



### Top Stories

#### World celebrates new year for Gregorian Calendar



As midnight moves across the globe, millions of people are welcoming the new year with fireworks and other celebrations.

#### Teenager in Florida, United States skips school, goes to Iraq

Farris Hassan, a 16 year old high school student from Florida, [redacted] decided to visit Iraq and left for the [redacted] country on December 11, 2005 alone and without having informed his parents.

### 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

•Tropical Storm Zeta continues activity in the Atlantic Ocean, becoming only the second North Atlantic tropical cyclone to exist across two calendar years and extending the already historic 2005 Atlantic hurricane season even further.

### Wikipedia Current Events

•Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accuses European nations of trying to complete the Holocaust by creating a "Jewish camp" Israel in the Middle East. "Don't you think that continuation of genocide by expelling Jews from Europe was one of their aims in creating a regime of occupiers of Al-Quds? Isn't that an important question?" He went on to say that Europe should cede some of their territory for a Jewish state, and that anti-Semitism has a long history in Europe, while Jews have lived peacefully among Muslims for centuries.

•At least three Qassam rockets landed in the western Negev, despite Israel Defense Forces' Operation Blue Skies. At least one Qassam rocket landed in Sderot, in which the Red Dawn alert system was activated around 15:30. Two Qassam rockets landed in an open area near Israeli communities in the western Negev. In all the cases there were no injuries.

•Northern California residents braced as second storm to hit the region, a day after the first sent rivers rising into cities and mud sliding into homes and across highways, which could have a bigger effect as the storm heads more inland to Southern California.

### 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, began cutting off supplies at 7:00 a.m. UTC this morning.

Gazprom claims to have taken this action because Ukraine refuses to pay the market rate for natural gas which is approximately four times higher than the price which they have previously enjoyed. Ukraine has stated that they are not averse to higher prices but believe they ought to be introduced sequentially. Additionally, Russia signed a contract to supply gas at \$50 per 1000 cubic meters until 2008 which it now does not want to honor.

Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said enough gas was still being piped via Ukraine to maintain deliveries to other countries, and if they were not getting all their gas, it meant Ukraine was tapping into it. Eighty percent of Russian gas exports to western Europe pass through Ukraine.

"We have information from the ground that shows Ukraine has started illegally siphoning off Russian gas destined for European consumers," Kupriyanov said. The Ukraine is of the position that since Russia will not live up to the agreement to sell at \$50 per 1000

cubic meters until 2008, the Ukraine, as a transiting country, has the right to offset the illegal cost increase with seizure of Russian assets - namely the gas going through the pipelines in Ukraine.

Sergei Kupriyanov, press secretary to Gazprom's chief executive, said "Negotiations reach a deadlock when it comes to discussing actual figures ... They have called on us to use price parameters than probably existed in the late 1990s in 2006, which is impossible ... The price of gas and other energy resources has risen considerably over the past few years."

The dispute is inseparable from the political situation between the two countries. Although a private business, the largest individual shareholder in Gazprom is the Russian government which owns slightly less than 40%. The dispute was further politicized by the personal intervention of Vladimir Putin who offered Ukraine the chance to delay paying market prices for a further three months. Critics of the current Russian government have argued that Gazprom's action has been an attempt to punish Ukraine for forging closer links with the West following the Orange Revolution. Putin's advocates, however, have argued that the status quo is akin to a budgetary transfer between the two governments and costs Russia about US\$4.5 billion per year.

A recent poll conducted by VTSIOM suggests that 80% of Russian citizens support the move by Gazprom. Ukraine has threatened to retaliate by raising the rent that Russia's navy pays to use the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol as headquarters for its Black Sea fleet.

### **Tropical Storm Zeta becomes second cross-season tropical storm in history**

Tropical Storm Zeta has become the first storm of the 2006 Atlantic hurricane season after crossing over from 2005 Atlantic hurricane season as that seasons 27th storm, breaking the record set by Hurricane Epilson earlier in December. This makes Zeta the second tropical storm in history to cross over into another season; the first time this occurred was in 1954-55 with Hurricane Alice.

Zeta currently has a top sustained wind speed of 50mph (85 km/h). It is currently about 1,085 miles (1745 km) southwest of the Azores and is proceeding west-southwest at 2mph (4 km/h). Forecasters say it is not expected become a hurricane or threaten land.

Zeta formed on December 30, 2005, after the official end of the destructive and record-breaking 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, which ended on November 30, 2005. The 2005 season was notable for the record number of storms it produced (including Zeta), and was the first time storm names used V, W and Greek letters and the second time the letters R, S, and T were used. The season also had the highest-ever number of storms forming in the month of July, and had the highest number of Category 5 hurricanes with a total of three, including Hurricane Wilma, the most intense hurricane ever in the Atlantic basin.

The most notable of the three Category 5 hurricanes was Hurricane Katrina. Katrina caused over \$100 billion (USD) in damage and 1,383 deaths, especially along Mississippi and Alabama coastlines

which suffered catastrophic damage. The storm also caused levees to break in New Orleans leading to the flooding of the city which is located below sea-level. The United States government, the city government of New Orleans and the government of the State of Louisiana were all severely criticized for their handling of the storms aftermath. Hurricane Katrina, although not yet certified, is most likely the costliest hurricane in U.S. history.

Forecasters are predicting that hurricane seasons are going to be more active than usual for about another decade.

### **Australian volunteer firefighters kept busy on New Year's Day**

A massive bushfire that was threatening West Victorian towns of Great Western, Armstrong, Moyston, Pomonal, Halls Gap and Ararat has stopped spreading due to heavy rainfall giving firefighters their first relief in two days. Meanwhile, two major fires have broken out on the New South Wales Central Coast, North of Sydney with another in Sydney.

The Victorian fire has destroyed 5 homes in the Stawell and two people have been injured when they fell down a mineshaft while fighting the blaze. Reports claim that the fire front was upto 30Km in length. Earlier today the fire was burning out of control, being fanned by strong winds. This afternoon a weather change came, dumping heavy rain over the region.

Two major fires have been reported on the NSW Central coast in the Woy Woy and Mount White regions. 50 homes are believed to be under direct threat. Residents

in affected parts of Woy Woy, Umina and Pearl beaches, and Patonga, have been taken to makeshift evacuation centres at the Gosford Leagues Club and Woy Woy Bowling Club.

The Sydney Newcastle (F3 freeway) and Pacific Highway have been closed. Motorists which had been stranded on the southbound carriageway of the F3 freeway were allowed through at around 6PM AEDT following fears of a wind change which could have put them in danger of the fire. Police say that the backlog was let through and the freeway remains closed.

Intercity train services North of Sydney have also been affected with the railway line closed at Berowra.

Dozens of fire crews and four water bombing aircraft were battling the blazes, according to bushfire volunteer Michael Wood, with changeable wind conditions starting spot fires nearby. Strong north-westerly wind gusts and temperatures of up to 44 degrees posed extremely dangerous fire conditions, the Rural Fire Service said.

The Woy Woy fire front was expected to make a run to Umina and Pearl Beach in the coming hours. 300 firefighters are working to contain the flames.

Cameron Wade, a spokesman for the NSW Rural Fire Service said firefighters were battling flames up to 30 metres in height, destroying several homes. A Fire Station near Woy Woy was also destroyed along with several fire trucks and volunteers cars.

Mr Wade also said that crews were being called in from Sydney and

the Hunter to assist local fire crews. Six aircraft and a sky crane are also being used.

It is believed that winds in the Central Coast region are gusting at upto 60 Km/h.

Another fire in the Sydney suburb of Belrose is expected to cause problems in the next few hours.

In Merimbula, on the NSW far south coast residents are being evacuated, after a fire broke containment lines.

Phill Koperberg, Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service said there were fires concern at Junee and Cootamundra in southern NSW and at Appin and Bulli south of Sydney.

According to an RFS spokesman, a house in Junee was destroyed and a farmer was hospitalised after receiving burns to 60 percent of his body. A total of five homes in the Junee area have been confirmed lost.

About 100 people have been evacuated from Junee's outskirts amid fears that southerly winds could reach 100 kph, drastically worsening the fire situation.

### **New Zealand citizenship requirements tighten in 2006**

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2005, that amends New Zealand's nationality law, comes into effect today.

As of today babies will only acquire citizenship at birth if at least one of their parents is a citizen in New Zealand or its dependencies. Babies born to parents who are in New Zealand or its dependencies on holiday will no longer become citizens, as was the

case until the end of 2005.

The Department of Internal Affairs website, says the changes have been brought in to ensure the benefits of New Zealand citizenship only go to those with a genuine and on-going link to the country.

### **4-team East Coast baseball trade may be in the works**

NEW YORK - It looks like baseball stars Manny Ramirez and Miguel Tejada might be traded after all. Several NY Daily News sources claim that Ramirez could go to the New York Mets as part of a four-team deal. However, budget constraints may complicate the trade. According to the NY Daily News, if this blockbuster deal is successful, the following trades could take place:

Mets would get:

- Manny Ramirez
- Danys Biaz

Red Sox would get:

- Miguel Tejada
- Joey Gathright

Orioles would get:

- Matt Clement
- Julio Lugo
- Kris Benson

Devil Rays would get:

- Andy Marte
- Jae Seo
- Kaz Matsui

**Today in History**

366 - The Alamanni crossed the frozen Rhine in large numbers to invade the Roman Empire.

533 - Mercurius became Pope John II, the first pope to adopt a new name upon elevation to the papacy.

1492 - Reconquista: Los Reyes Católicos expelled Boabdil of Granada, the last of the Moorish rulers, from the Iberian Peninsula.  
1946 - Unable to resume his reign after World War II, King Zog of Albania abdicated but retained his claim to the throne.

1949 - Luis Muñoz Marín became the first democratically elected Governor of Puerto Rico.

**Quote of the Day**

"How often people speak of art and science as though they were two entirely different things, with no interconnection...That is all wrong. The true artist is quite rational as well as imaginative and knows what he is doing; if he does not, his art suffers. The true scientist is quite imaginative as well as rational, and sometimes leaps to solutions where reason can follow only slowly; if he does not, his science suffers." ~ Isaac Asimov

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