



Top Stories

Rape suspects in Ciudad Juárez arrested



Police have arrested three suspects in connection with the rape and murder of a 17

year old on Christmas Eve. This was the thirty-second such murder in 2005. More than 350 women have been murdered in Juárez since 1993.

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

- Ugandan presidential candidate Kizza Besigye is released from prison. Besigye had been in jail since his arrest on November 14 on treason and rape charges.
- 13 miners are trapped after a coal mine explosion in Upshur County, West Virginia.
- Eleven people are killed when the roof of an ice rink collapse in Bad Reichenhall, southern Germany, under the weight of recent snowfall, trapping some 50 skaters underneath.
- Several exploits of a severe Windows security vulnerability are spreading over the Internet, permitting compromise of any Windows computer merely by viewing a maliciously crafted image on a website or in e-mail or instant messaging. No patch from Microsoft is available, however an unofficial patch exists . The vulnerability affects every version of Windows, potentially affecting more computers than any prior computer security vulnerability in history.
- The leader of the Maoist guerrillas in Nepal issued a statement that his group, the People's Liberation Army, will resume its war with the monarchy after a four month truce.

Row over Australian flag at Bondi Pavilion

New South Wales Premier Morris

Iemma has prompted controversy following recent race-riots, when he urged the Waverley Council to reconsider its decision not to fly the Australian flag over The Bondi (Beach) Pavilion Community Cultural Centre.

"There is no problem with the flag and as for council banning the flag, it's absolute nonsense," responded Waverley deputy mayor George Newhouse. He said that the Premier, who described the council's decision as divisive and disgraceful, did not understand the facts.

"We already fly the flag at Bondi, we proudly fly the flag at Bondi and this decision has absolutely nothing to do with racism or Cronulla. It has everything to do with practical common sense," Mr Newhouse said.

"The Pavilion is a heritage-listed building and it will cost thousands of dollars to perform a heritage study and then erect the poles, which don't exist. We already have the flag, we love the flag, there is no problem with the flag and as for council banning the flag, it's absolute nonsense," said Mr Newhouse.

Riots took place in December at Cronulla, another Sydney beach, with many of the proponents and commentators blaming inter-ethnic tensions for the outbreak.

Premier Iemma last week presented a new flag to the Brighton-le-Sands RSL Club after

its symbol was burnt during the December 11 riots.

Of the Waverly Council decision, Premier Iemma said, "Our flag is a symbol of national unity and the council decision is just ridiculous. They want to reconsider it immediately."

The Council first voted against installing the flag in March 2005 because of a lengthy and expensive permit process. It is the second time in a year the council has rejected the motion. Mayor of Waverley, Mora Main, says there are already number of Australian flags flying in the Bondi Beach area. She said their primary concern was cost - not just \$150 for each flagpole, but more than \$15,000 because of the need to do a heritage study and consult the community.

"It's an iconic heritage building. Anything that's done to the pavilion needs to go through a rigorous heritage process," Cr Main said.

Before imposing the ban, the Council recently rejected an offer from Federal MP Malcolm Turnbull to pay for an Australian and Aboriginal flag.

However, Mayor Mora Main says the Council would now have a rethink.

"I have called on the Premier and Mr Turnbull to meet with me to discuss the appropriateness of putting flags on the pavilion and also how it can be funded," she said. "It's great to hear this discussion about the flags and I look forward to hearing everyone's ideas when we consult with the community."

New South Wales firefighters continue to battle fires, threat eases

Firefighters in the Australian state of New South Wales continue to battle bushfires across the state.

Rural Fire Service Commissioner Phill Koperberg said that there are still three fires on the Central Coast, while another fire in Junee is moving north and is now spread over 35,000 hectares.

He added that it could take up to four days to contain the fires due to rain and strong winds. A southerly change blew through the state last night, easing temperatures and reducing the fire threat. No homes are believed to be under direct threat at this time.

It is feared that the weather which helped the fires take hold may return on the weekend.

Fires on the Central Coast continue to affect road and rail transport between Sydney and Newcastle.

The Sydney-Newcastle Freeway and the Pacific Highway have been reopened, although there is heavy traffic on the freeway at Brooklyn and Cowan. Drivers have been advised to exercise caution due to thick smoke. Trains travelling between the Central Coast and Newcastle to Sydney are heavily delayed.

Only one person has been killed by the fires, a 65 year old man who suffered a heart attack while helping residents evacuate on the Central Coast.

27 fires are reported to be burning across New South Wales.

Colombia signs FTA with Mercosur

President Alvaro Uribe signed, on December 30, 2005, a law that ratifies a FTA with Mercosur and gives Colombian products preferential access to a market of 230 million people. Colombian entrepreneurs will also be able to import materials and capital goods from Mercosur at lower costs due to reduced tariffs resulting from the agreement.

The agreement's asymmetry clauses favor Colombia because it allows the gradual and progressive reduction of tariffs and likewise gives Colombia the opportunity to gradually reform its production system to adapt it to the requirements of future negotiations within the scheme of Mercosur and the South American Community of Nations

This agreement along with previous treaties signed with the Andean Community, Mexico, Chile and the FTA with the United States currently under negotiation, highlight the geographic position of Colombia as a center for investment.

Bolivian President-Elect takes 50% pay cut to aid social program funding

So more staff can be hired for Bolivia's education, health and social programs, President Elect Evo Morales announced that he and his cabinet will take a 50% pay cut. The 46-year-old leader slashed his future salary of about \$3600 a month to \$1800.

Raising Bolivia from its situation as one of the poorest countries in the world is a primary intention of the president elect. "It's a question of sharing the country's situation

among us all." said Morales. "This is a democratic revolution and we will answer the Bolivian people's call."

Cabinet ministers and all 157 members of Morales' party that were elected to Congress will also take a 50% pay cut, Morales said. The salaries of 157 substitute congressmen will be eliminated.

Morales, who is known across the country as "Evo", is Bolivia's first native Indian president. Growing up in poverty has marked his politics. He often says, "For a handful of people there is money, for the others, repression." Evo will soon move from his rented single room of a shared house to Bolivia's presidential palace.

Morales also met with business and civic leaders on Tuesday in a conciliatory meeting. Morales said his government would create a stable legal and economic environment to attract investment and create jobs which was applauded by the Bolivian elite.

"I do not have a professional education, but it is important that we co-operate. You have the professional capacity, I have the social consciousness"

Broadway Market Café occupied against gentrification



Broadway market occupation

For several weeks, a group of local

residents has kept Francesca's Café on 34 Broadway Market, Hackney, East London occupied day and night to prevent its demolition and conversion into luxury flats by property developer Dr Roger Wratten.

The occupation was evicted on 21st December by police and bailiffs, and workmen began a partial demolition, but a new group of supporters re-occupied the building on 26th December and have begun rebuilding it including new walls and a replacement roof.

The café was bought by Dr. Wratten from Hackney Council as part of a number of sales in the street, now surrounded by controversy, and was run by Tony Platia who had worked there for over 30 years. Hundreds of people have attended the café in the past few weeks to show support.

Microsoft Windows metafiles are a vector for computer viruses

Microsoft Windows metafiles have been discovered to be a vector for computer viruses, as they are treated as image files, but can execute machine code. Windows metafiles often use the extension .wmf files, but they may also execute if their extension is .jpg.

This vulnerability affects any Windows software which displays images, including instant messenger software, email clients, and web browsers. Firefox reduces the vulnerability by asking a user before executing Windows metafiles, but metafiles masquerading as another format will still be executed automatically by the operating system.

Microsoft has not yet issued a

patch for the vulnerability, prompting Ilfak Guilfanov to release an unofficial patch. Microsoft's security advisory recommends unregistering shimvw.dll to disable handling of Windows MetaFiles. Critics point out that shimvw.dll could become re-registered by malicious processes or other installations. They also suggest that malicious Windows Metafiles could merely remain "dormant" until shimvw.dll is re-registered.

The exploit has been used to attack online forums which allow embedding of image files via tags, prompting some gaming forums to disable tags. Any site accepting image media upload, such as avatars, will also be vulnerable if it the site accepts .wmf files, possibly masquerading as another media file format.

The exploit has also been used by an instant messaging worm, which appears to provide a backdoor for later exploitation via an IRC bot.

F-Secure's Mikko said "The WMF vulnerability" probably affects more computers than any other security vulnerability, ever."

PepsiCo buys Poland's Star Foods

PepsiCo has acquired Poland's Star Foods, a leading maker of snacks, for an undisclosed sum. The deal strengthens its position in Poland in snacks sales such as potato chips. More than half of PepsiCo's total sales is from snacks, less than 20% is from soft drinks.

Star Foods was selling potato chips under the brand Star Chips, and corn snacks under the brand Mr. Snaki. Star Foods was privately held by the Mitzalis family, Advent

International, Copernicus Capital Partners, and Cazolico S.A.

Coal miners trapped in West Virginia mine

Buckhannon, West Virginia --

At approximately 6-6:30 am EST, the Sago coal mine, near Buckhannon, experienced an explosion.

6 miners escaped shortly after the explosion, but at least 12 miners are still trapped in the mine, almost one mile underground, where methane gas is accumulating, making rescue efforts difficult.

Nearby homes have been evacuated due to the high levels of methane gas, and fans are being used to help disperse the gas.

At this time it is unclear what has caused this explosion.

The mine is owned by International Coal Group Inc.

British MP calls for ban on aspartame

According to a recent article Roger Williams, a UK Member of Parliament, called for emergency action to ban the artificial sweetener Aspartame, questioning its safety. The MP said that there was "compelling and reliable evidence for this carcinogenic substance to be banned from the UK food and drinks market altogether". Some of the FDA's scientists questioned its safety from the very beginning, but many other countries followed the agency's lead in approving the chemical sweetener. The chemical sweetener has allegedly been linked to brain tumors, anxiety attacks and other side effects and there

are calls for possible class action law suits.

New research on common food additives, including the controversial sweetener aspartame and food colourings, suggests they may interact to interfere with the development of the nervous system.

Aspartame is sold under the brand names of Equal, Nutrasweet and Canderel, as well as an ingredient in many "diet" or "lite" products

Steelers defeat Lions to advance to NFL playoffs

The Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the Detroit Lions 35-21 at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh. The victory earns the Steelers the final spot for an AFC team in the NFL playoffs.

The Steelers, who had a 10-5 record heading into the game, were strong favorites against the Lions, who were 5-10. However the Lions pulled ahead early, with quarterback Joey Harrington throwing scoring passes on two consecutive drives in the first quarter to put Detroit up 14-7.

Veteran Steelers running back Jerome Bettis scored the next three touchdowns, matching a career high in what will likely be his last home game. His third touchdown resulted in a standing ovation from the crowd of 63,794.

The Steelers (11-5) go on to play the Bengals (11-5) in Cincinnati next Sunday at 4:00pm in the wildcard round. The Steelers split their season series with the Bengals winning 27-13 on October 23 in Cincinnati, but losing 38-31 at home on December 4.

"We play [the Bengals] twice a

year and we know them," said Steelers running back Hines Ward. "It's not going to be easy, but we're more comfortable with them."

The other AFC wildcard game has the Jacksonville Jaguars (12-4) visiting the New England Patriots (10-6). The winners of the wildcard round will face the Indianapolis Colts (14-2) or the Denver Broncos (13-3) in the divisional round.

Rape suspects in Ciudad Juárez arrested

A 17-year-old girl was raped and murdered in Ciudad Juárez on Christmas Eve, and now 3 have been arrested in the incident. According to spokeswoman Claudia Elena Banuelos of the Chihuahua Attorney General's office, the 3 men were drinking with the victim when one proposed having sex with her. When the victim refused the sex, the attackers raped her, according to the spokeswoman. One of the attackers then allegedly hit her in the head with a blunt object several times, and ran away when he saw she was unconscious. The 3 attackers were identified as Mario Loya Aguirre, Eleazar Pena Navarro and Jorge Armando Sifuentes Martinez.

This was the 32nd murder of a woman in Ciudad Juárez in 2005 — police have reportedly solved 26 of these murders.

More than 350 women have been murdered in Juárez since 1993, according to federal investigators. A report from Amnesty International indicates that as many as 400 women may be missing. At least a third of these killings followed a similar pattern in that young women were

assaulted, strangled, and dumped in the desert.

12 hurt in San Luis de La Balsa tourist bus accident

In San Luis de La Balsa, Costa Rica a tourist bus carrying foreign tourist flipped over in the highway about 55 miles Northeast of the capital of San Jose. At least a dozen people were injured. One man, Dan McHugh, is a Canadian who is among the people hurt.

McHugh says that the roads were slick which caused the bus to slide into a ditch and roll onto its side. He says that he was only cut by shattered glass while other passengers were pinned under the bus.

The nationalities of the other passengers is not immediately known, though McHugh said that there were Australians on the bus and the U.S. Embassy confirmed that there were citizens of the United States also.

One woman with serious injuries was air-lifted to a hospital in San Jose while others were taken to local hospitals in nearby towns.

Redskins qualify for playoffs with win in Philadelphia

The Washington Redskins defeated the Philadelphia Eagles 31-20 at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. With the win, the Redskins advance to the NFL playoffs for the first time in six years.

The Redskins pulled ahead in the first quarter, but the Eagles answered with Mike McMahon throwing two touchdowns to rookie wide receiver Reggie Brown.

Washington evened the score at 17 on the opening drive of the third quarter, thanks to a 54-yard pass to wide receiver Santana Moss and a 6-yard running play by running back Clinton Portis. David Akers put the Eagles in the lead again with a 35-yard field goal on the next drive.

McMahon then made a crucial mistake, when a bad pass was intercepted by line backer Lemar Marshall at the Philadelphia 22 yard line. Portis ran the ball up the sidelines on the next play for his second touchdown of the game, putting Washington ahead 24-20. Free safety Sean Taylor clinched the victory for the Redskins with a 39-yard fumble return.

Portis ran for a total of 112 yards in the game and set a franchise rushing record of 1,432 yards. This is the fifth win in a row for the Redskins, who finish the regular season with a 10-6 record.

"Looking back to 5-6, we talked at that time that if we lost another game we'd be out," said Washington head coach Joe Gibbs. "Trying to win five straight is a tough deal, but our guys seemed to understand what it would take. We went back to the basics."

The Redskins go on to play the Buccaneers(11-5) in Tampa Bay next Saturday at 4:30pm in the wildcard round. The other NFC wild game has the Carolina Panthers (11-5) visiting the New York Giants (11-5). The winners of the wild card round will face the Seattle Seahawks (13-3) or the Chicago Bears (11-5) in the divisional round.

Oklahoma City suburbs on fire

Wildfires are burning homes in Oklahoma City. Winds in excess of

40 mph have grounded helicopters and tanker planes, the high winds are also driving the fires. Firefighters have ordered an evacuation of several neighborhoods. At least three homes have burned. 200 homes have been evacuated. The area has had only a quarter-inch of rain since October with no relief in sight.

Several fires have sprung up in the region over the past few days. Nearly 30,00 acres of prairie have burned across Texas. Temperatures have ranged into the low 80s.

New Zealand's South Island and southern North Island struck by storms

New Zealand's warm sunny New Year's weather has come to a sudden end as gale force winds and rain assault southern New Zealand.

In parts of the South Island New Year campers have finished their holiday early as winds averaging 120km/h (75 m/h), gusting at times up to 180km/h (112 m/h), have blown in.

Power went out to 1300 homes in the capital city Wellington; flights were grounded at the airport, with incoming flights diverted to Palmerston North airport.

"The North Island will also be affected by the low," says MetService forecaster Michael Short, "with heavy rain around the Tararua Ranges and Mt Taranaki."

The MetService has issued severe weather warnings for most of the South Island and the southern portion of the North Island; bad weather is also forecasted throughout the rest of the country.

The MetService says to expect bad weather for the next 10 days as a deepening low moves south of Stewart Island, but a flow of westerly winds is expected to stay put all week.

Holiday makers have been asked by MetService to review their holiday plans and keep up to date with the latest weather.

Today in History

1749 - Benning Wentworth began to issue the New Hampshire Grants on land which was also claimed by New York, and is now Vermont.

1888 - The 91-cm refracting telescope at Lick Observatory, at the time the largest telescope in the world, was used for the first time.

1958 - Ten former British colonies in the Caribbean joined to form a new independent country, the West Indies Federation.

1973 - George Steinbrenner and a group of investors bought the New York Yankees for 10 million U.S. dollars.

1990 - General Manuel Noriega, the deposed "strongman of Panama", surrendered.

Quote of the Day

"Not to know what happened before you were born is to be a child forever. For what is the time of a man, except it be interwoven with that memory of ancient things of a superior age?" ~ Cicero

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