



Top Stories

Australian Van Nguyen executed in Singapore

Convicted Australian drug trafficker Van Tuong Nguyen was executed at Changi Prison at 2200 UTC (0900 AEDT) today.

Bush speaks of goals for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, decries calls for timetable

U.S. President Bush stated his commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq and outlined goals for training Iraqi security forces that will guide such withdrawal. As expected, he did not set a timeframe for this withdrawal.

Featured story

First face transplant performed on French woman

Surgeons in France have performed a face transplant operation on a French woman who had lost her nose, lips and chin after being savaged by a dog.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Scientists in Gabon and Congo discover that three species of fruit bat serve as animal reservoirs for the ebola virus. The virus probably first spread from animal to human in 1976 by local hunters eating the bats.

•Hurricane Epsilon strengthens from a tropical storm to become the record breaking fourteenth hurricane of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season.

Wikipedia Current Events

- 10 US Marines are killed following an insurgent roadside bomb attack in Falluja.
- Australian Van Tuong Nguyen is executed by hanging in Singapore for drug trafficking.
- An independent commission to investigate the Malaysian prisoner abuse scandal is established by Prime Minister of Malaysia Abdullah Ahmad Badawi
- United States describe a propaganda program to plant stories in Iraqi newspapers. Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman states it is not clear whether the program violated the law or Pentagon policy, adding, "You can do something perfectly legal, but that is inconsistent with the policy or procedures of the department. Just because it's legal doesn't mean it's the right thing to do." The White House acknowledges concerns over the legitimacy of the program.
- Kenneth Boyd becomes the 1000th person to be executed in the USA since the re-introduction of capital punishment in 1976.

Australian Senate sits for extra day, passes industrial relations legislation

The Australian Senate sits for an unusual extra day today, in order to finish considering amendments to the new industrial relations legislation. An extended sitting of the Senate was held yesterday, December 1, considering these amendments.

The bill has been declared as urgent and as consequently a timetable for debate is set, so the bill would have either passed or not in its entirety today. Key senator Barnaby Joyce has expressed his support of the bill due to his influencing Government amendments dealing with public holidays. Non-Government senators expressed their concerns yesterday and today in regard to these amendments - Family First Party senator Stephen Fielding introduced amendment to try and complement the Government amendments, but the Government has expressed that they will not be supporting them as they do not contain "right to refuse" provisions.

The Senate had not finished debate on all the amendments in the nine page outline of business before 4.30 pm, the time set by the earlier guillotine, and the amendments were consequently put without debate. Non-Government members did not pursue divisions on all the amendments other than key ones. Ominously, during the following third reading debate, fierce thunderstorms had brought about the use of emergency power to the parliament with Opposition senator Penny Wong saying that "The lights may have just gone out in the Senate chamber, but they do not go out on the labour movement!". Persons in the gallery of the Senate were applauding to non-Government speeches, which brought about support from the Opposition and skepticism from Government senators saying that

"no amount of guffaws from those who have been trundled in here today to stand up the back will change the fact that we have been re-elected four times by Australian working men and women."

Due to Government numbers, the bill eventually passed the third reading debate.

Best's Body Arrives in Northern Ireland

The body of former Manchester United player, George Best, has arrived in Northern Ireland. It was flown in to an RAF Aldergrove, on a chartered plane accompanied by his son, Calum, and his agent, Phil Hughes. Bests Family, including his father Dickie were waiting at the runway of RAF base in Co Antrim.

Mr.Bests body was then driven in a black horse along a 20-mile route to the home of Best's father, Dickie, in the Cregagh Estate in east Belfast, where it will be kept overnight.

Up to 500,000 people are expected to line the streets to Stormont, the Northern Ireland Parliament buildings, where a public funeral ceremony for the former Manchester United and Northern Ireland football player will be held tomorrow.

Mr Best died at the Cromwell Hospital in London last Friday afternoon, aged 59. A private family service will be held at Best's Fathers home, which has been turned into a shrine to his son. Then a service will take place in the Great Hall at Stormont, before Best is buried in a private family service beside his mother Ann at Roselawn Cemetery. Among the people attending the private ceremony will be Best's lifelong friend Denis Law, Harry Gregg and

Derek Dougan.

Joseph De Veuster voted greatest Belgian

Yesterday, December 1, 2005, the election for the "Greatest Belgian" ("Grootste Belg") was won by Father Damian (Joseph De Veuster). Runners up were Dr. Paul Janssen, founder of Janssen Pharmaceutica, and Eddy Merckx, a cyclist.

Father Damian is famous for working with living lepers on Molokai, where he persisted in caring for the sufferers, against directions of church hierarchy. Eventually, Father Damian died from leprosy himself.

The Belgian "Greatest National" poll is organized separately by the Flemish and the Walloon region. Father Damian was elected "Greatest Belgian" in the poll organized by the Flemish television. Next week, the Walloon poll will conclude, so Belgium will have two "Greatest Belgians".

Man charged with Huxley attack

A 36-year-old carpenter faced the Campbelltown Local Court with charges stemming from five offences relating to the November 9 assault of a Northmead teenager named Lauren Huxley. Robert Black Farmer, also a resident of Northmead, was arrested by NSW State Protection Group officers.

Ms. Huxley was bashed unconscious, gagged, tied up and doused in petrol. Her attacker then set fire to the house and fled the scene. Firefighters rescued her from the floor of the garage. The 18-year-old remains in a critical condition in intensive care at Sydney's Westmead Hospital.

Police prosecutor Jennifer Chenhall told the court detectives have collected a large amount of forensic evidence and have taken numerous statements. One of the charges against Farmer relating to the assault includes causing grievous bodily harm with intent to murder. He did not apply for bail and was remanded into custody to face Parramatta Local Court on January 19, 2006.

The arrest comes days after NSW Police Commissioner, Ken Moroney, condemned the attack as the worst he had seen in his 40 years of policing and promised that detectives would not rest until the guilty party was caught.

Federal Opposition hounds Treasurer over appointment to RBA board, Gerard resigns

The Australian Federal Opposition has hounded the Treasurer, Peter Costello, over the appointment of Robert Gerard to the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) board. Mr Gerard announced on Friday 2nd that he will resign from the Board, citing the events of this week as the reason.

On Tuesday, November 29, Wayne Swan, the Shadow Treasurer asked of Costello in the first question of Question Time about an apparent statement that Costello made to Gerard, namely, "I know there's an issue with the Tax Office but I don't have a problem with you on the board". Costello responded that he had no problem with Gerard, noting that "he brings a great understanding of Australian manufacturing industry to the board", and that the obligatory declaration of interest was "indeed was signed by Mr Gerard".

Later it was said by Swan in the House of Representatives that Gerard's company was using "tax havens as tax avoidance schemes to the value of \$150 million" and that the declaration of interest mentioned was only in regard to his personal affairs and on asking the Treasurer when he knew this, claimed that him actually knowing the information "would breach the secrecy act". Later Swan revealed that Gerard "and his corporate vehicles" have been "substantial donors" to the Liberal Party. Costello maintained that the Government "[does] not think that supporting the Liberal Party is a disqualification from holding ministerial office, prime ministerial office, Treasury office or other offices in Australia"

Swan moved a censure motion to "provide this House with a full and proper explanation of...his communications with Mr Robert Gerard...and his knowledge of Mr Robert Gerard's dispute with the Australian Taxation Office...", which failed in the Government's favour with votes 83 to 59 in division.

On Wednesday, November 30, Swan opened the House in a movement to suspend standing orders again to get information from the Treasurer, stating that "The Treasurer is in real strife" before the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer moved the gag. In Question Time, the Opposition continued to ask every question in regard to the appointment of Gerard. The Leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley revealed in his question to the Treasurer that "some of his cabinet colleagues have privately said that they did not consider Mr Gerard was 'a good choice' in the first place for the Reserve Bank board". The Treasurer responded that

Gerard's "appointment was supported by all members of the cabinet"

In the subsequent Matters of Public Importance debate, the matter selected was that proposed by Wayne Swan, namely, "The need for the Treasurer to uphold the highest standards of probity in the selection of candidates for the Reserve Bank Board."

On Thursday, December 1, the Opposition again reserved a number of its questions for inquiring about Gerard's appointment. Swan revealed in a question to the Treasurer that Gerard Corporation had "acquired an investment company in the tax haven of the British Virgin Islands eight months after the Treasurer recommended his appointment to the Reserve Bank board". Costello responded to Swan referring him to "a statement about that allegation in the Australian Financial Review today...in which he makes it clear that no income has been derived."

Later, the Leader of the Opposition tried to move a censure motion on the treasurer, but leave of the House was not granted, so he had to resort to moving a motion to suspend standing orders to move the same motion, to censure the Treasurer for his appointment. The motion failed due to Government numbers, but the Matters for Public Importance (which follows Question Time) which was selected as "The need for the Government to govern for all Australians not just a privileged few." in order to draw a comparison with the unequal treatment of the Treasurer in supporting Gerard and the new industrial relations legislation, dubbed WorkChoices, and said how the Treasurer and the Prime Minister were "laughing

up their sleeves", that the Treasurer was "not fit to lead", and Gerard "is the worst attendee on the Reserve Bank board."

The Minister for Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, however focused elsewhere on the MPI, and drew the attention of the Australian Labor Party's ties to the unions, had described the Opposition as a "policy free zone", said that "there is one group that represents privilege in this place and that is the Australian Labor Party", and stressed the benefits of WorkChoices.

Craig Emerson noted that the Queensland branch of the Liberal Party participated in "deliberate tax evasion", and that Mr Gerard "paid penalty tax in circumstances of deliberate tax evasion". Emerson later said that the Liberal Party was "soft on tax cheats", "soft on tax cheating Liberal Party donors...and members".

The adjournment debate also brought up criticism of Gerard's appointment in the adjournment debate. Christopher Bowen noted the "disquiet" in the media, and noted the previous Board member Bernie Fraser also calling for his dismissal. Bernard Ripoll called for a "full inquiry" into the Government's "self serving public policy".

Swan has said that Gerard had done the "honourable thing", but that he will not let up on pressing the Treasurer for a full disclosure of the facts.

The House of Representatives as of this date sits next on December 5, 2005.

Australian Van Nguyen executed in Singapore

Convicted Australian drug trafficker Van Tuong Nguyen was executed at Changi Prison today. Prison officials have confirmed the execution took place at 2200 UTC (0900 AEDT).

The 25-year-old Nguyen was arrested at Changi Airport in December, 2002, while in transit from Cambodia to Australia. He was found to be in possession of 396.2 grams of heroin. He was convicted in the Singapore High Court and sentenced to death under the Misuse of Drugs Act which mandates a death sentence for trafficking more than 15 grams of heroin.

All appeals for clemency were rejected. Singapore's High Commissioner in Australia, Joseph Koh, said Singapore carefully considered appeals from Australia but decided the law must be applied consistently. "It had to treat Nguyen consistently with similar past cases, and apply the law equally to Singaporeans and foreigners," Mr Koh said.

After saying goodbye to his client, Nguyen's Australian lawyer, Julian McMahon, said Nguyen's execution was a waste. "He is completely rehabilitated, completely reformed, completely focused on doing what is good and now they're going to kill him," he said.

It was previously reported that Nguyen's mother would not be permitted to embrace her son before the execution, however, Mr McMahon has confirmed that they were allowed some physical contact. "Well I actually wasn't in the room when that happened but there was a grill and they were able to hold each other's hands

and Kim was able to, at least for some time, I'm not sure how long, was able to touch Van on the face," he said. "She told me she was able to talk to him and touch his hair. That was a great comfort to her."

Prayer vigils were held outside Changi Prison and around Australia to mark the first execution of an Australian since Michael McAuliffe in Malaysia in 1993. Nguyen's body is expected to be returned to Australia on Saturday for a funeral next week.

Hostage standoff in North Reading, Massachusetts ends in tragedy

In what appeared to be a hostage situation ended in tragedy this afternoon in the quiet Massachusetts town of North Reading when the body of a 72-year old man, Roaldas Baran, and his 65-year old wife, Zinaida Girdauskiene, were found dead in an apparent murder-suicide at 14 Country Club Road.

The situation began when a neighbor heard four gunshots and a woman screaming and called 9-1-1. Police arrived at the home, and encountered the 72-year old man standing over, a brief conversation was held with the man who then went back inside the house. Then a fifth shot was fired. The SWAT team of the North Eastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council was brought in to clear the house and evacuate the surrounding houses. The Massachusetts State Police was also on hand.

Martha Coakley, the District Attorney for Middlesex County reported on what was found upon the SWAT team entering the house.

"In the bedroom, lying, apparently a victim of several gunshot wounds, was a female. We know her to be approximately 65-years-old. In the kitchen on the floor, also apparently the victim of a suicide, was a male we know now to be approximately 72-years-old who was her husband."

Emily LaGrassa, Coxley's spokesperson said the man apparently shot the woman and turned the gun on himself. Two guns were recovered.

North Reading Police had been called to the house once before in August 2004. The North Reading police are currently investigating further.

Today in History

1854 - Miners at Eureka Stockade clashed violently with the police and the military in Ballarat, Victoria in Australia.

1937 - Issue 1 of The Dandy, the world's longest running comic, went on sale.

1967 - A team led by Christiaan Barnard at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa performed the first successful human heart transplant on Louis Washkansky.

1984 - Bhopal gas disaster: The accidental release of methyl isocyanate over Bhopal, India resulted in at least 18,000 deaths in one of the world's worst industrial disasters.

1999 - The Mars Polar Lander reached Mars and disappeared. December 04 is Feast day of St. Francis Xavier

Quote of the Day

"All idealisation makes life poorer. To beautify it is to take away its character of complexity — it is to destroy it." ~ Joseph Conrad

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