



Top Stories

At least 55 killed by Hurricane Katrina; serious flooding across affected region



More than 50 are reported dead in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Large parts of New Orleans have been flooded.

Sydney prepares for Forbes Conference and 30A protest



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Protest. A major police operation is occurring in the vicinity of the Sydney Opera House, where the conference is scheduled to occur.

Featured story

Louisiana locked down; New Orleans now a "toxic soup"

Ivor van Heerden, Deputy Director of the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center and director of the Center for the Study of Public Health Impacts of Hurricanes, is warning that floodwaters resulting from Hurricane Katrina could carry toxic waste from the "Industrial Canal" area in New Orleans - the site of many chemical plants.

Wikipedia Current Events

- According to US and Iraqi government officials, US Air Strikes near the border with Syria have left 56 civilians and over seven insurgents dead.
- The American Red Cross declares that the relief effort will exceed in scope that after the September 11, 2001 attacks.
- Michael Brown, director of the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, declares that Katrina was "catastrophic" and pledges full federal assistance.
- Oil reaches US\$70/bbl for the second time, closes at \$69.35 on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Gasoline expected to rise as well.
- Former Prime Minister of Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu, has declared his intention to challenge Ariel Sharon for leadership of the Likud party.
- In Paris, France, seven die and fourteen are injured when a fire burns down an apartment housing African immigrants owned by the Société Immobilière d'Économie Mixte de la Ville de Paris 22:00 (GMT+1)
- Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced India would give US\$50 million in additional aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan during his meetings with Hamid Karzai. Earlier, it had pledged US\$500 million to help rebuild the war-ravaged country.
- Former New South Wales Opposition Leader, John Brogden, is hospitalized after apparant suicide attempt after resigning as party leader.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Martial law is declared in New Orleans.

Green Day dominates at MTV's 2005 Video Music Awards



MTV's 2005 Video Music Awards were rather unbalanced this year, with Green Day's capture of seven of the eight awards for which they were nominated. The awards were for their single Boulevard of Broken Dreams off of the American Idiot album. Up-and-coming rock bands Fall Out Boy and The Killers also won awards.

The event was hosted by Sean "P-Diddy" Combs at the American Airlines Arena in Miami, Florida, USA, which was unaffected by the passing of Hurricane Katrina through the area.

Broadband users kicked off service for constant questioning



A UK ISP, Plusnet, terminated the service of two of their broadband service customers for asking too many repeated questions and taking up too much customer support time on their portal discussion forums.

Early last year, Plusnet, an ISP with nearly 200,000 subscribers,

cut its prices for all of its broadband products. In doing so, Plusnet allegedly did not inform its existing customers by e-mail, and instead published new products and prices on their public portal. This manner of notice for the price changes may have resulted in thousands of customers paying almost twice as much for the same service.

Within the last month, Plusnet began 'packet shaping' peer-to-peer transfers for users of its 'Premier' service, which is sold and described as a 'clean' connection.

They also recently introduced the throttling [enforcing a maximum limit] of customers using more than 150GB per month of bandwidth. Users whose bandwidth is throttled receive service of 70Kbps, while paying for 2Mbps. The throttle is permanent and meant to help keep broadband access for all Plusnet users fast by stopping a percentage of users from using excessive bandwidth. As a result, the ISP has begun receiving numbers of customer complaints and criticism both privately and through their publicly accessible member discussion forums.

Wade Woverly, 20, from Leeds (also known as "Wadev1589"), started a thread in the Plusnet member discussion forums challenging the ISP on a number of customer service issues. One of those was regarding the customers who were paying an unnecessary premium for the same internet connection. In addition, Woverly mentioned he was assisting the Trading Standards Institute with an investigation of the legality of terms and conditions of Plusnet.

Woverly's claims so far are only

speculative. Disgusted at the responses, Woverly continued to ask the same questions dozens of times on forum pages hoping to receive some sort of satisfactory answer from Plusnet.

Woverly ultimately received a telephone call from Plusnet stating that if he didn't stop posting comments on their forums, they would terminate his entire ADSL internet connection and forum access. They claim that Woverly was using up excessive customer services resources. Neil Armstrong, Head of Marketing at Plusnet, commented, "Our comms team is there to serve all our customers, not to be drained by one unreasonably demanding customer."

The Plusnet forums are led by a team of moderators, also customers, whose job it is to deal with problem posters, amongst other things. Forum Moderator Liam Martin, another stirrer, said "Part of our moderation involves restricting access to those users causing problems... and this is always carried out at our discretion when we believe somebody is causing a nuisance and/or breaking forum rules. 'Wadev1589' didn't come close to being banned, in my book. This has come as a complete shock."

After a night of lengthy posts both on Plusnet boards and at the forums at ADSLGuide, Customer Services Manager at Plusnet, Carol Axe, contacted Woverly to inform him that they would be terminating his service, and that he has 30 days to migrate away until his line will be disconnected. Axe refused to allow her conversation to be recorded: "her voice was that of rude arrogance, not listening at all, it was a true ultimatum of a call," according to

Woverly.

A second user, "pr100" from Wargrave, has since then had his service ended after being given the same ultimatum. He was told that it was "in his best interests". He responded on the Plusnet forum, "I did suggest to her that perhaps PlusNet should allow me to decide what will be in my best interest whereupon she stopped beating around the bush and said that my account was being terminated because of my anti-PlusNet posts in the forum." Not all ISP's would give you the option of migrating or losing your BB connection, some would just use their right to end your contract forthwith.

Another forum user, "chuffbears", commented, "Carol [Axe] is in a position where she should be taking responsibility for customer service. In my book she should be issuing an apology over this entire situation."

Louisiana locked down; New Orleans now a "toxic soup"

Ivor van Heerden, Deputy Director of the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center and director of the Center for the Study of Public Health Impacts of Hurricanes, is warning that floodwaters resulting from Hurricane Katrina could carry toxic waste from the "Industrial Canal" area in New Orleans - the site of many chemical plants. Van Heerden has, for four years, studied computer models about the impact of a powerful hurricane.

"These chemical plants [could] start flying apart, just as the other buildings do, so we have the potential for release of benzene, hydrochloric acid, chlorine and so on." said van Heerden; "we're

looking at a bowl full of highly contaminated water with contaminated air flowing around and, literally, very few places for anybody to go where they'll be safe."

Van Heerden itemized problems people returning to the city would find: "no sewage, no drinking water, contamination, threat of rapid increase in mosquitoes, roads are impassible, downed power lines everywhere, trees, debris from houses in the roads, no way to go shopping, no gas." The water has also released fire ants and thousands of snakes, many being venomous, from their normal habitats.

"If you came back, you would be coming literally to a wilderness," van Heeden said. "Stay where you are, be comfortable; nothing's going to change. If your house is gone, it's gone. If you come back in a day or a week, it's not going to make any difference."

CNN is reporting "huge police roadblocks" leading into New Orleans and that their news truck was not allowed to enter the city. The CNN correspondent said the other side of the roadblock looked like "a scene out of hell".

At least 55 killed by Hurricane Katrina; serious flooding across affected region



Damage by Katrina

Thirty people died in the Gulf of Mexico resort of Biloxi when Hurricane Katrina demolished a water-side apartment block, Harrison County emergency operations center spokesman Jim Pollard told AP. However, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency has yet to confirm the news.

At least another twenty have died across the rest of Harrison County; this number is expected to rise. The Governor of the state of Mississippi has asked people to stay away from the area for several days. The towns of Biloxi and Gulfport took the brunt of the hurricane's 140mph+ winds after it veered away from New Orleans as it made landfall.

Three more people have been killed by falling trees and at least two died in traffic accidents resulting from the hurricane. Hundreds of people have been rescued by boat and helicopter from the roofs of houses cut off by flood water.



Oil rig platform hits a bridge in Mobile Bay

The hurricane has caused a storm-surge - the force of the winds has piled the waters of the Gulf of Mexico against the coastline, causing widespread flooding reaching at least a mile inland in places.

A levee on the Lake Pontchartrain canal has broken in two places, causing massive flooding. Some parts of New Orleans are now under 20 feet of water. Flooding seems to have reduced to increasing at a rate of one inch an hour and Army Corps of Engineers are on the scene of the breaks.

The western part of New Orleans has been flooded after a two-block long stretch of the 17th Street Levee gave way on Monday afternoon. Much of the city lies below sea level and depends on flood defences to keep it safe. One hospital - that has 1,000 patients inside - has been surrounded by the water. The vice-president of the center has described seeing whitecaps on the waves of the water in a street outside.

A water main pipe has failed, meaning that tap water has been contaminated with flood water, and is no longer safe to drink.

The mayor of the city has described seeing "bodies floating in the water."

Some 10,000 people remain in the Superdome stadium, despite the electricity supply failing leaving the indoor stadium in darkness. The coverings of the concrete roof of the structure have been stripped away by the wind.

Electricity supplies to 1.3 million people across the south eastern parts of the US have been damaged, and it could be months before power is restored to all affected.

Two oil rigs have broken free of their moorings in the Gulf of Mexico, and a third drifted into a bridge in Mobile Bay, Alabama.

Katrina has now been downgraded

to tropical storm status as it moves northwards across the US, and wind speeds have dropped to 60mph. The current death toll does not include the 11 killed in Florida when Katrina struck there last week.

Sydney prepares for Forbes Conference and 30A protest

Sydney is today preparing for the Forbes Global CEO Conference and 30A Protest. A major police operation is occurring in the vicinity of the Sydney Opera House, where the conference is scheduled to occur. The Opera House forecourt has been closed to the public, and barricades have been set up down Maquarie St and across the Botanic Gardens.



Barricades surround the Opera House, preventing public access to the forecourt

Police checkpoints have been set up on Maquarie St and the Circular Quay walk to control access to the Opera House. Police dogs are patrolling the area.

At 8am this morning Customs Square, where the 30A protest is planning to assemble, was as normal for a Tuesday, with no indication of preparations by activists. The police have 1,000 officers attending, and have said that they are preparing for 10,000 protestors.

Sharron Burrows, leader of the

ACTU, has criticised the conference, saying that it celebrates corporate greed at the expense of workers.

"As the global economy grows we should have cause for celebration for the advancement that this should deliver for workers and their families all over the world, but the reality is that corporate greed is driving profit share at the expense of wages, safe workplaces, conditions and entitlements for workers," she said.

Mr Collins said that police will respond promptly to any trouble. He has also stated that schoolchildren who attended the protest will not be immune.

"We will arrest people regardless of age in regard to if they are [unlawful] in their protest," he said.

"I make no apology for the fact that if people are breaking the law and are disrupting the conference, we will deal with it, we will arrest people and deal with them appropriately," he added.

Acting Police Commissioner accuses activist groups of 'training to disrupt'

New South Wales Acting Police Commissioner, Terry Collins, on Monday accused activist groups of training their members to cause disruptions during protests. He was speaking in reference to the protests planned to coincide this week with the Forbes Global CEO Conference at the Sydney Opera House.

"Activist groups by their very nature are actually trained to go about to disrupt and certainly undermine any attempts by police

or any other security forces to actually deal with protest groups," Mr Collins said.

"I make no apology for the fact that, if people are breaking the law and are disrupting the conference, we will deal with it and we will arrest people," he added.

A spokesman for the 30A Network, Bruce Knobloch, has labelled the claims as ridiculous.

"The assistant commissioner has been very pig headed," he said.

"The only training I know about is something called non-violent direct action. This is exactly what it says: non-violent," he added.

Mr Knobloch says that the 30A network has not attempted to hide its plans, and has made every attempt to work with the police.

"The 30A network has no secrets, we have been very open about our intentions: to have a carnival protest. It's amazing the degree of paranoia going on at the heads of the NSW Police Force. We are a bunch of community activists and concerned citizens who have a right to protest against the war profiteers and free-market freaks," he said.

The comment by the Acting Police Commissioner seem to be in contrast to previous statements from the 30A Network, who said in a press release last week that they are hoping for a peaceful, fun protest.

"We want a safe community action showing that people in Sydney oppose Howard's plan for a US-style wages system, the war in Iraq and his kow-towing to global corporate chiefs. We pose no threat to the Opera House or the

millionaire delegates, or to other users of east Circular Quay," the press release said.



Access to the Opera House is tightly controlled

The Herald Sun, a Melbourne newspaper, is reporting that "Radical protesters from Melbourne will send their most 'hard-core' activists to Sydney to protest outside a meeting of the world's top business leaders." The paper is reporting that "leftists" are unable to guarantee that they will obey police exclusion zones.

Socialist Party national organiser Anthony Main said that protestors would not provoke violence, however he suggested that the police may act violently.

"Given the new era of global terrorism and so forth, we wouldn't be surprised if they (police) flexed their muscles," he said.

The 30A Network is a loose association of peace and global justice groups and trade unions. The protest hopes to draw attention to a wide variety of issues, including war, corporate greed, and neo-liberalism.

"The protest is against free-market madness. The conference attendees are people who believe that the free-market can solve all of our problems, e.g privatisation, including things such as water.

One of the conference attendees works for a private water company," Mr Knobloch said.

Suspects apprehended after car chase through Denver, US

A high-speed pre-dawn pursuit on 29 August, 2005 ended in a fatal accident. A local resident reported to police at 1:00 am (local time) that two people appeared to be attempting to steal a Honda Civic near West 75th Circle in Westminster, Colorado. As the two individuals left the scene in the stolen car, the resident followed in his own vehicle until the passenger stepped out of the Honda and opened fire with a shotgun. The police came upon the suspects near West 72nd Avenue & Pierce Street, Arvada, Colorado, and began pursuit.

The chase proceeded southbound on Sheridan Boulevard and northeast on Interstate 76, reaching speeds of 120 miles per hour (190 kilometres per hour). When the vehicle attempted to merge onto southeast-bound I-270 in Commerce City, Colorado the suspects lost control and impacted two other vehicles.

The stolen vehicle may have punctured one or more tires, as sparks were observed from the bottom of the car as it began the merge. The stolen car struck the middle of the passenger's side of a Toyota 4Runner in the left-hand lane and sent it careening across the median into the northwest-bound lanes of traffic, where it rolled several times. The stolen vehicle then bounced off the guardrail on the right shoulder and impacted a Ford pickup truck before coming to rest. The two suspects then escaped on foot, discarding some of their clothing as they fled. One of the

passengers traveling in the Toyota 4Runner, Brian Kapko, 19, of Costa Mesa, California, was killed.

After eight hours of searching for the perpetrators, the police called off their manhunt. Later in the day, a witness alerted the police about two "suspicious persons" near the scene of the accident. The police arrested a Matthew G. Wartena, 19, and a 16 year old male. Wartena was wearing only boxer shorts, socks and a bloody tank top. The juvenile wore only one sock and tan pants. The pair were charged with suspicion of first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, vehicular eluding, and criminal trespass. At the time of the incident Wartena was free on bond, having pleaded guilty the month before to forgery of a government document.

Protests over UK preparations to deport Kurd Iraqi asylum seekers

Refugee groups and protesters in the United Kingdom are concerned over plans to forcibly deport around 20 rejected asylum seekers to Northern Iraq from the detention centers where they are currently being held beginning August 28.

Despite a warning by the UN High Commission for Refugees that no part of Iraq is now safe, the home office are reported to be sending the men back as soon as 28 August in an Iraqi military aeroplane. Paul Kessler of UNHCR has said that kidnappings and other security problems are still common in Northern Iraq.

Returns to Iraq had been voluntary, but according to The Times around 100 rejected asylum seekers have been arrested and are now in detention.

Demonstrations have been held across the country and are expected outside the home office today, 26 August.

A spokesperson for the Refugee Council said: "It is one thing for people to return voluntarily and accept the risk. But there seems to be no urgent reason to remove people now. Iraq is in a state of turmoil."

The home office has not yet commented on the case. They have previously backed down under pressure. Zimbabwean asylum seekers were given amnesty from deportation until October following headlines such as that on the front page of right-wing Daily Mail "For pity's sake, let them stay".

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Today in History

1876: Sultan Murad V of the Ottoman Empire was deposed and his brother Abdul Hamid II succeeded him.

1888: In Victorian London, Jack the Ripper claimed his first victim.

1920: Polish forces, led by their cavalry, defeated the Bolshevik Red Army in the Battle of Komarów.

1986: After a collision with a freighter, Soviet ocean liner Admiral Nakhimov sank in the Black Sea within 7 minutes, killing 398 on board.

1992: Pascal Lissouba was inaugurated as the President of the Republic of the Congo after a multi-party presidential election, ending a long history of one-party Marxist rule.

August 31 is Independence Day for Malaysia (1957), Trinidad and Tobago (1962), Kyrgyzstan (1991)

Quote of the Day

"No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world." ~ Mary Shelley