

Top Stories

Bush Nominates John G. Roberts for U.S. Supreme Court



BREAKINGNEWS US President George Bush announced at 9 P.M. EST his Supreme Court nominee, John G. Roberts Jr. At 50 years of age, if confirmed, he will be the youngest judge on the court. He was appointed to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in 2003. His potential appointment would be filling the vacancy left by the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Report: invasion of Iraq provided boost for Al-Qaeda

A report released on July 18 by Chatham House has concluded that the risk of terrorism has increased as a result of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It says that terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda have been strengthened, giving a boost to their "propaganda, recruitment and fundraising".

Afghan warlord convicted of torture by British court

Zardad Faryadi Sarwar, a warlord who controlled several checkpoints at the road between Kabul and Jalalabad in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, was convicted today of torture and hostage-taking by a London court.

Wikipedia Current Events

- US President George W. Bush has chosen federal appeals court judge John G. Roberts Jr. to replace Sandra Day O'Connor. Wikinews
- According to reports from Russia, at least 14 people have been killed and several injured in an explosion in Chechnya.
- In the Philippines, President Gloria Arroyo announces that she intends to form a truth commission to investigate charges of poll fraud against her.
- Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India addresses joint session of US Congress in his historic visit to the US.

Bush Nominates John G. Roberts for U.S. Supreme Court

US President George W. Bush today announced Justice John G. Roberts Jr. as his pick to fill the Supreme Court void caused by Justice O'Connor's retirement. Roberts is known as a strong conservative, but is nevertheless endorsed by many from both parties. At 50 years of age, if confirmed, he will be the youngest judge on the court, and is expected to be able to serve 30 years or more. He was appointed to the D.C. Court of Appeals in 2003 by the President.

Bush offered the nomination to Roberts during a phone call at 12:35 p.m. EDT today, with the intention to release the information to the public tonight, at a 9 p.m. EDT press conference. The Associated Press had already revealed the president's pick at 7:45 p.m. EDT. Critics have already begun to voice complaints, including issues with free speech and religious freedom, along with reproductive rights. Supporters see Roberts as a conservative who cut his teeth with Nixon and Reagan- just the kind of nominee they were hoping for.

In 1990, Roberts wrote a brief on Roe vs. Wade, which stated, "The court's conclusion in Roe that there is a fundamental right to an abortion ... finds no support in the text, structure or history of the Constitution." Though, during his confirmation hearings for the appellate court in 2003, Roberts stated that "Roe v. Wade is the settled law of the land... There is nothing in my personal views that would prevent me from fully and faithfully applying that precedent."

Niger facing food shortages after drought

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has warned that 2.5 million people living in the African country of Niger are facing food shortages. Of those, about 800,000 are children.

Supplies of the staple foods - such as millet - have been low, forcing prices up. Drought and plagues of locust devastated crops

across the Sahel region of Africa, and in Niger the effects have been compounded by years of economic decline.

More than a third of the countries districts face "critical" or "extremely critical" situations. While rainfall in the last few weeks has improved, seeds are in short supply after the earlier droughts.

The FAO launched an appeal to the world community for \$4m of aid to combat the situation. So far, the only contributor has been Sweden, who donated \$650,000 of seeds and animal fodder, which is currently being distributed to make the most of the current rains.

Nearly 25,000 Iraqi civilians killed in Iraq, Iraq Body Count Project claims

A report published by the Iraq Body Count project, a British NGO, says that 24,865 civilians have been killed in Iraq in the two years following the start of the US-led invasion in March 2003. Seventy percent of the deaths occurred after the US President George W. Bush proclaimed "the end of major combat" on May 1 2003.

The study, compiled from more than 10,000 media reports, says that 37% (9,270) of the deaths were the result of allied actions. Half of all deaths (53%, 13,178) were caused by explosives, with 64% of those (8,434) being due to air-dropped bombs. The study also recorded that 82% of the deaths were adult males and 9% were adult women.

Anti-occupation forces and terrorists accounted for 9% of the deaths, while criminal violence was blamed for 36%. The 28 page dossier also claimed that the situation in Iraq is getting worse. The fatalities in the second year after the invasion were twice as high as in the first year after the end of the war.

More than a third of the report was based on the work of Reuters, the Associated Press and Agence France Presse. Three-quarters of reports had at least one primary source,

while 23% had two or more.

The Iraqi government disputed the figures. The Ministry of Health's figures recorded 6,629 deaths in the year leading up to April 2005, one-third of which were due to "terrorist incidents", with the remainder due to coalition forces. The Ministry of Interior, which also records deaths in the armed forces, reported 8,175 Iraqis were killed between July 2004 and May 2005.

Reuters noted that the figures apparently fail to note the number of people killed by suicide bombers in the last 18 months - with over 2,000 lives taken by car bombers, while the report claims that only 1,000 people have been killed by suicide bombers over 24 months. Reuters also pointed out that the report may underestimate deaths, as the media - the basis for the report - focuses mainly on Baghdad.

"The international forces try to avoid civilian casualties, whereas the terrorists target civilians and try to kill as many of them as they can," the government said in a statement

The US military also disputed the figures and said it is doing everything to avoid civilian casualties. "Since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom until now, we have categorically not targeted civilians", said Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan, a spokesman for the US-Military in Baghdad.

"The ever-mounting Iraqi death toll is the forgotten cost of the decision to go to war in Iraq. On average, 34 ordinary Iraqis have met violent deaths every day since the invasion of March 2003", said Professor John Sloboda, one of the authors of the report.

The Iraqi Body Count group is based mainly in the Sheffield area of the United Kingdom. The co-founders are a human-rights campaigner, Hamit Dardagan, and Professor Sloboda, a psychologist at the University of Keele who is also a leading anti-war campaigner. The senior researcher is a retired librarian who last worked as the Head of Acquisitions in Keele University Library, and now runs an anti-war mailing list in the Sheffield area.

Other studies

There have been two other studies into the number of civilians killed in Iraq since March 2003.

The first to be published was a report in the British medical journal *The Lancet* in October 2004, stating that there had been 98,000 "excess deaths". The report was based on a questionnaire given to 998 households in 33 randomly-selected areas of Iraq, intended to be a representative sample. Of the total, 57,600 were given as being caused by accidents and disease, with the rest due to violence. The report had an extremely large margin of error - the 95% confidence interval (ie less than a 0.05% chance of being a fluke) range was from 8,000 up to 194,000.

The second report was the UN Development Program Iraq Living Conditions Survey, published in May 2005. This sampled 21,668 households in 2,200 areas, using similar selection and interpretation techniques as the *Lancet* study. This study recorded 24,000 "conflict-related deaths", with a 95% confidence interval of 18,000 to 29,000.

Remote Assistance service of Window OS vulnerable to attack



Until a patch is issued, Microsoft recommends that users close or block TCP port 3389, the port opened when the Remote Assistance service of its Microsoft Windows operating system (OS) is enabled. The Remote Assistance feature is service of the OS that allows Internet Technology administrators of corporate workgroups remote access to other desktops to perform maintenance and other configuration tasks from their own computer. It can also be used by on-line tech support sites. A support assistant can go into a user's machine, if the service is enabled, and themselves make changes directly to another person's computer to resolve an issue.

To initialize the remote assistance feature,

the user of the helper computer must first make a request of the user of the target computer. Compliance must be granted by the user of the target machine, which then fully opens the communication port of the target machine to the helper computer. The operator of the helper computer then has control of target computer to make changes at will. The user of the target machine can watch in a separate window the actions of the helper, and either party to the session can end it at any time.

In a telephone conversation with a Microsoft representative Tuesday, work to develop a security patch is underway, but when it will be available is unclear. It was cited that a patch must work consistently across multiple platform versions of the OS.

The vulnerability, thought at first to effect only Windows XP SP2, is now believed to effect all current OS editions, including Windows 2000, Windows XP SP1, Windows XP Professional x64, Windows Server 2003, Windows Server 2003 SP1, and Windows Server x64.

The Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) is not enabled by default, however if the service is enabled, a Denial of Service attack could cause the OS to restart unexpectedly according to Microsoft, or experience buffer buffer overflows according to Symantec. The RDP is enabled by default on Windows XP Media Center Edition.

Microsoft suggests users block TCP port 3389 (the port used by RDP) on their firewall, or disable Terminal Services or Remote Desktop if not required by the user. The remote desktop connections could also be secured using either Internet Protocol Security or a virtual private network connection until a patch is ready.

The disable Remote Assistance on a Windows XP Edition, the steps are:

1. click 'Start', right-click 'My Computer', select 'Properties'
2. select 'Remote' tab on top of the 'Systems Properties' window, clear checkbox that says "Allow Remote Assistance invitations to be sent from this computer."
3. click 'Apply' button

The group, Internet Storm Center, detected spikes in scanning for port 3389 beginning July 6. Larger number of systems scanned

were reported on July 13. Cackers may be scanning for vulnerable machines, the group said.

"It's a kernel vulnerability," said VP of engineering for Symantec Alfred Huger, "so it will be difficult to exploit reliably. But he [the original discoverer] found the vulnerability with a commonly-used tool, so if he can find it, so can others. I don't think it will turn it into a large-scale worm, but then, some kernel vulnerabilities have ended up as just that, like the Witty worm."

Suspected 'mastermind' of London bombings no longer a suspect

The Egyptian chemist arrested in Cairo last week has no links with the London bombings, officials have said. The Egyptian interior ministry published a report which "made clear there was no link between Magdi Asdi el-Nashar and Al Qaeda or the bombings". Mr Nashar has still not been named a suspect by British police.

Just after his arrest, the Egyptian interior minister said that reports linking Mr Nashar to al-Qaeda were "groundless" and based on a hasty conclusion. Mr Nashar has always denied being part of the London bombings; however he is reported to have told investigators that he helped arrange the rental of a flat for one of the bombers, Hasib Hussain.

Mr Nashar has always maintained that he had intended to return to Leeds at the end of a holiday in Egypt, which began a week before the bombings.

14,500 job cuts announced by Hewlett-Packard



Today the Hewlett-Packard Co. has announced that it will be cutting 10% or 14,500 of its full-time staff will be cut over the course of the next six quarters. HP CEO Mark Hurd, who's had office for just about three months now, has decided that he wishes to simplify HP's operations by

combining sales and marketing directly into business units. The job cuts are expected to save HP \$1.9 billion US annually. These cuts are all part of HP's new restructuring plan, the savings from this restructuring will primarily be to "offset market forces" or in other words, to strengthen HP's competitiveness in the market.

The job cuts come after prolonged analyst speculation that HP would be announcing between 10,000 and 25,000 losses. Few losses are expected in the areas of Sales nor in Research & Development.

Reactions

The media in Ireland, where HP has over 4,000 employees across seven business units, has reacted cautiously to the announcement urging that more details should be waited for before making any comments. The news however has made national headlines and workers are understandably anxious to find out more details.

Deadly forest fire in Spain claims lives of firefighters

A deadly forest fire in Spain's Guadalajara province has claimed the lives of at least 11 fire fighters. The fire began after a group of day trippers in Cueva de los Casares on Saturday left a barbecue unextinguished -- the day trippers have since confessed to causing the fire. At least 11,000 acres have been affected by the fire thus far.

The 11 firefighters, both men and women in their 20s, were trapped in their vehicle after a change in wind direction caused their vehicle to be encircled with flames.

More than 150 firefighters have battled the blaze since Sunday. Water planes and helicopters from the region are assisting in the effort to extinguish the blaze; two French firefighting aircraft have been sent to augment Spanish forces.

Spain suffers on average 20,000 wild fires each year -- a heat wave and lack of rain have contributed to the tinder-box conditions which have exacerbated the fire season this year.

Report: invasion of Iraq provided boost for Al-Qaeda

A report released on July 18 by Chatham House has claimed that the risk of terrorism has increased as a result of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It says that terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda have been strengthened, giving a boost to their "propaganda, recruitment and fundraising".

According to the press release, the report claims that there is "no doubt that the invasion of Iraq has imposed particular difficulties for the UK and for the wider coalition against terrorism".

"The UK is at particular risk because it is the closest ally of the US and has closely supported the deployment of British troops in the military campaigns to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam's regime in Iraq," it continued.

The report also criticised the UK governments lack of attention to international terrorism.

"As a result of giving lower priority to international terrorism, the British authorities did not fully appreciate the threat from Al-Qaeda. The failure to gain any warning from existing information of the 9/11 attacks on the United States was an intelligence failure of the entire Western alliance, not only of the US intelligence community," the report said.

It also stated that countries such as the UK and Australia are "at particular risk because [they are close allies] of the United States, has deployed armed forces in the military campaigns to topple the Taleban regime in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and has taken a leading role in international intelligence, police and judicial cooperation against Al-Qaeda".

Australian shadow foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd claimed that the report proved Australia's support for the Iraqi invasion has placed Australia at greater risk. He said that it "turbo-charged" its profile as a potential terrorist target.

A number of governments have criticised the report. Australian Prime Minister John Howard is currently in Washington. He gave a joint press conference with Donald Rumsfeld.

"I think that people who think that terrorists

pick and choose discriminately don't understand how it works. The United States had done nothing on September 11 when it (the attack on America) was done. People who think they can make a separate peace with terrorists will find that it's like feeding an alligator, hoping it eats you last," Mr Rumsfeld said.

"No country can allow its foreign and defence policy to be malleable in the hands of terrorists," Mr Howard added.

Chatham House is a non-profit NGO. Its website describes it as "one of the world's leading organizations for the analysis of international issues". It was formerly known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

The report was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Governor of Tokyo is sued for insulting French language

On July 13, 21 French and Japanese individuals sued Shintarō Ishihara, the governor of Tokyo, for defamation towards people who use the French language. Those 21 were French language teachers and Japanese researchers who taught French. In 2004, Ishihara said that no one can count in the French language. Ishihara was sued for 500,000 yen (approx. US \$4,457) for each plaintiff, including Malik Berkane, a French private language school owner in Tokyo. In addition, the plaintiffs demanded that he make an apology.

On October 19, 2004, Ishihara said "French language is a language in which no one can count, therefore it seems to me reasonable that it is disqualified as an international language. People who are tied to the language have taken it upon themselves to oppose [me]. It is all ridiculous" in a speech Ishihara made at the inaugural celebrations of the "Tokyo U-Club". The Tokyo U-club was founded to support the foundation of Tokyo Metropolitan University (Japanese: 首都大 東京, Shuto daigaku Tokyo), which was planned by Ishihara as replacement of universities run by the Tokyo metropolitan government including the same name in English (Japanese: 東京都立大 Tokyo Toritsu Daigaku).

On August 1, 2003, Ishihara issued his plan

to found the new university. His plan had no relation to the restructuring plan of the former Tokyo Metropolitan University which had been on-going for years in cooperation with faculty and Tokyo prefectural government. In his new plan faculties of Humanities, Economics and Law would be drastically changed and divided into newly organized faculties and departures. As for humanities, literature and language studies would be re-organized into language section and literature section, reduced in number of students, and undergraduate and graduate would be relocated into separate campuses. Quite a few members of the Faculty of Humanities opposed this idea strongly and called for opposition widely. As to that its all faculty issued the opposition on the consensus of all faculty on September 25, 2003. The department of French literature and language was a key group in the movment. Also in 2004, Professor Masato Goda, a teacher of French literature, resigned to express his opposition toward Ishihara's educational policy.

Berkane said "I was very shocked when I heard that. Of course we can count numbers in French, and it is used as an official language in international organisations." "I have been in Japan for 23 years. I am sad that what I have taught in that time is denigrated." Berkane said that he had sent a memorandum to Ishihara in February to ask the governer to apologize but he had as yet received no reply from Ishihara.

On July 15, Ishihara again expressed his opinion that French was formerly a diplomatic lingua franca but due to its complexity it had been falling back. He mentioned that no student had registered in French language lessons at the newly founded Tokyo Metropolitan University. He also stated plaintiffs should have considered seriously if his criticism was appropriate or not.

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Today in History

- 1927 – Five-year old Michael I became King of Romania upon the death of his father Ferdinand I.
- 1940 – Billboard magazine published its first "Music Popularity Chart."
- 1944 – Adolf Hitler survived the July 20 Plot, an assassination attempt led by Claus von Stauffenberg.
- 1960 – Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected Prime Minister of Ceylon, becoming the world's first elected female head of government.
- 1969 – The Apollo 11 lunar module landed on the Sea of Tranquility, where Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon.
- 1976 – Viking 1 landed on Mars, marking the first visit from Earth.
- July 20 is Independence Day in Colombia (1810)

Quote of the Day

"That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." ~ Neil Armstrong on first stepping onto the surface of the moon, 20th July 1969.

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