



Top Stories

United States Navy ordered to Somali coast

The United States Navy has been ordered to the Somali coastline in an attempt to stop members of the Union of Islamic Courts, from escaping the country. Naval forces have been boarding ships searching for fighters who might be hiding on them to escape Somalia.

Pelosi named new Speaker of the House

Californian Democrat Nancy Pelosi has been named the 60th United States Speaker of the House at the age of 66. She is the first female House speaker in United States history. The opening of the Congress in 2007 marks the first time in a dozen years that the Democrats have control of the entire Congress.

Featured story

CNN typo mixes up U.S. Senator with Osama bin Laden

CNN mixed up U.S. Senator Barak Obama and Osama bin Laden by mistake Monday, leading into a segment on Osama bin Laden with the title, "Where's Obama?" on The Situation Room, a show hosted by pundit Wolf Blitzer. CNN called it a "bad typographical error."

Wikipedia Current Events

- A bus bomb near the Sri Lankan town of Nittambuwa kills 5 and injures at least 30. The Sri Lankan government declares the Tamil Tigers responsible, but the rebel group denies involvement.

- In Vancouver, the roof of the world's largest air supported domed stadium, BC Place Stadium, is intentionally deflated due to a tear in a fabric panel.

- Alexander Litvinenko poisoning: Traces of polonium-210 have been found in a second restaurant in London. The Health Protection Agency had been monitoring the establishment in connection with the Alexander Litvinenko assassination.

- A second victim of the National Express Coach crash, a male, is still not identified. Authorities have appealed to the public in the hopes of identifying the victim.

- Four are injured in a coach crash in the French Alps.

- Hitachi breaks the 1 terabyte barrier in hard disk drive capacity.

- Josefa Iloilo appoints Commodore Frank Bainimarama, the leader of the December 2006 coup d'état, as Prime Minister of Fiji.

- United States President George W. Bush will nominate Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, to replace Alejandro Daniel Wolff as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. If Khalilzad is confirmed by the Senate, he will

Canada wins gold at 2007 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship

For the third time in a row, Team Canada has won the gold medal at the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship. This year's tournament took place in Leksand, Sweden. Canada clinched gold in a 4-2 victory over Russia. The Canadian team held a perfect 6-0-0 record for the third straight year.

Canada's first three goals were all scored in the first period in a span of just under two and a half minutes. Scoring the goals for Canada were Andrew Cogliano, Bryan Little, Jonathan Toews, and Brad Marchand. Scoring for the Russians were Pavel Valtenko and Gennady Churilov. This is the third year in a row that Canada and the Russians have met in the gold medal game.

Canadian coach Craig Hartsburg was quoted as saying after the game that "It's hard to describe. It's unbelievable", and that "I'm so proud of these kids. It's tough to come over here and win this thing."

Earlier in the day, the United States beat the hosts Sweden 2-1 in the bronze medal game. The Most Valuable Player Award for the tournament, along with the top goalkeeper award were given to Carey Price, Canada's goalkeeper. Erik Johnson of the US received the top defenceman award, and Russia's Alexei Cherepanov got the top forward award.

Ethical debate surrounds surgery to stunt disabled girl's growth

An ethical controversy has surged in the United States and elsewhere around nine-year-old Ashley X (her family name is not released). The disabled girl was operated upon at the request of her parents, to prevent her from growing, menstruating and developing breasts. The parents, who wish to remain anonymous, explain their situation on a blog entitled The "Ashley Treatment". There have been over 1000 reactions on the blog so far.

Ashley suffers a condition termed static encephalopathy with marked global developmental deficits of unknown etiology, which means brain damage of unknown cause leading to a kind of static condition. She can make sounds, move her arms and kick her legs, but she cannot change her position, eat, walk, talk etc. Many of these children are in poor health and die young, but Ashley is in good health. For all of these functions she depends on her caregivers. Most of the day she passes watching her surrounding, lying on a pillow. Her parents call her their "Pillow Angel", "since she is so sweet and stays right where we place her—usually on a pillow

Ashley's parents want to keep her at home and care for her themselves, and they want to guarantee their daughter's quality of life. To this end, they say, Ashley underwent several surgical procedures and medical treatments during a period of three years. To attenuate her growth, Ashley was given high doses of the hormone estrogen. Ashley now measures 4ft 5 (1m 35cm) and weighs around 75 lbs (34 kg), which is below her

expected length and weight. Her low body weight and size would improve her comfort, and at the same time facilitate the work of her caregivers.

Surgery to remove her uterus (a procedure called a hysterectomy) and breast buds were performed, so Ashley does not menstruate and will not develop breasts, both of which parents think only would cause her discomfort. Since high estrogen levels can cause menstrual bleeding and breast development, the surgery was also meant to limit these effects. She also underwent surgery to remove her appendix, because it would be difficult to diagnose appendicitis given Ashley's low communication possibilities.

Dr. Gunther, an ethicist and Dr. Diekema from the Department of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle published a case report on her treatment in the October 2006 issue of the medical journal Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. They suggest that "after proper screening and informed consent, growth-attenuation therapy should be a therapeutic option available to these children should their parents request it". In the paper, they refer to the American Academy of Pediatrics, which holds the belief that "most parents desire to raise their children with special health care needs at home", and "that all children, regardless of the presence of a disability, belong in families." Ashley's parents were quoted to fear that without an intervention, their daughter would be "put in the hands of strangers."

Ashley has two siblings, and the medical report notes that "Despite her severe disability, she clearly is an integral, and much loved,

member of the family." The treatment was approved by a local multidisciplinary ethical committee consisting of 40 members. The committee noted that "although justified in this patient, growth attenuation should be considered in future patients only after careful evaluation of the risks and benefits on a case-by-case basis."

In the case report discussion, the physicians recognise that surgical removal of the uterus in disabled girls "is controversial and invariably associated with the negative connotations and history of forced 'sterilization.'" Indeed, some reactions on the internet accused the parents of practices bordering eugenics and "perversity". The hysterectomy eliminates the need for contraceptive hormone treatment in a population with "no realistic reproductive aspirations". Estrogens carry a theoretical risk for thrombosis, but the clinical importance in this setting remains unknown. There seems to be a risk of seizures in a population with a predilection for epilepsy.

In their paper, the authors also discuss the fact that Ashley's small stature could cause caregivers to continue treating her like a nine-year-old, even if she becomes older. But they do not believe that such "infantilization" will harm the child, because they believe her intellectual capacities are at about the same level, so such an approach may be in fact appropriate.

In an editorial by Dr. Brosco, Department of Pediatrics, University of Miami, he discusses the fact that there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that keeping a disabled person small allows them to be cared for at home for a longer period. He

rejects the argument of interfering with nature too much, since it is not uncommon practice to treat girls who grow taller than what is normally accepted with estrogens. He argues that a small gesture alone might induce some intuitive ethical concern, but that shouldn't stop us "if we truly believe that the worth of a person goes deeper than his or her physical appearance."

Dr. Brosco also draws attention to a broader social context, indicating that the burden for the family is higher in a society that fails to provide adequate support. He notes that when the child enters the adult medical and social system, parents tend to get less access to often expensive care aids and devices. "As a society, we do a pretty rotten job of helping caregivers provide what's necessary for these patients," was the comment of another medical ethicist, Dr. Joel Frader of Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital.

In bioethical issues, where benefits and risks are weighed, "do no harm" is one of the governing principles for doctors, who swear it in the Hippocratic oath. Arthur Caplan, a biomedical ethicist at the University of Pennsylvania told Reuters that "Puberty, growth (and) aging happen to all of us and there are plenty of people out there who will require help from family or society... The solution isn't to take every person who is schizophrenic or autistic or behaviorally disoriented and keep them in a child-like state." He further warns of the slippery slope implications this kind of thinking might have.

Egypt announces Internet crime initiative

Egypt intends to launch an

international initiative to fight misuse of the internet. This statement was made by Egypt's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs Abdel Aziz Seif el-Nasr.

The idea lies in implementing a long-term international cooperation plan that concerns suppressing the activity of criminals and other groups that use World Wide Web for promoting their interests.

Abdel Aziz Seif el-Nasr stated that soon Egypt will take necessary steps to present the idea on the international arena. He also outlined the fact that the plan for fighting cyber-crime stipulates the introduction of new rules for Internet users.

Report: 50,000 American casualties in Iraq

As the U.S. military hit a grim milestone this week of 3,000 deaths in Iraq, the online magazine AlterNet reported on Thursday another marker was reached there sometime in December: 50,000 U.S. casualties, including deaths, wounds and injuries.

The figure comes from more than 22,000 wounded in combat and more than 24,000 either injured in accidents or who became too ill to fight, all of which the U.S. military deems casualties.

The story cited two sources. One was a military document that counted casualties in Iraq through Dec. 2, 2006. The other was an independent website called the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count.

The author of the report urged opponents of the war to make the figure known, because "we are being manipulated along with the media and public by the

administration's determination to minimize the cost in blood" by only reporting the number of deaths.

FBI details chief justice's prescription drug trouble

Former U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist suffered paranoid delusions in 1981 during withdrawal from a dependence on prescription painkillers, according to his recently-released FBI file.

The late head of the U.S.'s top court began taking the drug Placidyl in the early 1970s for insomnia and back pain while he was an associate Supreme Court justice. His dependence on the drug was first made public when he was hospitalized for symptoms related to it in 1981, but the delusions were only revealed in the release of the file this week.

A doctor who treated Rehnquist told an FBI investigator the justice had "bizarre ideas and outrageous thoughts. He imagined, for example, that there was a CIA plot against him." Another doctor said Rehnquist "had also gone to the lobby in his pajamas in order to try to escape."

Rehnquist had been taking nearly three times the recommended maximum daily dosage of the drug. His delusions came when doctors at George Washington University Hospital took him off it. Eventually, they put him back on Placidyl and weaned him off slowly until he was cured of his dependence.

The FBI conducted an extensive investigation into Rehnquist's drug dependence at the request of the Senate Judiciary Committee during his 1986 confirmation hearings to become chief justice.

Rehnquist's file was released to

media and lawyers this week as part of a public records request. Rehnquist died in September 2005 and because his privacy could no longer be violated, the FBI OK'd its release.

The FBI was also asked to investigate Democrats who were set to testify against Rehnquist at the 1986 hearing, the file showed. The Democrats were set to testify Rehnquist intimidated minority voters in the early 1960s as a Republican Party official in Arizona.

It's not clear if the bureau ever did investigate the Democrats, however a memo in the file shows then-Assistant Attorney General John Bolton, the most-recent United Nations Ambassador for the U.S., approved the investigation and said he would "accept responsibility should concerns be raised about the role of the FBI."

Rehnquist first took his seat as associate justice in 1972 and served on the court until his death.

Record low amount of organs donated in New Zealand

Figures released today show that the number of organs donated by New Zealanders in 2006 has decreased by four to a new record low of 25. In 2005 the number of organs donated equalled 29, a previous record low in New Zealand.

Before 2005 the number of organ donations averaged 40, an already low number by international standards.

Andy Tookey, campaigner for GiveLife New Zealand, said: "It is important not to lose donors through families overriding donors wishes or the doctors not asking families in the first place." In the Intensive Care Units an audit

showed that there were a possible of 104 donors and only 69 of those families were asked if the organs could be donated. And 31 families refused to donate the organs.

GiveLife suggested that the main reason for the lack of donors could be the low road toll and the better healthcare.

Doctor Jackie Blue, National member of Parliament, and Mr Tookey have together proposed a change to the current law, in opposition to the latest change in the law proposed by the government, which he claims will give more power to help reverse the decline in organ donations. Mr Tookey said that the government's proposal bestows power upon others to "veto your wish to be a donor."

Mr Tookey said: "With doctors not asking families and other families saying no, we need to give the power back to the individual. What is the point of someone specifying they want to be a donor if it means nothing and can be overridden by everyone else? Why are doctors asking for a second consent when they have a perfectly legal one already from the person concerned, who made the decision whilst in sound and calm mind and then they are replacing it with a decision made by others made at a fraught and distressing time?"

In world league tables of organ donations, New Zealand currently stands between Iceland and Mexico for the numbers of organs donated. Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom top the table, with 25 donors per million population, 21 donors and 10.7 donors respectively.

Indonesian passenger plane

crashes in mountains

On the 2nd of January, relatives waiting for news about the Adam Air jetliner broke down in tears after learning that senior Indonesian officials erroneously reported the Boeing 737's charred wreckage had been found and that a dozen people may have survived.

A Boeing 737-400 flying for low-cost carrier Adam Air has crashed into the mountains of Indonesia's Sulawesi missing during its flight from Surabaya, Java to Manado, Sulawesi, Indonesia amid bad weather. The plane serving as flight number KI-574 was carrying 96 passengers and a crew of 6.

The domestic flight disappeared and vanished off late Monday about an hour before the intended landing time. The captain managed to send out two distress signals, but contact was then lost. Before the ill-fated plane vanished from radar, Singapore's satellite had picked up a distress signal from the plane.

According to airline spokesman Hartono, there are now plans to evacuate the survivors to Makassar. "The plane is in ruins," said First Air Marshal Eddy Suyanto. "The plane was found around 20 kilometers from Polewali, in the mountains." Later, the statement was rebutted by Marshall Eddy Suyanto himself and the Minister of Transportation Hatta Radjasa. This statement was an erroneously reported. Government had appologized to the public for this statement. This have been made an anguish to the relatives and family members.

Six days after plane crashed, wreckage of the ill-fated plane has still not been found. Indonesia has widened the hunt arround Sulawesi Island. Indonesian

rescuer was assisted by US satellite and Singapore Air Force.

Automobiles torched in France for New Years

In what is becoming an annual phenomenon in France, 400 cars were set ablaze during the New Year's night. Authorities say this is lower than the usual amount.

In 2006, an average of 112 cars a day were torched across France. There were 15 attacks per day on police and emergency services. Almost 3,000 police officers were injured in clashes with residents. In four separate ambushes, officers were badly injured in the Paris suburbs since September. Police speak of open war with youths who are bent on more than vandalism.

Nancy Pelosi named new Speaker of the US House of Representatives

Californian Democrat Nancy Pelosi, 66-years-old, has been named the 60th United States Speaker of the House with the votes 233-202. She is the first female House speaker in United States history. The opening of the Congress in 2007 marks the first time in a dozen years that the Democrats have control of the entire Congress.

In her speech she said it was time for a new America: "Now it is our responsibility to carry forth that vision of a new America. A new America that seizes the future and forges 21st century solutions through discovery, creativity, and innovation, sustaining our economic leadership and ensuring our national security. A new America with a vibrant and strengthened middle class for whom college is affordable, health care accessible, and retirement secure. A new America that

declares our energy independence, promotes domestic sources of renewable energy, and combats climate change. A new America that is strong, secure, and a respected leader among the community of nations," said Pelosi in her speech.

She finished her speech by calling all the children, including her own grandchildren, to the microphone and declaring "For all of America's children, the House will be in order."

Rep. John Boehner of Ohio was named the new Republican minority leader.

Britain makes final World War II debt payments

Great Britain has paid off the last of the loans it received to rebuild the country after World War II, sixty years ago. The last payment of US\$83.25 million was transferred electronically to the United States on the last business day of 2006, along with an additional US\$22.7 million to clear a similar debt owed to Canada.

The original loan of US\$4.34 billion, equivalent to about \$27 billion in today's dollars, was negotiated in 1945 by John Maynard Keynes to protect the country from bankruptcy. Canada contributed US\$1.2 billion.

The loan was required after the U.S. terminated grants in aid to Britain under the Lend Lease Act, signed by then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. On 2nd September 1945, with the decision to terminate aid, some of the goods were still in transit and it was necessary for Britain to arrange new loans to finance reconstruction.

The loan was negotiated at a 2%

interest rate, payable over 50 years starting in 1950. The final payment was actually six years late, the British Government having suspended payments due in the years 1956, 1957, 1964, 1965, 1968 and 1976 because of financial difficulties at those times.

Today in History

1661 - Thomas Venner and the Fifth Monarchists unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of London from the newly restored government of Charles II.

1838 - Samuel Morse successfully tested the electrical telegraph for the first time.

1907 - Maria Montessori opened her first school and day care center for working class children in Rome.

1929 - King Alexander of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes abolished his country's constitution and introduced a dictatorship.

1995 - A suspicious fire in a Manila flat led to the foiling of Oplan Bojinka, a precursor to the September 11, 2001 attacks. January 06 is Epiphany in Western Christianity.

Quote of the Day

History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth.
~ E.L. Doctorow

Word of the Day

rigmarole; n

1. Complex, obsolete procedures; excess steps or activity; needless motion.
2. Confused and incoherent talk.

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Quote of the Day

http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page

Word of the Day

http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page

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