



### Top Stories

#### **Bomb explodes in crowded São Paulo street**

16 people were injured Friday when a bomb exploded in a crowded street full of Christmas shoppers in São Paulo. Police believe it could be in reprisal to recent crackdowns on counterfeit dealers.

#### **Greenpeace activists clash with Japanese whaling fleet in Southern Ocean**

The environmental activist group Greenpeace has attempted to disrupt Japan's Southern Ocean scientific whaling fleet.

### Featured story

#### **Drug website surveys LSD users and culture**

Erowid, a website with the stated mission of "Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans & Psychoactives" has over the past few months been gathering data through a series of surveys about the drug LSD to present at the LSD Symposium, scheduled for January 2006 in Basel, Switzerland.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- The Egyptian opposition leader, Ayman Nour, is found guilty of fraud and jailed for five years.
- The United Kingdom begins commemorations for the victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami ahead of the official Thai commemorations in Thailand.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- The Congress of the United States rejects Condoleezza Rice's request to restore \$50 million in aid to the African Union that human rights groups say had been cut from the budget in November. The money would have gone to maintain AU peacekeepers in controlling the Darfur conflict, in which about 180,000 people have died.

#### **U.S. taskforce encourages vote to decide Puerto Rico status**

The U.S. task force on Puerto Rico's status has requested that the U.S. Congress set a date for a plebiscite in Puerto Rico whereby the people would be able to decide of the commonwealth would like to change its status.

The first vote would consist of a simple "yes" or "no" vote on changing the current commonwealth status. From there, if the vote went in favor of changing status, Congress could then set another date for a vote on whether the people favor independence or statehood. Co-chair Ruben Barrales said, "We hope that Congress will take a look at the recommendations and hopefully move the question forward."

In past plebiscites, Puerto Ricans are divided relatively evenly between statehood and commonwealth status. Those who favor independence are in a small minority. Currently Puerto Ricans

are U.S. citizens and receive many of the benefits that the federal government offers, but can not vote in national elections and do not pay federal taxes. If Puerto Rico was to become a state of the U.S., it could mean a shift in the balance of power in congress and in presidential elections.

The press release including the question and answer section can be viewed here. The recommendation calls for 2 polls, one on whether to remain at the status quo and the second to decide between independence and statehood. This could create some controversy. In the past there have been 1 single poll with all options included. There is also the issue on "free association" which falls somewhere between commonwealth status and independence. Some in Puerto Rico might argue that these options are too narrow and stacked against a commonwealth status.

#### **Australia's ALP loses support in NSW for first time under PM Iemma**

The Liberal/National party coalition has gained support in New South Wales the latest Newspoll says.

Primary support for the coalition rose five points to 43 percent, while the ALP's support fell four points to 34 percent. On a two-party preferred basis (where the minor parties are excluded from the polling) coalition support is at 52 percent.

The results are the lowest for the ALP in twelve months and the first time the coalition has polled ahead of the ALP since the departure of Bob Carr as premier.

Morris Iemma remains the more popular choice for premier with 40 percent support to Peter Debnam's 18.

The results indicate voter backlash over a series of errors made by the Iemma government. These include anger over secret dealings with the Cross City Tunnel, plans for a desalination plant, a sharp decline in public services and budget blunders.

The next state election is due to be held in 2007.

### **Bomb explodes in crowded São Paulo street**

Sixteen people were injured on Friday when a homemade bomb exploded in a crowded São Paulo street in Brazil. The blast took place on March 25 Street where it was crowded with Christmas shoppers. According to the police it was left in a trash can. One police official Patricia Fernandes said, "apparently (the bomb) was an amateur device but we haven't completed the examination."

One woman remains hospitalized in serious condition. According to police the other victims did not suffer life-threatening injuries. The local media is saying that a pregnant woman and a 5 year old girl were also injured, but police did not confirm this.

The bombing is believed to be related to police raids on counterfeit dealers in the area. Fernandes stated that "One line of investigation is that this was a

reprisal for for police actions in the area."

### **Haiti might have to postpone elections again**

The first round of the presidential elections, currently scheduled for January 8, 2006, might have to be delayed, according to some members of the electoral council. This would mark the 4th time the presidential elections have been moved, and the 5th time for all elections.

The chairman of the council, Max Mathurin, expressed concern over political unrest that could occur if conditions were not adequate to ensure fair elections. He said, "If certain major technical problems are not solved, elections on Jan. 8 could be a catastrophe." The problems related to the current possible postponement involve distribution of voter identification cards, a lack of poll centers, and recruitment of poll center workers. According to Reuters, only 500,000 of the 3.5 million voter identification cards have been handed out and few of the 40,000 needed poll workers have been recruited.

Rosemond Pradel, Secretary-General of the electoral council, told reporters that sometime between January 22 and January 29 would likely be the new dates of the elections are indeed rescheduled. However one council member, Patrick Fequiere, suggested that several months might be needed to guarantee fair elections. Pradel blames the delays, in part, on the Organization of American States (OAS). He is quoted as saying, "Our decision to set the January 8th deadline for the first round was based on OAS' commitment that voting cards distribution

would have been completed by December 25."

However the OAS struck back in Friday saying that "Ninety per cent of the cards are already in the electoral centres, waiting for people to pick them up," and "Our problem is that most voters have stopped coming to the centres," according to OAS spokesperson Louise Brunet. Denneth Modeste, OAS ambassador to Haiti, says that people are not coming to the centres to pick up their cards because they don't believe the elections will take place as scheduled. She said that "the Provisional Electoral Council should be the leading agency inciting people to collect their cards, instead of spreading doubts."

One presidential candidate, Evans Paul, complained about the problems saying "I've never seen elections so poorly organized," and "it's not acceptable that people have to struggle for hours in line to register, they have to do the same to get the voting cards, and now they have to walk six hours to reach a place to cast their ballot."

Max Mathurin says that they should know by next week whether or not the current date of January 8, 2006 is a realistic target for holding the first round of the presidential elections. Juan Gabriel Valdes of the UN's peacekeeping missions says that his people are completely ready for elections if they are to take place on January 8th.

### **Bolivian President Evo Morales convinces EU to pay for study of coca**

Evo Morales, newly elected President of Bolivia, requested that the European Union to fund a study to track coca. The study will

focus on what happens to the coca and how much of it makes its way into the drug trade. According to Angel Gutiérrez, the EU has agreed and will donate US\$ 499,800 for the study, but will not participate in its implementation. Morales has requested similar studies in the past, prior to being elected.

Morales himself owns a coca farm and his Socialist Movement Party got its birth in the union of coca farmers. Although the coca leaf is also used to make cocaine, Morales and his union have fought attempts to eradicate growth of the crop. It is also used by indigenous in religious ceremonies and to chew (to fight fatigue).

**Egypt court sentences opposition leader**

Egyptian opposition leader and former candidate in presidential election, Ayman Nour, has been sentenced today for 5 years imprisonment, as it was reported by both officials and Nour's lawyer. According to the court, he and his liberal democratic party, Ghad, falsified signatures required to register a political party in January 2005. Both Nour's punishment and his imprisonment have been condemned by the international community.

Nour, who stood as a candidate in the recent presidential election, held on September 7 2005, claims that there was political pressure on the judgement and he'll take it to the court of cassation. The leader's lawyer, Amir Salim, said that the verdict would be annulled by the appeal court, as Associated Press reports.

Groups of Nour's supporters, organized mainly by his wife Gameela Ismail, protested against

the decision and the style of government of current president Hosni Mubarak, shouting "Down with Mubarak, Down with the regime."

Ayman Nour was arrested in January, 2005 and then imprisoned. He was released when the presidential campaign started.

**Today in History**

800 - Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor, a title that had been out of use in the West since the abdication of Romulus Augustulus in 476.

1776 - George Washington and his army crossed the Delaware River to launch a surprise attack on Hessian mercenaries at the Battle of Trenton.

1868 - The Republic of Ezo was founded in Hokkaido by rebels loyal to the deposed Tokugawa shogunate. In the first elections ever held in Japan, they elected Admiral Enomoto Takeaki as their President.

1991 - Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union. December 25 is Christmas; Hanukkah (1st night); Newtonmas

**Quote of the Day**

"My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?" ~ Bob Hope

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