



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.

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.

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

- A railroad train on the Uetsu Main Line in northern Japan derails, killing one and injuring at least 33.
- Joseph Pararajasingham, 71, a pro-Tamil Tiger politician, is shot at a Christmas Midnight Mass in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
- Nazir Ahmad, a Pakistani laborer, admits to, and is arrested for

Wikipedia Current Events

murdering his four daughters, aged 4, 8, 12, and 25, after his eldest daughter, Muqadas Bibi, married a man against his wishes.

- The Supreme Court in Libya overturns the death sentences given to international health workers charged with infecting children with HIV.

Australian wheat to lose out in Iraqi market grab

The Australian Wheat Board (AWB), the primary economic authority for Australian wheat export is set to lose their long standing trade contract with Iraq worth \$270m/annum to United States exporters after a deal was struck with Iraqi Wheat Board for a majority share of the \$500m wheat market.

Aggressive lobbying by United States trade diplomats used the imminent uncovering of AWB involvement in the Oil for Wheat incident as fodder in their recent negotiations. The AWB's previous arrangement saw the use of Alia, a Jordanian based transport corporation owned by the wealthy Al-Khawam family, to transport their wheat to Umm Qasr, a southern sea port in Iraq.

"There has been obvious corruption in procurement and there were illegal and illegitimate transfers of huge funds abroad, outside the control of the Iraqi state," said Iraq's finance minister, Ali Allawi.

The UN report headed by Paul Volcker (former Chairman of the United States Federal Reserve), released in October 2005, noted that the AWB was aware the Iraqi Government used Alia as a backdoor for obtaining \$310m in kickbacks under the guise as 'transport costs' and adjusted their price for the wheat accordingly which was noticeably higher than their trading price with importers in other regions.

"Numerous aspects of the AWB-Alia relationship suggest that some employees of AWB were placed on notice of facts strongly suggesting that AWB's payments were in whole or part for the benefit of the government of Iraq." said Vockler.

Sheik Hussein al-Khawam head of the Shiite Al-Kahawam influential family business operation including Teebah, Alia, Al Huda International Trading Company recently assumed its control on the newly established Iraqi Airlines in alliance with the new Iraqi Government, has been under heavy scrutiny from some influential US political analysts, including Volcker and which accuse the family of corruption due to dealings with Saddam Hussien.

Armenian Journalists Facing Prison Sentences in Turkey

Hrant Dink, Arat Dink, Serkis Seropyan and Aydin Engin, all employees of Agos, an Armenian newspaper published in İstanbul, have each been charged with "attempting to affect legal

proceedings" by the Sisli 2nd First Instance Court for their alleged attempts to tamper with Hrant Dink's trial earlier this year. The four journalists will be tried under the 288th article of the Turkish Penal Code, and face a possible 6 months to 3 years in jail if found guilty.

In his indictment, the public prosecutor claimed that the defendants attempted to influence the result of Hrant Dink's earlier trial by way of articles published in *Agos*, of which Dink is the editor. In response to the indictment, Hrant Dink said, "It is impossible for a man not to be puzzled. I am the defendant at the same time. It is a basic right for a defendant to attempt to affect the legal proceedings. If a defendant is not trying to affect the legal proceedings, then he would do this? We would go, face the court and see the results."

Hrant Dink was found guilty in October of insulting Turkey's national identity, a conviction for which he received a suspended sentence of 6 months imprisonment. He claims he will appeal this decision.

Fiesta Season begins in Colombia

A Fiesta Season of two weeks begins in Colombia in December 25 with the FERIA de Cali followed by the FERIA de Manizales and the Carnival of Blacks and Whites in Pasto.

The 48th FERIA de Cali Begins at 1:00 pm in the city of Cali and the opening ceremony includes a Cabalgata, (Horseriding Parade). During the FERIA, there will be bullfighting events and shows, salsa and Caribbean music concerts until December 30. This

year concerts will include renowned salsa artists such as Jonny Pacheco, Sergio Vargas, Jose Feliciano, Carlos Vives, Sonora Carruseles from Miami among others.

Feria de Manizales
This is the FERIA of Pasodoble, the musical rhythm that accompanies the bullfighting events. These festivals are to be celebrated from January 2nd to January 9th. It includes a beauty contest with the participation of 24 beauty queens from different countries. The beauty queens will be homage in a sort of Petals-Rain Parade on the main streets of the city of Manizales.

There will be 16 venues music concerts, each one specializing in different music types including Salsa, Vallenato, Pasodoble, music of the 60's, tango, etc.

Carnival of Blacks and Whites
Beginning with a pre-carnival event on December 28th, the carnival begins on January 2nd with a parade of "Colonies" is the most picturesque carnival of the country.

On December 4 is the arrival of the Castaneda family, a krewé parade where a typical settler family from the north of Colombia caricatured. On December the 5th people will play to paint each other in black to celebrate the Day of the Blacks and on December the 6th the whites will take revenge by to throwing white talcum to everyone

Australian troops receive Christmas show in Iraq

A group of Australian entertainers have sacrificed Christmas at home to spread some Christmas cheer among 450 troops deployed in

Iraq. The show was put on for troops in the Al Muthanna Task group at a base near the town of As Samawah.

Performer Little Pattie (Patricia Thompson), who entertained Australian and allied troops during the Vietnam War at the age of 17, led the entertainment. She was joined by Beccy Cole, Angry Anderson, Hayley Jensen, Bessie Bardot, Geoff Barker and Lehmo.

"I feel I'm here to continue a time-honoured tradition which is of Australian performers performing for Australian forces no matter where they are in the world," Little Pattie said.

"It's a thing as a country we need to constantly be reminded of that they represent us as a nation around the world" said Angry Anderson.

The Christmas spirit also reached HMAS Parramatta, which is deployed to protect Iraq's oil infrastructure in the Persian Gulf. The HMAS Parramatta sailors received a surprise visit from Santa Claus who handed out presents.

New South Wales ALP loses support first time under premier 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.

Tolls may be needed for NSW Pacific Highway upgrade

In a joint statement Friday by Australian federal Roads Minister Jim Lloyd and his New South Wales counterpart Joe Tripodi said that tolls were being considered to fast track upgrades of the Pacific Highway. Over Half of the highway between the F3 freeway terminus at Beresfield on Newcastle and the Queensland border is still single carriageway.

Despite the New England Highway being the "national" highway from the F3 to Brisbane, traffic along the Pacific Highway is almost three times heavier on most sections . By 2021, traffic on the Pacific Highway is expected to rise by 35 percent.

The New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority estimates that to complete the dual carriageway "North Coast Motorway" (Pacific Highway upgrade) by 2016 would cost \$AU8 Billion. Since the major upgrades began in 1996, \$AU2.2 Billion has been spent. Around 40

to 50 people die on the Pacific Highway every year.

Mr Lloyd said "If there are sections of the Pacific Highway where you can get private sector involvement, get it built quickly, provide value for money for those who wish to use it and alternative routes for those who choose not to, then I think let's go for it". The proposal could introduce tolls on some sections of the highway with other sections (that are completely publically funded) remaining toll free.

The plans have drawn mixed results from transport groups. A spokesperson for the NRMA, the largest motorist's organisation in NSW said that tolls should only be considered as a "last resort". He further added that if the only way the road could be upgraded was by use of tolls then the NRMA would agree with conditions. He said that any toll should not exceed \$AU20.

Tourism and transport lobby group TTF Australia welcomed the move but warned that NSW north coast communities should not be disadvantaged through the introduction of a toll. Managing director Chris Brown said "We don't expect north coast communities to pay 10 bucks to go and get a bottle of milk".

Today in History

1790 - French Revolution: Louis XVI of France gave his royal assent to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

1898 - Pierre and Marie Curie (pictured) announced the discovery of a new element, later to be named radium.

1966 - The first Kwanzaa was celebrated by Maulana Karenga, a professor at CSU Long Beach

1991 - The Supreme Soviet

officially dissolved itself and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

2004 - An earthquake in the Indian Ocean generated a tsunami that killed upwards of 200,000 people, mostly in Indonesia.
December 26 is Boxing Day;
Wren's Day in Ireland.

Quote of the Day

"It is not the facts which guide the conduct of men, but their opinions about facts; which may be entirely wrong. We can only make them right by discussion." ~ Norman Angell

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