



Top Stories

Israeli PM Sharon rushed to hospital

Ariel Sharon, 77, the Israeli Prime Minister has been admitted to Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem after suffering what doctors are calling a serious stroke.

Televangelist Pat Robertson claims Sharon's stroke is "divine retribution"

American televangelist Pat Robertson is coming under fire for claiming that Ariel Sharon's stroke is "divine retribution" from God, for withdrawing from the Gaza Strip.

Featured story

Comedian Jon Stewart to host 78th Academy Awards

American comedian and Daily Show anchor Jon Stewart has been chosen to host the 78th Annual Academy Awards. This is not Stewart's first time hosting an awards show as he hosted the Grammys in 2001 and 2002.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Janjaweed militants cross the Sudanese border into Chad and attack the villages of Boroto, Ade, and Moudaina, killing nine and seriously wounding three others. Chad once again warns Sudan that it will retaliate for attacks by Janjaweed and UFDC rebel attacks.
- 2005 Kashmir earthquake: SOS Children report gastroenteritis, pneumonia and bronchitis rife in

Wikipedia Current Events

emergency camps as landslides block route to Muzaffarabad. The organization now has a total of 106 children with missing parents in its care. SOS

- The People's Republic of China announces that the last surviving member of the Gang of Four, Yao Wen Yuan, died on December 23, 2005.
- Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos begins six month tour of Mexico to unite social movements for positive change. The tour coincides with presidential election campaigns. Marcos claims that the all the party candidates are liars and criminals who don't care about the Mexican people.
- A third child from the same family in eastern Turkey dies of H5N1 avian flu. Hülya Koçyiğit, 11, was the sister of Mehmet Ali, 14, who died last weekend, and of Fatma, 15, who died on Thursday. She was the third human fatality outside China and South-East Asia. A six-year-old brother is also being treated for the same disease.
- Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon successfully undergoes a third round of surgery to correct a rise in cranial pressure.

Televangelist Pat Robertson suggests Sharon's stroke is act of God in response to Gaza withdrawal

Christian televangelist Pat

Robertson has come under fire for recent comments, stating that former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recent stroke was "divine retribution" for pulling Israelis out of the Gaza Strip. Robertson made the comments on his show, The 700 Club, which is produced in Norfolk, Virginia by Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network.

Robertson stated on the show that, "God considers this land [Israel] to be His. When you read the Bible, He said 'This is my land.' For any Prime Minister of Israel who decides he will carve it up and give it away, God said, 'No, this is Mine.'" He later added, "I would say woe to any prime minister of Israel who takes a similar course to appease the EU, the United Nations, or the United States of America."

Robertson also said that Sharon is "a very tender-hearted man and a good friend" and that he has prayed alongside the former prime minister. A spokesperson for Robertson said he "expresses his deep sadness over Ariel Sharon's life threatening stroke and concern for Israel's future security."

Reverend Barry W. Lynn, director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State stated that a religious leader "should not be making callous political points while a man is struggling for his life." Lynn further added in a statement that, "Pat Robertson has a political agenda for the entire world, and he seems to think God is ready to take out any world

leader who stands in the way of that agenda."

The White House called Robertson's comments improper. White House spokesman Tret Duffy said, "Those comments are wholly inappropriate and offensive and really don't have a place in this or any other debate."

Angell Watts, a spokesperson for Robertson, who is an ordained minister and bible teacher, said that "Robertson is simply reminding his viewers what the Bible has to say about efforts made to divide the land of Israel."

Robertson has made controversial comments in the past, such as a comment in late 2005 about Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, and commenting on the residents of Dover, Pennsylvania after a proposal to teach intelligent design in public schools was defeated.

Robertson claims himself as a Southern Baptist. He is also a former nomination for the Republican party presidential candidate in 1988.

DNA re-test ordered on executed Virginia man

Virginia's outgoing governor and possible 2008 presidential contender Mark Warner ordered on Thursday that DNA testing should be performed on Roger Keith Coleman, a Grundy, Virginia man executed in May 1992 for the rape and murder in 1981 of Wanda Fay McCoy.

The death penalty was re-instated in the United States after a Supreme Court ruling in 1976, reversing its brief suspension from 1973. A total of 1,004 prisoners have been executed since then,

but none yet have been posthumously exonerated. That could change if the more precise DNA testing methods available today find Coleman innocent.

Coleman, 33, maintained his innocence to the end, saying "An innocent man is going to be murdered tonight. When my innocence is proven, I hope America will realize the injustice of the death penalty as all other civilized countries have," as his final words before being strapped into the electric chair.

Governor Warner said regarding the Coleman case, "[that] technology has advanced significantly and can be applied in the case of someone who consistently maintained his innocence until execution... My prayers are with the family of Wanda McCoy as we take this extraordinary step." Coleman's resolute insistence on his innocence drew national attention when he was pictured on the cover of TIME magazine, focusing attention on capital punishment.

The victim was a 19-year-old housewife and Coleman's sister-in-law. DNA work done on sperm evidence during the 1990's found that Coleman was within 2% of the possible population of people who could have committed the crime. Coleman's execution was allowed to proceed by then governor Douglas Wilder.

Virginia governor Mark Warner

The biological evidence used during Coleman's post-conviction appeal process has been under negotiation for months to agree on a proper method to have it re-tested. Four Virginia newspapers and the Centurion Ministries, a New Jersey organization, asked for

the re-testing. The request was denied by the Virginia Supreme Court. With negotiations over the biological evidence successfully concluded, and with a new appeal from the Centurion Ministries to Governor Warner, the testing has begun and may conclude before the end of Warner's governorship on January 14.

The sperm has been kept frozen at a California laboratory for 15 years. Dr. Blake, the head of the lab, submitted an affidavit attesting to the integrity of the samples. The first set of samples was sent to the Ontario Centre of Forensic Sciences lab in Toronto on December 15. A second delivery currently is underway.

"We have found that the latest DNA technology—in certain instances where the other facts of a case support it—has provided a definitive result not available at the time of trial or post-conviction testing," said Governor Warner.

Singer Lou Rawls dies of cancer

The Grammy Award winning velvet-voiced soul singer Lou Rawls has died of cancer at age 72, according to his publicist.

Second Turk dies from bird flu, more suspected to be infected

A 15 year old female has been the second person to die in Turkey from bird flu. The news follows the death of her brother on Sunday. Six people from another Turkish province are also thought to be infected, bringing the total number of suspected cases in Turkey to 18.

It has been revealed by Turkish officials that samples from the boy tested positive to the H5N1 strain

of bird flu.

The deaths are the first from H5N1 outside of Asia. Around 70 people have died from the virus in the last two years. Of those infected, over half have died.

In an attempt to stop the virus from spreading, the Turkish government have placed five areas of eastern Turkey near Dogubayazit, the affected village, under quarantine. The sale and movement of animals in the region has been banned, livestock is to be kept in enclosed areas, and a hunting ban is also in place in the east.

The Turkish government will make 7m lire (US\$5.2m, €4.3m, £3m) available to farmers who surrender their poultry for culling to prevent the virus spreading further.

The World Health Organisation are sending a team of experts to Turkey to determine how best to deal with the outbreak.

Authorities are urging people not to panic and reassuring them that the outbreak does not mean a pandemic. At this stage, the virus is only transferred to humans from close contact with infected fowl.

Ponting breaks cricket records

Australian cricketer, Ricky Ponting made his second century (100 runs) in his 100th match. The Australian cricket captain is playing in the final day of the third Test against South Africa at the Sydney Cricket Ground. He clocked up 120 runs in his first innings.

He is the first player in Test cricket history to make twin centuries in his 100th match.

The skipper has also in this match become Australia's third-highest runs scorer, passing Mark Waugh (8,029) and trailing Steve Waugh (10,927) and Allan Border (11,174).

Comedian Jon Stewart to host 78th Academy Awards

American comedian and Daily Show anchor Jon Stewart has been chosen to host the 78th Annual Academy Awards. This is not Stewart's first time hosting an awards show as he hosted the Grammys in 2001 and 2002.

His choice by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences shows their continuing attempt to target a younger viewing audience. Last year's host was Chris Rock, also a comedian who is popular with young adults, whose performance and jokes at the expense of celebrities irked some Academy members. The Academy has also been seeking an Oscar host with the appeal of popular hosts such as Billy Crystal, Johnny Carson, and Bob Hope.

The choice further demonstrates Stewart's transformation from the host of a cult TV show into a mainstream performer. Stewart is host of The Daily Show, a satirical show aired on Comedy Central that parodies network and cable news shows. The show started in 1996, anchored by Stewart's predecessor Craig Kilborn, who left in 1999 to host The Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn. The Daily Show draws in about 1.4 million viewers nightly. While not a groundbreaking number, sixty-five percent of those viewers are in the 18 to 49 age group, which is the group most coveted by television advertisers.

The Daily Show has become

influential in politics and pop culture. Stewart has interviewed many guests from both sides of the political spectrum, including 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry, Bill O'Reilly, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, and has asked for President George W. Bush to come on the show, going so far as publish an invitation in a full page newspaper ad during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

Stewart has interviewed celebrities like Bruce Willis, Ice Cube, The Rock, and recently interviewed the band The White Stripes who then did a live studio performance.

Although The Daily Show is steeped in satire, its emphasis on political coverage and current events has led to many of its younger viewers regard it as their daily news source, especially during the 2004 presidential election. Stewart was even considered as a possible replacement for Dan Rather on the CBS Evening News by CBS executive Leslie Moonves, which owned Comedy Central before splitting into two companies just a few days ago.

Although a comedian, Stewart can be serious at times. Notable was his appearance on the CNN show Crossfire in which he got into a debate with host Tucker Carlson over the state of television journalism, and accused Crossfire of polarizing politics and that it was hurting America, Stewart, in his own words said "It's not so much that it's bad, as it's hurting America [...] Stop, stop, stop, stop hurting America." He referred to Carlson and co-host Paul Begala as "partisan hacks", and said that Carlson was "as big a dick on [his] show as [he is] on any show". Many believe this highly publicized criticism led to the cancellation of

Crossfire.

The Daily Show has won seven Emmys and a Peabody Award for their coverage of the 2000 presidential election.

The Academy Awards ceremony will be held on ABC this year on March 5th.

CBS Corporation begins trading on New York Stock Exchange

The new CBS Corporation began trading on the New York Stock Exchange once again on January 3 after officially finishing its split with Viacom two days earlier. The split had been in the works since around March 2005 when Viacom announced it was breaking into two publicly traded companies due to stock price stagnation.

In June 2005, Viacom's board approved the split and saying the CBS Corporation name would be revived for one of those companies. One of these units would receive most of Viacom's broadcasting and mass-media portion of subsidiaries (CBS, UPN, Infinity Broadcasting, now CBS Radio) along with Viacom Outdoor (now CBS Outdoor), Showtime Networks, and Paramount's television studio and a few other operations and announced long-time executive Leslie Moonves would head that new company.

The split is filled with twists and turns. Viacom was founded in 1971 as CBS' television syndication division and was spun off in 1973. Westinghouse Electric Corporation bought CBS and changed its name to CBS Corporation. In a ironic twist, Viacom acquired their parent company in 1999 and CBS' stock symbol was de-listed as it became a division of Viacom. Ironically, the

new CBS Corporation is actually the original Viacom. A new Viacom was founded and spun off containing MTV Networks (which contains CMT and Spike TV, two cable networks originally owned by CBS) along with BET, Paramount's film studio and home entertainment divisions, online virtual pet game Neopets, and a music publisher. It also partially owns Sega of America along with the Sonic the Hedgehog trademarks and is currently in the process of acquiring DreamWorks.

CBS unveiled its logo, the iconic CBS eye, and launched the corporation's official website, cbscorporation.com

Bill Sweetenham cleared of bullying allegations

Australian coach Bill Sweetenham has been cleared by an independent inquiry of bullying allegations made last year by former British table tennis player Matthew Syed. Syed had accused Sweetenham of damaging British swimming and causing the retirement of 13 senior British swimmers.

Sweetenham has been the performance director for British swimming since November 2000, when he took over from Deryk Snelling. His contract, which was recently renewed, runs up till the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China.

Syed's claims had been denied by Sweetenham, British Swimming and many of the swimmers involved. Despite this and the result of the inquiry some of the swimmers maintain that the inquiry was not thorough enough.

The inquiry will be published later in the month when Sweetenham returns from Australia.

Australia exports less to US despite FTA

Figures issued by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade show that in the twelve months to October, 2005 exports from Australia to the United States fell by 4.7 per cent while imports from the US rose 5.7 per cent. Australia and the US entered into a free trade agreement which began in January, 2005.

During the drafting of the agreement it drew heavy criticism for only opening parts of the US market to Australia.

The Australian Government insists that the results are due to a stronger Australian Dollar and increased competition from Asia. Acting prime minister, Mark Vaile said while exports to the US slowed, Australia was exporting to other markets "At the same time, there have been buoyant and robust economies operating in north Asia that have been very attractive for our exporters to go into those markets, so you can't just look at 12 months in isolation."

Critics of the Free Trade Agreement are calling on the government to use its escape clause. "Our argument is that we should be looking seriously at the provision in the agreement (under which) the Government can give six months notice to end the agreement" said Public Interest Advocacy Centre policy officer Patricia Ranald.

Mark Vaile has also indicated that he wishes to lobby the US to include sugar in the free trade agreement. This has received strong opposition from sugar farmers in the US.

The news comes just days after Mark Vaile announced that the government were considering dropping an amendment to the FTA to protect generic medicines.

Today in History

1558 - Francis, Duke of Guise (pictured) retook Calais, England's last continental possession, for France.

1610 - Galileo Galilei first observed the Jovian satellites Io, Europa and Callisto through his telescope.

1785 - Frenchman Jean-Pierre Blanchard and American John Jeffries became the first to cross the English Channel by balloon.

1927 - The first transatlantic telephone call was made from New York City to London.

1975 - OPEC raised the price of crude oil by 10 percent.

1979 - Phnom Penh fell to the People's Army of Vietnam, effectively ending the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

January 07 is Christmas (Christianity-Julian calendar)

Quote of the Day

"There is no first world and third world. There is only one world, for all of us to live and delight in." ~ Gerald Durrell

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