



Top Stories

Death toll rises in Indonesian tsunami

Over 520 people have been reported killed after a tsunami, triggered by a magnitude 7.7 earthquake hit western Java.

Severe tropical storm Bilis leaves 178 dead in south-east China

South-east China has been flooded by torrential rainstorms as the Severe Tropical Storm Bilis came ashore on Friday.

Featured story

G8 Summit debates Middle-east crisis, WTO trade talks

The leaders of the Group of Eight nations met this weekend, to discuss the ongoing crisis in the middle-east, the stalled WTO trade talks and other global issues.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The U.S. House of Representatives fails to override Bush's veto of the embryonic stem cell bill, which would lift the ban on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. This is his first use of a presidential veto.
- Heat waves are responsible for more than a dozen deaths in the United States and in Europe, including deaths as far north as the Netherlands. The U.K. hit a record-breaking July temperature of 36.5°C (97.7°F) at Wisley.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the United States Federal Reserve warns the United States Senate Banking Committee of the possible impact of rising energy prices on inflation.
- Internet censorship: In an unprecedented move for a leading democracy, India bans some blogs; Huge outrage reported.
- Two Israeli soldiers have been killed in fierce fighting with Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon.
- At least 55 civilians have been killed in Israeli air strikes in Lebanon.
- Israeli ground troops cross the border into Lebanon in a limited incursion.
- Israeli airstrikes hit the southern suburbs of Beirut near the airport.
- Cruise ship carrying 1000 Americans leaves Beirut for Cyprus as the fighting enters its second week.
- Israeli warplanes attack bunker in south Beirut believed to contain Hezbollah leaders.
- At least nine Palestinians have been killed in fresh Israeli operations in Gaza and the West Bank.
- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement reports that over 100 people are dead and missing in North Korea as a result of floods and landslides.

Wikipedia Current Events

- More than 9,000 families are left homeless. There have been at least 25 deaths in South Korea.
- OFCOM removes the retail price controls that had been imposed on Britain's dominant telco, the BT Group, for the last 22 years.

DNA in underwear matches Philippines rape victim

Dr. Francisco Supe Jr., a forensic analyst from the DNA Analysis Section of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Crime Laboratory, took the stand and disclosed in court for the first time that DNA was present in two pieces of evidence. According to Supe, DNA of complainant 'Nicole' was found in samples of 'biological fluid' found on the panties she was wearing on the night of Nov. 1, 2005 and in the condom purportedly used by accused Lance Corporal Daniel Smith in committing the alleged rape.

The used condom was retrieved at Subic's Alava Pier where a distraught Nicole was found after the alleged rape.

'The condom and the underwear had female DNA, and they matched. They are the same DNA profiles ... which means they most likely belong to the same person,' the expert witness said during direct examination by State Prosecutor Hazel Valdez.

Only Nicole's underwear tested positive for male DNA---a result that Supe attributed to the

possible 'degradation' of bodily fluids on the condom to "environmental insults, particularly the humid condition, bacterial factors that may have contaminated it ... and the enzyme inside DNA which destroys it when functioning outside a living system.'

In reply to Valdez's question, Supe said that while it was possible that the evidence had not been handled properly before the turnover, he said the condom and the panties were not contaminated as they still yielded DNA samples.

Upon Valdez's questioning, Supe related how analysts came to match the female DNA found in both specimens with that of the complainant.

He said Nicole's DNA, extracted from a blood sample that she had voluntarily provided, was the same as that found in the panties and the condom.

'I am comparing now, and it appears that they match exactly -- the DNA profiles generated from the blood sample and the samples generated from the condom and the underwear,' said Supe, referring to two DNA test results he was holding.

Valdez then sought Supe's expertise on the possible indications of the presence of male DNA in a woman's underwear, and asked him its possible source.

Supe replied: 'We're dealing here with a [pair of panties] and you would think of areas that come in contact with a panty... The most probable source is either saliva or seminal stains. But if you go by logic, I don't see any reason why anybody would lick a panty.' While the test may lead experts to areas

where DNA can be extracted, it cannot specify which part of the body the spots came from, Supe had explained.

Supe said the owner of the male DNA could not be identified as yet, as the crime laboratory lacked a sample with which to compare the results. None of the accused--- Smith, Lance Corporals Keith Silkwood and Dominic Duplantis, and Staff Sgt. Chad Carpentier--- had submitted his specimen for DNA testing. The prosecution panel had filed a motion on July 17, asking the court to compel the accused to submit blood samples for comparison with the male DNA found in Nicole's panties. Defense lawyers told the court that they would file their reply on July 20.

In response to the question on how could a female's DNA be in a used condom, Supe replied: 'The most plausible is that the inside of the condom came in contact with [Nicole]... Maybe that part of the condom was rubbed with [Nicole],' he said. 'Most likely it came in contact with the genital area, [but it] was turned inside out most likely, such that the [DNA] specimen was preserved.'

When asked to demonstrate how a condom could have been reversed, Supe had apparently anticipated the question and brought a condom. He then demonstrated how a condom could have been turned inside out in the act of removing it.

Defense lawyer Jose Justiniano said Supe's testimony did not help prove rape. He said the presence of the male and female DNA in the specimen could at most prove that a man and a woman had sex, not whether or not there was "a presence of force or intimidation,'

Cross-examination of Supe is scheduled for Thursday, July 20.

Four children among six Canadians killed in Israeli attack on Lebanon

Six Canadians, including four children who were killed on Sunday by an Israeli bombardment on a house in south Lebanon have been identified.

Saja Al-Akhrass (8), Zeinab Al-Akhrass (6), Ahmad Al-Akhrass (4), and Salam Al-Akhrass (11 months) were in Lebanon for a summer holiday, visiting their extended family. They were killed when their house collapsed after being struck by an Israeli bombardment. Their parents, 36-year-old Ali Al-Akhrass and his wife Amira (23) were also killed in the attack. The family were residents of Montreal.

Six others were reported wounded in the attack.

"I lost my brother, I lost my sister, my nephew, the family of my nephew, my aunt, my uncle. Oh God," said Hussain El-Akras, brother of one of the victims. He told a Montreal news conference Monday that his family were begging the government of Canada to "put pressure on Israel to stop this barbaric behaviour."

The Israeli military statement on the incident said "The responsibility for any civilian casualties rests entirely with the Hizbollah terrorist organization" and "The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) requested and warned residents of the area not to stay within range of the launch sites". Israel says that Hezbollah disperses its weaponry among supporters in residential neighborhoods to avoid being targeted by the much larger,

better-equipped Israeli Defense Forces.

Indian Big Brother to have ban on "hanky-panky"

Producers of India's Big Brother have said that an upcoming celebrity edition will have a ban on 'hanky-panky'.

A spokeswoman for Endemol India told BBC News that contestants will have to remain chaste in the Big Brother house for three months. 'Participants will be told to keep their hands to themselves,' she revealed. 'India is a conservative society and it is not ready for the raunchy scenes that so characterise the programmes in the West,' she added.

And unlike other versions of Big Brother around the World, India's version will not be transmitted live in a bid to avoid showing unpleasant scenes which may cause controversy.

It is understood that up to twelve contestants will participate in the show, which is to be televised at the end of this year. The show's producers have said they want stars from Bollywood, Indian television and cricket to live in the Big Brother compound. The managing director of Endemol India, Rajesh Kamat, said both Hindus and Muslims may be chosen, but that issues between religions would not be talked about on the programme.

India is still quite a conservative society. Close acts like kissing are never seen on TV, and only a small number of couples cohabit before marriage.

In 2006, two housemates were removed from Australia's version of Big Brother after a female

contestant alleged they had sexually assaulted her.

Big Brother was created in the Netherlands in 1999 and has sold to almost seventy different countries.

Second quake in two days strikes Indonesia

An earthquake measuring 6.3 or 6.4 (according to preliminary data) on the Richter scale hit Indonesia today, days after a larger earthquake hit the same region and triggered a tsunami and killed at least 520 people. The earthquake struck the Sunda Straits separating the islands of Sumatra and Java. There are no immediate reports of damages. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said that the quake posed no risk of a tsunami, being too small in magnitude.

The US Geological Survey has reported the magnitude of the quake as 6.0.

Heatwave hits the UK and Ireland

Today has seen Britain's hottest recorded July day with temperatures hitting 36.5°C (97.7°F) in Wisley in Surrey. Warm air from the Gulf Stream is raising the temperature, and the hot weather is causing the asphalt on some public roads to melt, requiring gritting. Some schools stayed closed on Wednesday, while others shut at lunchtime. Many school sports days have also been cancelled.

People have been advised to drink plenty of water, not go out in the midday sun and keep curtains closed to cool rooms. People have also been asked to check the most vulnerable, including the elderly, the young and the sick. The RSPCA has also told pet owners to

try and keep their pets cool.

The heat wave has also hit northern France and the Netherlands, with 4 people reported dead due to heatstroke.

However, some areas aren't basking in the heat. Lerwick in the Shetland Islands is currently cloudy with fog, at only 18°C (64°F)

Weather forecasters have said that while the temperatures are not going to rise any further, it will get more humid as a band of showers arrive this evening, with night-time temperatures at 19°C in London and Cardiff, 14°C in Edinburgh and 18°C in Dublin.

Row over NZ Police memo on issuing traffic tickets

According to a leaked memorandum, sent to New Zealand Police officers in the Levin district last year, they will be penalised if they do not perform well in the issuing tickets.

The penalties for not reaching the target will be:

- Pay deductions, 20% loss of pay
- Loss of additional training courses or specialised duties
- 'Named and shamed'
- Demotion

The requirement for issuing tickets is one per hour and the requirement for catching a drunk driver is one per ten hours.

Simon Power, Law and Order spokesman for the New Zealand National Party, said "It is very disturbing that police officers are being put under internal and financial pressure to write traffic tickets. And just yesterday Annette King told me in answer to

a written question that police do not receive incentives, financial or otherwise, if they issue a particular number of tickets."

Two weeks ago a different memo was leaked which showed the police officers have quotas, which the Police Minister, Annette King, dismissed.

However if police officers are performing well the Area or District Commanders will be informed which could lead to extra benefits.

The Police Central District Commander, Superintendent Mark Lammas, said that there was nothing wrong with the memo as it is reasonable for officers to be told they may not receive a pay increase if they consistently fail to enforce.

Stem cell bills passed by US House and Senate

The U.S. House of Representatives failed to override Bush's veto. The final vote was 235-193, which was 51 short of the 2/3 majority needed.

The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005 (HR810), approved by the US House of Representatives in 2005, gained a 63-37 approval in the Senate on July 17th, 2006, and will now be presented for presidential approval or veto.

Bill HR810 passed by the Senate as SB471, overrides the 2001 executive order signed by George W. Bush that banned funding by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for embryonic stem cell research of stem cell lines created after the executive order was issued. The new bill does not include a provision against privately funded research, which is

legal under the law, only research funded by NIH.

The bill includes three ethical requirements for funded research. First, the stem cells were derived from human embryos that have been donated from in vitro fertilization clinics, were created for the purposes of fertility treatment, and were in excess of the clinical need of the individuals seeking such treatment. Second, prior to the consideration of embryo donation and through consultation with the individuals seeking fertility treatment, it was determined that the embryos would never be implanted in a woman and would otherwise be discarded. And lastly, the individuals seeking fertility treatment donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation.

President Bush is expected to veto the bill as early as today, White House Press Secretary Tony Snow said the veto would be "pretty swift". This would be President Bush's first veto of his two terms in office.

As with any vetoed bill, a two-thirds majority of the House and Senate can override said veto, but the original vote (63-37) show that the Senate is more than likely to not get the override votes it would need. Even without the two-thirds original vote, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan has voiced support for a veto override. [2]

Two other bills, S2754 and S3504, the Alternative Pluripotent Stem Cell Therapies Enhancement Act and the Fetus Farming Prohibition Act of 2006, respectively, were failed and passed in that order by the House of Representatives.

S2754 was introduced to the House this afternoon and failed by a vote of 273-154, S3504 was passed unanimously by the House and is also expected to be on the President's desk this morning.

Death toll rises in Indonesian tsunami

At least 550 people are now thought to have died after a tsunami hit the Indonesian island of Java on Monday afternoon. An earthquake, which measured 7.7 on the Richter scale, triggered the two-metre-high tidal wave.

As rescuers continue to pull dead bodies from destroyed beaches, homes and hotels, Indonesia's government has been criticised for failing to inform residents that a tsunami was imminent.

After the underwater earthquake erupted, Japanese and US agencies issued tsunami alerts for parts of Indonesia and Australia, but the Indonesian government has admitted it was unable to pass warnings on to coastal areas like the small town of Pangandaran which was worst-hit. "Our system is not yet working properly. We are still developing a communication system especially for the regions," said Fauzi, a government scientist.

In the wake of the 2004 Asian tsunami, which killed more than 130,000 people in the western province of Aceh, a warning system is being implemented there. However, Java has always been perceived as having a low tsunami threat, but Indonesia's Vice President Jusuf Kalia said today that an early warning system will be installed on the island within three years.

Officials have said that almost all of the victims were Indonesians, but a Pakistani, a Swede and a

Dutch citizen were among those who perished.

It is thought that 275 people are still missing. The army and police are searching affected areas with sniffer dogs and mechanical diggers in the hope of finding survivors. "We are looking for people who are still missing or buried under the rubble as well as clearing the debris," said Deden Rajab, an army officer.

Parents are also searching ferociously for their missing children. "The water was too strong," said Irah as she dug through a pile of rubble with her hands in the hope of recovering her 6-year-old son. "Oh God. Eki, where are you?"

More than 50,000 people have been left homeless as a result of the devastating wave, and aftershocks are making worried residents flee to higher ground.

"People suddenly started running so I joined them," 42 year-old Marino told the Associated Press.

Others have taken refuge in the hills since the disaster happened. "I am too scared to go down," one elderly woman told the AFP news agency.

Earlier today, another earthquake caused buildings to shake in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, but there were no reports of injuries. Officials at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said no new tsunami is expected.

Yesterday, survivors described the tsunami.

A Belgian tourist said he was in a beachside bar when the wave struck. "I saw this big cloud of dark sea water coming up to me,"

he said.

"When the waves came, I heard people screaming and then I heard something like a plane about to crash nearby, and I just ran," Uli Sutarli, a plantation worker who was on Pangandaran beach, told Reuters.

Indonesia is situated on the Pacific Rim of Fire where 90% of the world's earthquakes and 81% of the world's largest earthquakes occur.

Australian people back PM to stay

In the latest Newpoll to be released by "The Australian" newspaper Australian Prime Minister John Howard has been given overwhelming support by the Australian populace in his leadership stoush with Deputy PM Peter Costello. Mr Howard has received 66% support (up 4% from April) compared to Mr Costello with 20% (Down 4% from April). Even more damaging to Mr Costello's leadership hopes is the support levels from Coalition voters (88% for Mr Howard to 10% to Mr Costello). Mr Howard leads the opposition leader Kim Beazley 53% to 27%- down from 56% to 25% in April. This is despite Mr Beazley's Labor Party leading the Coalition 52% to 48% on a two party preferred basis. Labor would almost certainly find themselves winning an election should Mr Howard choose to step down as PM as Mr Beazley retains a 44% to 33% lead over the Deputy PM in the poll.

Curiously, in the same poll, 35% of those surveyed believed Mr Howard's version of the alleged "Leadership deal" meeting, whilst 65% believe Mr Costello. The Poll suggests that Australian people are resigned to believing that the

role of Prime Minister is a position where lying is acceptable.

Today in History

1402 - Forces under Timur defeated the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara and captured Sultan Bayezid I.

1866 - The Austrian Navy led by Wilhelm von Tegetthoff defeated a much larger Italian fleet in the Battle of Lissa.

1944 - Claus von Stauffenberg and others in the German Resistance attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

1969 - The Apollo 11 lunar module landed on the Sea of Tranquillity, where Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first men to walk on the moon.

1976 - The Viking 1 spacecraft landed on Mars.

July 20 is Independence Day in Colombia (1810); Friends' Day in Argentina and other Latin American countries.

Quote of the Day

"You don't have to be a fantastic hero to do certain things ' to compete. You can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals. The intense effort, the giving of everything you've got, is a very pleasant bonus."

~ Sir Edmund Hillary

Word of the Day

lachrymose; adj

1. Tearful; causing tears or crying.

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