1488 - Bartolomeu Dias of Portugal sailed around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and landed in Mossel Bay.

1787 - The Shays Rebellion was crushed, but prompted the drafting of the Constitution of the United States.

1867 - Crown Prince Mutsuhito (pictured) succeeded his father Kōmei as Emperor of Japan, taking the title Meiji.

1959 - Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper died in a plane crash on "The Day The Music Died."

1966 - The Soviet spacecraft Luna 9 became the first space probe to land on the Moon and transmit pictures from the lunar surface to Earth.

February 03 is Setsubun in Japan; Four Chaplains' Day in the United States.

Quote of the Day

"An age is called Dark not because the light fails to shine, but because people refuse to see it."
~ James A. Michener

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