



Top Stories

13 coal miners trapped in West Virginia mine

13 coal miners are currently trapped 2 miles (3 kilometers) inside the Sago coal mine in the US state of West Virginia. They have been currently trapped for 31 hours after a methane gas explosion.

Russia cuts off gas supplies to Ukraine

Russia has ended exports of natural gas to neighbouring Ukraine following a failure to reach a compromise over prices. Gazprom, Russia's natural gas behemoth, claims to have taken this action because Ukraine refuses to pay the market rate.

Featured story

Bolivia's new president-elect brands Bush 'the only terrorist'

Bolivia's new president-elect Evo Morales has branded George W. Bush a "terrorist", and has referred to Condoleezza Rice as "Mrs Condolences" in an exclusive interview for Qatar's News Channel Al-Jazeera.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Rescue workers are still battling to find survivors after the roof of an ice rink collapsed in Bad Reichenhall, southern Germany, leaving at least 10 people dead, some of them children. It is thought many are still trapped under the rubble.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Chinese journalist and whistleblower Jiang Weiping, who was jailed in 2000 for violating the State Secrets Law on charges of "subversion," is released after the one year left on his prison sentence is commuted. In 1999 Jiang wrote two articles for a Hong Kong magazine accusing Bo Xilai, who at the time was governor of Liaoning province, but is now China's economic minister, of covering up corruption.

•Conflict in Iraq: 6 members of the same family of 14 have been confirmed killed following a U.S. airstrike in Northern Iraq.

•Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Israel Police prevent two Palestinians in East Jerusalem from campaigning in the upcoming Elections in the Palestinian National Authority.

•Bidding continues in an international auction for Canadian steel company Dofasco Inc., Hamilton, Ont. -- the latest bid, C\$4.9 billion, came Tuesday from German steelmaker Thyssen Krupp AG.

•Four years after defaulting its external debt, Argentina cancels its USD 9.57 billion debt with the IMF.

Southern Ocean whale slaughter to resume

The international environmental organisation, Greenpeace, have been shadowing a Japanese whaling fleet currently operating in

the Southern Ocean in Australian Antarctic Territory. They claim a minor victory against the six-vessel fleet, saying no whales have been killed since Christmas Eve. However they expect a resumption of whaling and protest activity soon.

Greenpeace has two ships, MV Esperanza and MV Arctic Sunrise, active near Antarctica, in an effort to disrupt the whalers, who intend on slaughtering over 900 Minke whales and 10 Fin whales in the region this summer. The activists aim to stop the Japanese whaling fleet as it tries to catch nearly 1000 whales for what is claimed to be scientific research.

Greenpeace chief Steve Shallhorn states that the protesters have chased the six-ship fleet northwards, with the vessels now away from the designated whaling zone. Greenpeace plan to maintain their efforts to keep the whalers in the public eye.

"What the fleet is doing is trying to outrun Greenpeace so that it can sneak back into the whaling grounds and resume the kill," he said. "And for that very reason, we're doing our very best and are succeeding in keeping up with the factory whaling ship. We are certain that they do not want any further publicity."

He said Greenpeace will continue its high-speed tailing for as long as it takes. "We're capable of staying out there for many more weeks," he said. "The [Japanese] fleet is

clearly embarrassed by having their actions exposed to the world, since the spotlight on their activities shows what it really is - commercial whaling with a very thin disguise."

The whalers have been unable to kill any whales since Christmas Eve due to poor weather and harassment by Greenpeace vessels, and the Washington-based Sea Shepherd ship, RV Farley Mowat. Sea Shepherd are operating independently of Greenpeace but say they working towards a common objective - "the shutting down of illegal whaling in the Southern Ocean."

Greenpeace expedition leader Shane Rattenbury says the whalers have a season of about 100 days. "Their quota is 945 whales. If you lose, say, 10 per cent of those through bad weather, they've got an average they need to catch of 10 a day and it's gone 10 days now without having any whales," he said. "That starts to add up pretty quickly. They're under a bit of pressure to get on with the business."

Meanwhile, claims that a Japanese warship is being sent to guard the whalers from activists have been flatly denied. Japan's Institute for Cetacean Research have rejected the claims made by Sea Shepherd, that Japanese warship was being sent to Antarctica to protect the fleet against the activists.

The Japanese institute spokesman condemned Sea Shepherd over the claim by Farley Mowat captain Paul Watson, who called on the Australian Government to keep the peace.

Sea Shepherd had requested the presence of the Australian navy to monitor events in the Southern

Ocean. However, Australia's environment minister, Senator Ian Campbell, said that Sea Shepherd's threats to attack the fleet "risk setting back the cause of whale conservation many years".

Capt Watson said yesterday: "Stop threatening us, Mr Campbell, and charge us if you believe we are acting unlawfully. Stop posing for the Japanese [who] are in blatant violation of international conservation laws."

Japan's Fisheries Agency, which conducts the whaling, said the claim was a tactic by Sea Shepherd to try to raise the stakes for extra publicity.

"This is why the environmentalists' campaign in the Antarctic is a PR stunt: every time they get some media coverage there's always some member not too far away asking the public for money," an agency spokesman said in a statement. "Only this time, it completely backfired and now people will question what these groups say."

The spokesman had no response to Greenpeace's claim that another vessel had joined the whaling fleet and was refuelling the ships within the boundary of the Antarctic Treaty's nature reserve.

Mr Rattenbury said the 57 activists and crew aboard the Greenpeace ships were in good health following a quiet New Year's Day celebration on deck under a midnight sun.

He said his ships were not in contact with the Farley Mowat, which is believed to be closer to the Antarctic ice shelf. The Farley Mowat's weblog quoted ship

captain Paul Watson as saying the Sea Shepherd group had no conflict with Greenpeace, despite earlier British media assertions.

"As far as I am concerned both Sea Shepherd and Greenpeace are working towards a common objective - the shutting down of illegal whaling in the Southern Ocean," said Paul Watson.

Greenpeace believes the fleet killed at least 25 whales from the time it contacted the whalers just before Christmas.

Abramoff pleads guilty to three charges

Jack Abramoff pled guilty today to charges of mail fraud, tax evasion, and conspiracy charges stemming from the Indian Tribes investigation.

Abramoff, founder and former chairman of the International Freedom Foundation and former member of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Public Policy Research, reportedly agreed to cooperate in the prosecutor's case against Abramoff's former business partners, who are subjects of the SunCruz Casinos fraud investigation. Part of the three-count indictment charged Abramoff with influence-peddling a House Representative's Scotland golf trip with US\$50,000. The money in question was solicited from an Indian Tribe in Texas by Abramoff, and is rumoured to have gone to Representative Bob Ney (R-OH).

In exchange for his testimony, Mr. Abramoff is expected to be sentenced to a maximum of 10 years imprisonment, and will be allowed to serve sentences concurrently. He is due in a Florida court on Wednesday in regards to

the SunCruz case.

Russia assumes leadership of G8 for 2006

Russia became chair of the "Big 8" (G8) on 1 January. It took the chair from Great Britain. The G8 summit will take place in July in St. Petersburg.

Russia joined the club of the highest developed countries in the world in 1997. Before, the "Big 8" had been the "Big 7", the members being the U.S.A., Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy.

As the chair country, Russia is planning to discuss the following issues among the G8-countries:

- securing of energy
- struggle against epidemics (AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis)
- struggle against terrorism
- avoidance of spreading of weapons of mass destruction
- regional conflicts
- promotion of development of third world countries
- collaboration in environmental protection

In 2007, the chair of the "Big 8" will be passed to Germany.

13 coal miners trapped in West Virginia mine

13 American coal miners are currently trapped 2 miles (3 kilometers) inside the Sago coal mine in the US state of West Virginia. They have now been trapped since 6:40 am Eastern, Monday, January 2 following a methane gas explosion which caused the shaft to collapse. Rescue operations have commenced and at last report they were 1,000 feet (304 meters)

from the location of the miners.

Governor Joe Manchin, who lost an uncle in a 1968 mining disaster is there along with families who held a vigil in the Sago Baptist Church.

Presidential candidate of Haiti, Dany Toussaint, arrested by United Nations troops

Former senator and former police chief Dany Toussaint was arrested by United Nations troops on alleged possession of illegal weapons. According to police sources Toussaint was arrested by Chilean troops when they found the weapons on him in Cap-Haitien. Toussaint was driving through a police checkpoint when the troops spotted the weapons and arrested him.

One police official said, "Dany Toussaint was carrying several weapons for which he has no valid authorization."

Among the alleged weapons are those obtained from parliament when Toussaint became a senator, but they were to be returned when his term as senator ended. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has suspected Toussaint of drug trafficking in the past. Toussaint was also the suspect in the 2000 murder of a radio journalist, Jean Dominique. Currently Toussaint runs a private security company.

Bomb blasts in Athens destroy Finnish diplomat's car

Three home made bombs exploded during the night in Athens, Greece. One of the bombs destroyed a car of a Finnish diplomat. No one was injured in the bombings and a Greek anarchist group has told local media that it committed the

bombings as a revenge for jailing of anarchists who have committed sabotage. The Finnish Foreign Ministry believes it was an accident that Finnish diplomatic property was targeted, and Finnish diplomats in Athens are said to be calm.

Miners survive underground fire in Tasmania

Three miners have escaped uninjured after being trapped underground by a mineshaft fire on Tasmania's west coast. The men took shelter in a chamber more than a kilometre underground. A worker noticed smoke coming from a shaft at Avebury nickel mine on Trial Harbour Road near Zeehan at 7.45am.

The blaze started after a truck working 400 metres underground toppled and caught fire. It took nearly five hours for rescue teams to bring the blaze under control, move the burning truck and reach the trapped miners.

Allegiance Mining chairman Tony Howland-Rose said the workers were safe. "The emergency response procedures in place at Avebury were activated and resulted in the vehicle fire being extinguished and the safe rescue of the miners," Mr Howland-Rose said.

Ambulance crews say the men appear to be in good health. Queenstown Police Inspector Mark Beech-Jones says rescue workers reached the men just before midday.

"We've dispatched a number of ambulance service personnel there just to give them a check up but from our initial discussions with them, they are fine," he said.

The Avebury nickel mine is a new project for the Sydney-based company - Allegiance Mining. Allegiance suspended trading on the stock exchange this morning. Mr Howland-Rose said the suspension of trading would be in place until it became clear what had happened at the mine.

The mine is undergoing a \$60 million redevelopment and was due to resume mining later this year.

Sydney Opera House 'No War' activists face court for paint cans

Two activists convicted for painting the words "NO WAR" in five-metre-high red letters on the highest sail of Sydney Opera House in March 2003, are facing court action again to prevent them from auctioning the equipment used to paint the controversial sign.

Dr Will Saunders and David Burgess were sentenced to nine months periodic detention and ordered to pay the Opera House Trust \$151,000 for malicious damage to the building on March 18, 2003.

The pair spent six months in jail for painting the slogan on one of the sails of the Opera House on the eve of the invasion of Iraq. The protesters say they wish to auction the equipment for humanitarian causes in Iraq.

Police confiscated the paint can and two brushes used in the incident and have now applied for a court order to have the can and brushes destroyed. They are saying such an auction would contravene proceeds of crime laws.

Saunders said they wanted to auction the can and send the proceeds to humanitarian causes in Iraq. According to The Australian newspaper, Mr Saunders said the auction could be conducted by a registered charity to raise money for the Mother and Child Hospital in Basra.

He said the can should also be preserved as an important piece of Sydney history.

"We want to give the surplus money that we've raised, and anything extra we can make from an auction – not only the paint pot ... I think we can raise many many thousands of dollars," he said. "We'd be happy to come to any reasonable arrangement with the police about how this auction takes place ... it's just mean beyond belief, petty-minded just to destroy it."

The matter will go before a Sydney court on January 16.

Meanwhile, the world-famous Sydney Opera House is one of 21 international landmarks short-listed to become the new Seven Wonders of the World. The list includes modern landmarks such as Paris' Eiffel Tower and older candidates like the Colosseum in Rome and China's Great Wall.

Bank of America completes acquisition of MBNA

Bank of America Corp. has completed its acquisition of MBNA Corp. in a deal worth about \$34.2 billion. Bank of America now has 40 million active credit card accounts. MBNA was a leader in affinity marketing with relationships with organizations like the NFL and L.L. Bean. Shareholders of MBNA will receive .5009 common shares of Bank of

America plus \$4.125 in cash for each share. MBNA had 24,700 employees prior to the deal, Bank of America had over 177,000. 6,000 of those jobs will be eliminated saving the bank \$850 million by 2007. Bank of America is the world's second largest bank.

Australian government to consider dropping US FTA amendment

An amendment of the US Fair Trade Agreement insisted by the opposition may be dropped after lobbying by the US Pharmaceutical Industry.

Mark Latham, former opposition leader negotiated the "evergreening" amendment to ensure that drug companies could not extend patents to fight off cheaper generic versions of their medicines. Companies caught doing so may receive multi-million dollar fines. The US Pharmaceutical Industry claims that the provisions are harming investment.

Acting Prime Minister, Mark Vaile said "We will have a look at it, if (the evergreening issue) is raised by the Americans".

"(But) the US will have to prove that Labor's evergreening amendment is commercially detrimental, not just philosophically detrimental."

A Health Department secretary will travel to Washington on January 13 to discuss the issue before a formal review of the FTA in March.

Evgeny Adamov will be extradited to Russia

Following 8 months of deliberations, a Switzerland court has decided to extradite Evgeny

Adamov to Russia, rather than the United States, where he will face corruption charges. The US warrant for the arrest accused Adamov, a former nuclear energy minister, of diverting \$9 million slated to improve Russia's nuclear security to private projects in the US and Russia. He was arrested while visiting Switzerland to help his daughter who had had her bank account frozen.

Mikhail Kamynin, a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, said "We are pleased with the Federal Court's decision, although we are talking about an independent court. Therefore, we assume that all the formalities will be fulfilled in the shortest time ."

Adamov has defended himself, admitting that he put US money into his private accounts, but claiming that this was common practice in Russia and was necessary to shield the money from hyperinflation and instability in the banking system.

OCTranspo's "new year" of efficiencies?

Anyone riding OC Transpo express bus routes this morning and this afternoon, in the Ottawa area, were probably greeted with an empty bus, and inherently, a "fast and efficient" ride. This is in part because most government workers where off from work still celebrating their Christmas holidays.

Though, according to OC Transpo, the "Holiday Schedule", means buses this week shall be running a little less often, in reality there isn't that much difference than the regular schedule. To be more precise, from 05h48 until 07h20, on the express 27 route there will be 5 less buses during the

"Holiday Schedule" compared to the "Regular Schedule."

"This is probably going to be fine for the rest of this week, when government employees start coming back to work", said Yves Roy, an OC Transpo driver, "but today was a holiday and it appears that express routes only had an average of about 2 to 4 passengers."

"On my ride in to work, at around 6h10 am. this morning, nobody else got on the bus. It was like having a personal stretch limo to myself," said Patrick Roy.

On my ride home, at around 4h15 pm. I interviewed another driver, whom wished to remain anonymous. He indicated that "you are the first person I picked up today." Furthermore he indicated that "this is a waste of tax payers money." We discussed, the waste of fuel, employee pay, insurance liability issues and even went into details about such hot political items as the Kyoto Agreement and conservatism. I continued my interview and once we reached Place d'Orleans the second passenger joined in the conversation. The driver then took a faster alternate route and dropped us off not far from our homes.

According to Peter Dickson, editor at The Ottawa Citizen, last year OC Transpo buses followed a 'reduced' Sunday schedule and this created havoc on the system. Perhaps this year they where trying to compensate for this inefficiency?

Usually OC Transpo bus drivers have two 4 months bookings, for the fall and the winter and two 2 months booking for the spring and

for the summer, said Yves Roy. For the first time in March 2005, there was a special 1 week booking for the march break that rearranged and redistributed drivers of certain high school bus runs. During previous march breaks, drivers would show up usually waiting 30 or more minutes in an "idling" bus.

Is there such thing as to much efficiency? Today, is an example of buses being very efficient, on the other hand, it may be an example of inefficiency within OC Transpo's booking department and upper management.

Today in History

1493 - Christopher Columbus left the New World, ending his first journey.

1698 - Most of the Palace of Whitehall in London, the main residence of the English monarchs, was destroyed by fire.

1884 - The Fabian Society was founded in London.

1948 - Thakin Nu of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League presided over the independence of Burma (now Myanmar) from the British Empire.

2004 - The NASA Mars Rover Spirit landed successfully on Mars at 04:35 UTC.

Quote of the Day

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." ~ Isaac Newton

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