



Top Stories

Chinese police kill 20 villagers



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authorities opened fire on local villagers last week. Police allegedly shot dead up to 20 people, in what has been touted as the most lethal use of force by authorities since the Tiananmen Square massacre...

Violence at Cronulla Beach as 5000 people gather



Cronulla Beach in Sydney, New South Wales was the scene of racist mob-violence yesterday. In

what has been described as disgusting, un-Australian and shameful behaviour, a 5000-strong mob assaulted people suspected of being of Lebanese origin.

Featured story

Interview with Jimbo Wales

Wikinews contributors talk with Jimbo Wales, founder of the Wikimedia Foundation, in an exclusive interview.

Wikipedia Current Events

- ASEAN Summit begins in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- The Chronicles of Narnia: The

Wikipedia Current Events

Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe grossed \$65 million in the United States (\$107 million worldwide) on its opening weekend, making it the #2 December opening weekend film of all time (behind The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King and in front of the first two Lord of the Rings films). With this news, Disney has officially greenlit cinema production of second book in the series, Prince Caspian, by 2007.

- Gebran Tueni, a prominent Lebanese anti-Syrian member of parliament and managing editor of the leading liberal An-Nahar newspaper, has been killed in a car bomb attack in Beirut. He had spent months in Paris because of security concerns, reportedly only returning to Lebanon on Sunday. Another An-Nahar journalist, the anti-Syrian writer Samir Kassir, was killed in a car bomb in June.

Missed field goal gives Dallas important victory

The Dallas Cowboys beat the Kansas City Chiefs 31-28 at Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas.

It was a thrilling game which was decided in the final seconds when Lawrence Tynes missed a 41-yard field goal which would have forced overtime.

Cowboys quarterback Drew Bledsoe passed for a season-best 332 yards, including a 71-yard touchdown pass to Terry Glenn in the second quarter, and a 14-play 68-yard drive in the fourth for the

winning touchdown.

"That was really a great drive, probably the best one of the year," said Dallas coach Bill Parcells.

The win means the Cowboys remain tied with the Minnesota Vikings, who won against the St. Louis Rams, for the sixth and final NFC wildcard spot with 3 games remaining. The Chiefs are now in a three-way tie for the sixth AFC wildcard spot with the San Diego Chargers, who lost to the Miami Dolphins, and the Cincinnati Bengals, who won against the Cleveland Browns.

The Chiefs face the New York Giants next Saturday and the Cowboys play the Washington Redskins on Sunday.

University of Iowa tuition hike discriminates against engineering

It should come as no surprise to most students at the University of Iowa that tuition will be going up next year. After all, tuition has risen consistently since before 2002, often by larger percentages than other Big Ten Universities. The surprise may come when students of engineering, law, and public health receive their tuition bills, however, since the university has imposed an additional "fee" for law school, upper-level engineering, and public health programs that does not affect students pursuing other areas of study.

The fee, \$500 per year for law school students and for junior and

senior-class undergraduates in engineering, \$1000 per year for graduate students pursuing a masters of public health, is expected to help the university recoup some of the costs associated with operating these less popular and more costly areas of study. This is the first time the University of Iowa has been given the power by the Iowa Board of Regents to implement a policy affecting the tuition of one group of students studying in a non-professional program without affecting the tuition of all students in other non-professional programs, a policy known as "differential tuition."

The Daily Iowan reports that "Lola Lopes, the UI associate provost for undergraduate education, said the UI is boosting tuition for engineering students because other university students should not have to subsidize engineering, which is a more expensive program." But in a nation where science and engineering education is already struggling, some students and community members are wondering what type of effect this will have on enrollment in the University of Iowa's small college of engineering.

One student of engineering, who wished only to be quoted by his first name, Jeff, said that he couldn't "understand why the university would be charging students of one of the most difficult programs on campus more than those of programs like business and art." While it is true that engineering students do require additional university resources, according to university accounting records, if engineering students continue to face hurdles greater than simply an increased course load compared to their non-engineering peers, it is

unclear how many will remain in the program through graduation. Statistics for the expected effect of this tuition increase on enrollment were not available from the University of Iowa at the time of this report.

As reports continue to be published describing the relative drop in the number of students pursuing degrees in the sciences and engineering in the United States compared to other countries such as China, it isn't hard for some to figure out why America is falling behind. When asked about whether he would continue his education in engineering or switch majors due to the new fee, one engineering student said "I love engineering and I love the skills I've learned in engineering, but getting slammed at every turn by crazy coursework, additional hours, constantly changing curriculum, and now higher tuition [compared to students of other majors] makes me think I would have been better off doing business."

The university, when asked for justification for the differential tuition plan, cited the increased cost of facilities, equipment, computers, and even instructors required by students pursuing degrees in these fields. One faculty member in support of the plan, who again, wished to remain anonymous, stated that "the differential tuition seems fair. Why should the rest of the university have to subsidize the engineering program when we're already having enough trouble making ends meet in our own departments?"

While opinions remain diverse amongst most students and faculty regarding the differential tuition policy, one group of

students doesn't seem to mind the increase. Graduating senior in mechanical engineering, Mike, expressed that he was simply glad he was getting out before the fee increase took effect. "I'm going to get my degree this May and then get out of this place. I'm just glad I don't have to deal with any more of the politics at this school."

Currently University of Iowa engineering students are required to complete 128 semester hours of coursework in order to obtain a degree while students in the college of liberal arts and sciences are required to complete 120 semester hours of coursework to obtain a degree. The differential tuition plan is set to take effect beginning with the Fall semester of 2006.

Afghanistan Earthquake December 2005

A magnitude 6.7 on the Richter scale earthquake has struck north-eastern Afghanistan. The US Geological Survey (USGS) has stated that the time of the quake was 22:00 GMT, and the epicenter was close to the border with Pakistan.

The tremor was felt in Delhi, Muzaffarabad and Balakot. It is the second quake to hit the area in a fortnight.

Californian Governer denies 'Tookie' clemency

California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has denied clemency for gang founder Stanley Tookie Williams, a death row inmate convicted of four murders in the 1970's.

There has been much debate within the US in the run up to the decision with a number of figures

lobbying for clemency.

BBC News has reported Alice Huffman (President of The California National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) as saying "We believe this is a serious blow to our effort to fight gangs," 'Tookie' Williams being well known for his anti-gang efforts. These efforts have earned him Nobel peace prize nominations.

However the violent nature of Williams crimes has also been raised. In denying clemency Californian governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said "Without apology and atonement for these senseless and brutal killings, there can be no redemption,". Some reports indicate that the decision was a difficult one for the Californian governer.

Williams will be executed at 12:01 AM local time (0801 UTC) on Tuesday, according to reports.

Tramlink fan site closes news section

Croydon Tramlink - The Unofficial Site, a popular website about Tramlink, has removed its news section from its website by 6 December 2005 due to legal threats. Concerns about the move have already been expressed in the newsgroup "uk.transport.london". One of the articles in contention is claimed to be three years old. After the section was withdrawn, the site maintainer stated in a message on the site that he feels he is not in a position to defend legal actions should they arise.

In the same stament, the maintiner explains that the news section has been withdrawn because of threats over some of

the reports in the News section. The site maintainer further explains that "the aim throughout had been timely, detailed, accurate reporting" with information reported "in good faith".

IC Croydon, a local news website, has reported Bombadier (the company believed to have made the threats) as stating that some of the reports on the unofficial site were "100% inaccurate" with a spokesperson being quoted as saying that "Things came to a head when a potential customer read something on his website and asked us if there was any truth in it. This could have affected our bid."

By contrast the general manager of Tramlink's operators is quoted (by IC Corydon) as saying "It is a shame. I have warmed to the site over the years. He is such a strong advocate of Tramlink," referring to the maintiner of the fan site.

Internet company offers organs from executed Chinese prisoners

An Internet based company, Transplantsinternational.com has begun selling transplants of kidneys from executed Chinese prisoners, at a price of £23,000. The company states, 'A cadaveric kidney comes from a dead person and in the majority of cases in China, the dead people are prisoners, which allows for us to know at least two weeks ahead of time when the kidney will be ready.'

The prisoners apparently give their consent and are told that their families will receive money for the 'donation'. Human rights groups generally oppose such means of obtaining transplants as "organ harvesting" which makes human

rights abuses more profitable, and exploits poorer populations.

Amnesty International reports that China carried out 3,400 executions in 2004, which is 90% of all executions worldwide.

French police detain 20 terror suspects in dawn raid

French police said on Monday they have smashed an Islamist terrorism ring in Paris. Between 20 and 30 people were arrested in the Paris region following an investigation into the funding of Islamist extremists. Police described Monday's events as a "major operation aimed at disbanding an Islamist network linked to terrorism".

Among those arrested in a string of dawn raids were individuals linked to previous terrorism investigations and common crime, the police statement said. Those detained remained in custody and police were searching a number of premises and Internet cafes. The suspects were under surveillance for several weeks and were detained after evidence emerged that "violent actions" were being planned.

Those arrested are suspected of staging armed robberies to finance radical Islamist causes. French investigators were reportedly "convinced" those arrested intended to stage violent acts on French territory, a French radio station reported.

Some 20 suspects were arrested before dawn in five different regions. Others were arrested several hours later around suburban Paris. The raids were carried out by the domestic intelligence service, DST, detectives from France's organised

crime unit and members of the RAID crack intervention squad.

France has been on red alert, the second highest security level, since the suicide bomb attacks on London transport on July 7.

Gorillaz Nominated for 5 Grammy Awards

The smash hit "Demon Days" from cartoon band Gorillaz has been nominated for 5 Grammy Awards: Record Of The Year, "Feel Good, Inc." Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals, "Feel Good, Inc.", Best Urban/Alternative Performance, "Dirty Harry", Producer Of The Year, Danger Mouse "Demon Days", Best Short Form Music Video, "Feel Good, Inc."

The other nominations for Record of the Year are "We Belong Together" by Mariah Carey, "Boulevard Of Broken Dreams" by Green Day, "Hollaback Girl" by Gwen Stefani, and "Gold Digger" by Kanye West.

Indianapolis remains undefeated with win in Jacksonville

The Indianapolis Colts beat the Jacksonville Jaguars 26-18 at ALLTEL Stadium in Jacksonville, Florida. The Colts remain undefeated 13 games into the 16-game NFL season.

Marvin Harrison caught two touchdown passes from Peyton Manning, including a 65-yard pass in the second quarter. Mike Vanderjagt kicked four field goals. The Jaguars, who were held to a single field goal in the first 3 quarters, scored two touchdowns in the last five minutes of the game.

The victory guarantees that Colts will finish with the best record in

the AFC, entitling them to a bye in the first round of the playoffs, and home field advantage in the second and third rounds.

Only three other teams in NFL history have remained undefeated through the first 13 games of the season: the 1934 Chicago Bears, the 1972 Miami Dolphins, and the 1998 Denver Broncos. Only the 1972 Dolphins finished a 16-game season without a loss.

"Going 16-0 would be great, but it's not the most important thing," said Indianapolis coach Tony Dungy. "We're going to keep our mantra: one game at a time. We're going to do everything we can to beat San Diego and we're not going to look ahead."

The Colts face the San Diego Chargers next Sunday in Indianapolis.

Demonstration in Hong Kong denounces WTO

Anti-globalization protesters in Hong Kong began a series of demonstrations on Sunday to denounce this week's World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting.

Around 3,000 protesters with signs reading "Junk the WTO" and "Life is not for sale", took to the streets in a carnival atmosphere. "We feel very frustrated with multinational enterprises," said Kenzo Sasaki, owner of a 20-cow dairy farm north of Tokyo. "Our main message is for food sovereignty. Junk the WTO."

Some 10,000 anti-globalization protesters, including groups of South Korean farmers angry at the prospect of more agricultural imports, are converging on Hong Kong. Police hope to avoid the violent clashes that marked the

last WTO conference in Cancun, Mexico, in 2003, where a protester was killed by police.

Supporters of the talks say a trade deal may generate billions of dollars in benefits and possibly lift millions out of poverty, but many opponents say it would largely benefit rich nations at the expense of developing countries.

Deep divisions between developed and developing countries, particularly over agriculture, have forced WTO states to lower their goals for their sixth ministerial conference, which is being held this week amid tight security.

To avoid trouble, Hong Kong has blacklisted some people. Officials have also glued down loose pavement stones and welded shut sewer grates to prevent protesters from using them as projectiles and pedestrian overpasses have been covered in mesh to prevent objects being thrown.

Elizabeth Tang, head of the Hong Kong Peoples' Alliance coordinating the demonstrations, said she expected any violence to be on a very small-scale and easily handled by police. "People all over the world are feeling that the WTO and the way it has been functioning so far has failed to lift the poor out of poverty," Tang said.

Han Dongfang, a fellow marcher who led workers at the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protest, said workers' rights had languished. "The WTO is a double-edged sword for China," said Han. "Chinese workers have no right to organize unions, so how can you protect yourself or get benefits."

Spokespeople for the group of 1,500 South Koreans protesters

said they would demonstrate legally and peacefully, according to a statement by the Korean Struggle Mission, which represents several activist groups.

The Koreans oppose the WTO's aim to lower trade barriers for agricultural imports, saying such moves will flood the Korean market with cheap rice and bankrupt Korean farmers. Joo Jei-jun, general coordinator of the Korean Struggle Mission, on Monday told reporters, "We will be escalating the level of struggle on December 17. "Any hindrance to our freedom of expression - either by the Hong Kong government or the police - will be dealt with in an affirmative manner," he added.

Yang Kyeong-kyoo, of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, said the groups were still discussing protest tactics. "But generally, we will mobilize as many people as we can because December 17 is the last day to make decisions," he said.

Chinese police kill 20 villagers

Chinese security forces have sealed off a village where police have allegedly shot and killed up to 20 people, in what has been touted as the most lethal use of force by authorities since the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Days after reports of the shooting leaked out, Beijing has confirmed that police had opened fire last Tuesday on villagers protesting against land seizures. According to government statements, three people had been shot dead as police quelled a demonstration. The incident came after months of protest against the building of a power station, which villagers say was on stolen land.

In an apparent attempt to diffuse tensions, authorities have arrested the police commander accused of authorising the shootings. Hundreds of police have blocked roads into Dongzhou village, part of Shanwei city in Guangdong province near Hong Kong.

Villagers claim that up to 20 people died in the clash. They say 300 people have been arrested for protesting in recent months. Last Tuesday's demonstration was to demand the release of three more who had been detained.

A government statement, released after a four-day news blackout, said the villagers attacked police with sticks, knives and Molotov cocktails. "Police were forced to open fire in alarm," it said. "In the chaos, three villagers died, eight were injured, three of them seriously."

However, villagers claimed that the protest was peaceful and, at most, only fireworks had been thrown into the air. One teenager said: "We didn't expect the police to open fire. They threw tear gas first and then they shot."

According to newspapers in Hong Kong, residents say that police are going from house to house offering money to take away the bodies of those who died, in order to reduce the visible death count.

Local government officials say the killings will be investigated, but rather than blame the officers who pulled the trigger or gave the order to fire, it accused three local men of stirring up unrest, adding: "They must shoulder the legal responsibility for what happened."

The report, which was carried by the state-run Xinhua news agency, made no mention of claims by

villagers that up to 20 people were killed, some of whom were said to have been chased and executed.

Locals quoted in the Hong Kong and foreign media said bodies were left in the street and in the sea. Shots were reported many hours after the initial clash.

Violence at Cronulla Beach as 5000 people gather

Cronulla Beach in Sydney, New South Wales was the scene of racist mob-violence yesterday. In what has been described as disgusting, un-Australian and shameful behaviour, a 5000-strong mob assaulted people suspected of being of Lebanese origin. The angry, alcohol-fuelled crowd also turned on anyone who tried to help the victims, including police, security guards and ambulance officers.

Following an attack on two lifeguards earlier in the week, allegedly by men of Lebanese descent, a protest had been organised via text messages and a small number of usenet postings.

Sutherland Shire Mayor Kevin Schreiber says inflammatory text messages calling for revenge attacks fueled the violence. Mr Schreiber said the heavily-circulated messages ensured troublemakers went to the southern Sydney beach looking for a fight. Police had patrolled the area all weekend after text messages began circulating among the community calling for vigilante responses to unwelcome visitors on the beach.

"The sending out of that text message was foolish and irresponsible and ensured that people from all over Sydney came to Cronulla looking to cause

trouble and this was further fueled by alcohol," said Mr Schreiber.

As the crowd marched along the beach and foreshore area, waving Australian and White Nationalist flags, the crowd chanted racist slogans. Many of the crowd had adorned their bodies with racist slogans.

Middle Eastern men were openly targetted and assaulted. A young Muslim woman wearing a veil was chased into a kiosk on Cronulla beach. Police tried to move her away from the chanting crowd but were unable to reach the security of the command post. While the woman and police officers hid in the kiosk, a crowd surrounded the kiosk and shouted "Kill the Lebs", while others climbed on top of the kiosk.

As police horses and special operations officers formed a line and pushed the crowd away, they were bombarded with beer bottles. After half an hour, an ambulance arrived at the kiosk and people were loaded into it. The ambulance, transporting six injured youths, escorted by police and police horses, was also bombarded with beer bottles. One struck an ambulance officer on the head. His colleague suffered lacerations to the arm.

A total of 25 people, including two ambulance officers, were injured and about 40 cars were vandalised at Maroubra as the unrest spread to other beachside communities. Police said 16 people had been arrested and charged with 41 offences. Locals said today they were in shock and many refused to be named, too scared of retribution for their comments.

Those charged were from Mortdale, Cronulla, Bondi Junction,

Kareela, Granville, Lugarno, Greenacre, Mascot, Northmead, Jannali, Sutherland, and Riverwood. Offences included malicious damage, resist police, hinder police, assault police, resist arrest, possess prohibited drug, offensive manner, threaten violence, affray, possess knife in a public place, and driving in a manner dangerous. All of those charged were men between 17 and 40 years of age.

A Police strike force had been established to track down those responsible, NSW Premier Morris Iemma said today. Mr Iemma said video and photo evidence would be used to catch the offenders following incidents which he said showed "ugly face of racism in Australia".

He said the Government would examine what extra police powers would be needed to combat further outbreaks of violence. A meeting of community leaders would be convened to discuss the problem.

"Let's be very clear, the police will be unrelenting in their fight against these thugs and hooligans," the Premier said. A series of apparent revenge attacks – including two stabbings – occurred overnight following the unrest at Cronulla.

Prime Minister John Howard, at a separate press conference, condemned the violence. He said attacking anyone on the basis of their race or ethnicity was unacceptable and should be repudiated. He has refused to call Australians "racist". He himself created racism-related controversy when in 1988 he claimed that the rate of Asian immigration into Australia was too high.

Kuranda Seyit, the director of Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations (FAIR), an Islamic think-tank, was disgusted by the weekends violence. "The Cronulla police must send a loud and clear message to others who are potentially considering vigilante action against fellow Australians," Mr Seyit said. He also condemned the previous violence that was allegedly committed by Lebanese men, but said that this does not justify yesterdays violence. "I realise that the initial behaviour by the thugs who beat the lifeguard was unacceptable but to take it out any anyone who the mob think are not one of them, is not the solution," Mr Seyit said.

He suggested that a number of people in Sutherland Shire were racist, and this contributed to the violence. "Obviously the underlying racism and intolerance in the shire is now bubbling to the surface."

NSW Deputy Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione says police believed neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups were among the crowd. "That in fact is something that we're following up," he told the Nine network. "Yes, that's the advice we've received."

One woman was advertising a group called the Patriotic Youth League. The group describes itself as a "radical nationalist" group with links to the German-based skinhead group Volksfront, British Nationalist Party and the New Zealand National Front.

Most bloggers were in agreement that anyone committing acts of violence should be arrested and punished, regardless of race, place of residence, or justification for their actions. Some are purely critical, whereas others are

pointing to previous acts by Lebanese youths to explain the violence.

"Round `em up—all of them, from both sides—charge `em, convict `em, jail `em," Tim Blair said.

"Are we living in Tsarist Russia where peasants with pitchforks chase Jews down the street?" said Jason Soon of catallaxy. He made a distinction between these riots and previous riots, such as Maquarie Fields. "The denizens of Cronulla do not even have the excuse of poverty and deprivation for their actions. The infamy of disgrace will be heavier on them than on the people of Macquarie Fields."

One blogger said that he did not support Sunday's violence, but argued that it was understandable after what he described as years of violence and intimidation by Lebanese youths.

"This episode is an absolute disgrace. I, however, absolutely refuse to condemn the people who took that action yesterday, especially given the pattern of wilful inaction from the authorities over the last two years. Far from demonstrating intolerance (arguably, quite the opposite has been demonstrated here, given the facts), put quite simply, everybody has a limit," said James Ozark of "A Western Heart".

Another blogger, who goes by the name "AnonymousLefty", issued a challenge to right-wing bloggers and mainstream pundits, asking them to explain how recent events should have been handled. "What precisely should we be doing differently in order to prevent flare-ups like Cronulla? (If Andrew Bolt and Piers Ackerman are going to devote their next columns to

Cronulla - and I'd bet you the shiny biro on my desk that they will - perhaps they'd consider, instead of simply attacking 'multiculturalism' as a vague concept, actually suggesting what they'd do differently.)"

Splat Guy criticised the use of the national flag and anthem during the riot. "... the ugliest thing of all was the use of symbols of the unity of Australians - all Australians, not just Anglos - like the flag, national anthem, and sports cries as a sort of racial identifier. Really unsavoury, really unacceptable, really unaustralian."

Racism in post-invasion Australia dates back to the White Australia policy, which started as government policy in the 1880's, became a national law with the creation of Australia as a state in 1901, effectively was stopped in 1973 under the prime ministership of Whitlam, and was completed by further reform in immigration law under Fraser in 1978.

Xbox 360 not a hit in Japan Hundreds attend

Microsoft has launched its much-hyped Xbox 360 console into Japan, but unlike the European and American markets the Japanese are not rushing out to buy them.

When launched in the American and European markets, stores sold out early. In Japan, sales are much lower. One store-owner says that fewer than 50 units were sold in the first 2 hours of its release.

Many believe that in Japan it is difficult for any games console to be successful that isn't from a Japanese company, such as Sony or Nintendo. The first generation of Xbox consoles performed

similarly possibly due to being released two years after the PlayStation 2. The large size of the console and the differing style of games was also said to have contributed.

There is still some hope for the Xbox 360, Takeshi Tajima, a BNP Paribas analyst, told Reuters news agency "most people are going to wait and see."

"International Peace Conference"

On Saturday 10 December 2005, Tony Benn spoke to around 1,500 people at the opening rally of a peace conference at the Royal Horticultural Hall in London organised by the Stop the War Coalition in opposition to the occupation of Iraq. Tony Benn told the amassed conference delegates that the anti-war movement, which is calling for troops to be withdrawn from Iraq, is the biggest he had seen in his lifetime.

Throughout the long day, from 10am to 8pm, there were 33 speakers in total. Among these was Cindy Sheehan, American anti-war activist whose son, a soldier, died in Iraq. She spoke in a session along with among others Reg Keys and Rose Gentle from Military Families Against the War. Several speakers who had travelled from Iraq spoke, including Hassan Juma, president of the Iraqi trade union the Southern Oil Workers' Union. He condemned what he claimed were attempts by America to strip Iraq through privatizing its services. Sheikh Hussein al Zagani, a representative of Muqtada al-Sadr, was due to speak at the conference but was reportedly denied a visa.

George Galloway, the RESPECT MP,

closed the conference in a speech in which he urged people to build for a planned international demonstration on the 18th of March next year.

Business Brief for December 12, 2005

Paramount Pictures buys DreamWorks SKG

Paramount Pictures has agreed to buy DreamWorks SKG for \$826 million in cash and \$774 million in assumption of debt. Paramount intends to sell off the Dreamworks' 59 title library which includes *Gladiator*, *American Beauty*, and *Saving Private Ryan*. The library is expected to bring in \$850 million to \$1 billion making the Dreamworks net purchase price about \$500 to \$650 million.

DreamWorks was established 11 years ago by Steven Spielberg, David Geffin, and Jeffrey Katzenberg. Spielberg will remain producer-director and Geffen will remain the company's chairman.

Paramount will not receive Dreamworks' animation studios, which is responsible for the hit *Shrek*, but it will own the distribution rights of previously made Dreamworks films. Paramount will however receive Dreamworks' television division. NBC Universal, owned by GE, had offered \$900 million.

WTO battles on

The agricultural fighting continues in the WTO. EU's trade chief Peter Mandelson wants his six-point plan tabled. The plan includes a deal to end cotton subsidies. "We have asked [WTO Director-General] Pascal Lamy to consider making the development package that we have been promoting as the first subject in the discussions. I think it would earth these negotiations

in the real world, would give them a human face." Mandelson said.

This agitated several countries, notably the US, Brazil, and several latin american countries. "The US and EU are receiving billions of subsidies and at the end of the day these countries produce far more than they should and our market is flooded with subsidised cotton." said Samuel Amehou, Benin's WTO ambassador.

Brazil insists that the EU make a better offer. The country's finance minister said "Unless the European Union is able to improve substantially its offer on agricultural goods, there will not be a successful round."

Mandelson countered with "Another offer on agriculture would simply be pocketed without listing the levels of ambition overall," he said. "It is for others to come up with better proposals in key areas of industrial tariffs and services."

Hong Kong Secretary for Commerce, John Tsang, said he wants to build a platform in Hong Kong for the Doha Round to push for a final drive towards reaching a conclusion in 2006. Tsang said that ministers must give a clear direction on how to move forward after the conference.

Today in History

1545 - Counter-Reformation: The Council of Trent, an ecumenical council convoked by Pope Paul III in response to the growth of Protestantism, opened in Trento, Italy.

1862 - American Civil War: Union forces under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside were decisively defeated in the Battle of Fredericksburg.

1937 - Nanking Massacre: Japanese forces under General

Iwane Matsui captured Nanjing, China and began weeks of looting, burning, raping and killing.

1981 - Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in Poland, suspended Solidarity and imprisoned many union leaders.

2003 - Former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was found hiding in a spider hole during Operation Red Dawn and captured. December 13 is Republic Day in Malta (1974); St. Lucia's Day in Sweden

Quote of the Day

The maple tree that night
Without a wind or rain
Let go its leaves
Because its time had come.
~ Eugene McCarthy ~

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