



Top Stories

Ninety New Zealanders evacuated from Lebanon

Ninety New Zealanders have been evacuated from war-torn Lebanon and are on their way to the safety of Cyprus. Three ships are helping in the evacuations, two British Navy and one United Nations (UN) chartered ferry.

International bodies express concern over Israel-Hezbollah conflict

International humanitarian organisations and human rights watchdogs have expressed concerns over the rising civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing conflict in Lebanon and northern Israel.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Thousands of people across the UK demonstrate against Israeli attacks on Lebanon.
- Israel has massed soldiers and tanks on the border with Lebanon and called up thousands of reserve troops, in a possible prelude to a ground offensive.
- The New York Times reports that the United States is speeding up a delivery of precision-guided bombs to Israel. Israel apparently requested the weapons to use against targets in Lebanon.
- An earthquake measuring 5.1-5.2 in magnitude hits a mountainous region of Yunnan Province in south China killing at least 18-19 people and injuring at least 60 more.

among those who are still in refuge. "The risk of catching diseases is there because they live in an open area with limited tents and water," said Rustan Pakaya, from the health ministry's crisis centre. He added that people were being given injections to protect them from diseases like measles, tetanus and cholera.

Areas worst hit, like the small town of Pangandaran, are beginning to return to normal, and many businesses there have begun to open up again. "The market and many shops are already open today and although they are not operating fully, things are slowly returning to normal," district spokesman Wasdi bin Umri told AFP.

Featured story

Khmer Rouge "Butcher" dies ahead of trial

Ta Mok, military commander of the Khmer Rouge has died, while awaiting trial for genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the regime's rule.

Death toll in Indonesian tsunami continues to rise

More than 650 people have now died after a tsunami hit the Indonesian island of Java on Monday afternoon. In the past few days, around 100 dead bodies have been recovered, and it is estimated that over 300 people are still missing. An underwater earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 triggered the deadly wave which ravaged a 200km stretch of Java's southern coast.

Yesterday, Indonesia's President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono toured Pangandaran and met people who were staying in a temporary camp. The Indonesian government has been criticised for failing to inform residents living on the coast that a tsunami was looming. After the underwater earthquake was detected, US and Japanese agencies issued warning notices, but the government has admitted it was unable to transmit the bulletins to coastal areas. Speaking yesterday, Mr Yudhoyono vowed to hasten efforts to build an early warning system planned after the 2004 Asian tsunami. "We want to expedite efforts to get infrastructure for the tsunami warning system in place," AP quoted him as saying. "I will work with parliament to get the

Thousands of people are continuing to camp in the hills. They are too apprehensive to return home due to fears of another tsunami, but according to Reuters, health officials are worried about the threat of disease

Wikipedia Current Events

- The European Union sends experts to Cyprus to help coordinate provision of emergency humanitarian aid to Lebanon.
- Israel has carried out air strikes and small-scale incursions into Lebanon, as troops and tanks gather on the border.

budget".

After Bush leaves Russia, Voice of Russia commentary questions President's intellect

An unusual commentary on the Voice of Russia English-language web site, which has since been removed, claims that President Bush's presumed "narrow intellectual horizons" and "disastrous judgment" have had "cataclysmic" policy consequences. FreeMediaOnline.org reported that the commentary was published a few days after President Bush left Russia, where he had attended the G-8 summit.

FreeMediaOnline.org reported that the publication of such a strong personal attack on a foreign head of state by a government broadcaster in Russia is highly unusual and may indicate a worsening in relations between Moscow and Washington as a result of the war in Iraq and the decline of Russian democracy under President Putin. It may also be an indication of Moscow's increased activism in foreign policy thanks to revenues from high energy prices.

The analyst, David Brian, who is a regular Voice of Russia contributor, quoted at length from the July 16 Jonathan Chait's column in The Los Angeles Times: "Is Bush Still Too Dumb to Be President?." in his comment "George W. Bush Has Intuition (Maybe)". Voice of Russia [1]did not identify Chait by name as the author of the original commentary. Their analyst indicated, however, that he was citing a Los Angeles Times article. Quoting from articles from left-wing Western publications was common in the Soviet media during cold war. The Voice of Russia comment could under normal circumstances been viewed

as an example of unusual journalistic freedom [despite common misconceptions in the West - this is hardly unusual] but it would be more courageous for the state-run Russian media to question President Putin's personal abilities [they do it often enough, even though Putin sounds about ten times as intelligent as Bush].

The title of the Voice of Russia commentary, "George W. Bush Has Intuition (Maybe)," and its tone indicated that the analyst shared the same views about President Bush's intellect as The Los Angeles Times columnist Jonathan Chait. According to FreeMediaOnline.org the 450 word commentary consisted of not much more than a word-for-word repeat of Jonathan Chait's column.

President Bush received a bachelor's degree in history from Yale University in 1968, and also received a Master of Business Administration from Harvard Business School in 1975. Some critics suggested that George W. Bush was admitted into these prestigious American universities because of his father's influence.

Voice of Russia is Moscow's state-financed international broadcaster with programs in multiple languages, including English.

Box Office record for UK films

The UK Film Council has said British films claimed a record one-third share of UK cinema takings last year.

The council has also revealed that Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire was Britain's top-grossing film in 2005 after taking £435m (\$808m) at the Box Office worldwide. It was one of eight British films to be included in the top 20 list of the world's biggest grossing movies.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Batman Begins, Kingdom of Heaven, Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Nanny McPhee and Pride and Prejudice took £1.8bn (\$3.3) in total globally and were seen by 600 million people.

John Woodward, the chief executive officer of the UK Film Council, said: "The figures show that the public love British films and 2005 was a great year for British films at the cinema with the largest slice of Box Office takings since records began."

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, who has exposed tax incentives aimed at luring filmmakers to the UK, said: "Harry Potter, Nanny McPhee and Willy Wonka have all been hits at home and abroad - helping us achieve great success at the Box Office. I hope that next year, buoyed by the new tax incentive, the UK film industry will be in even better health."

The amount of British people viewing foreign language films also increased. More than 200 foreign language films in 32 different languages were shown at cinemas across the UK. Downfall, a German-produced movie depicting the final days of Adolf Hitler, was the most popular, according to the council.

Movies are classed as being UK-made if they are filmed in the country, star UK personalities, and invest money in the UK or on British staff and services.

Somali Islamists halt peace talks with government

The Union of Islamic Courts has broken off peace talks with Somalia's interim government as the country slides closer towards

major military conflict.

The Islamists blamed the influx of soldiers from neighbouring Ethiopia for the end of talks. In a press statement this morning, the UIC leader Sheikh Sharif Ahmed said "We do not negotiate with a government which is being helped by the enemy of Somalia."

The two sides were due to continue what have become increasingly hostile talks this weekend in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. The weakened interim government led by President Abdullahi Yusuf is currently based in the town of Baidoa, north of the capital Mogadishu, which the Islamic militias captured earlier in July; the UIC now control most of southern Somalia.

The breakdown of talks comes as eyewitnesses report seeing more Ethiopian troops crossing the border. It's believed around 5,000 are now stationed in the country, attempting to protect President Yusuf's fragile government. The BBC is reporting 200 Ethiopian troops have captured an airfield outside Waajid early this morning, but the Ethiopian government has yet to confirm this — so far they have denied all military intervention and it is not clear if there was any fighting in the town.

Ethiopia's involvement has angered the Islamist militia who vowed a "holy war" against the mainly Christian state if soldiers were sent in. Ethiopia meanwhile has threatened to "crush" the Islamists should they attempt to take Baidoa.

The brewing crisis in the horn of Africa could get more complex, as Ethiopia's other hostile neighbour Eritrea has been implicated in supplying the militia with arms.

"The Eritrean support is the backbone of the Islamists' military structure," one unnamed local analyst told Reuters. John Prendergast from the International Crisis Group has grimly warned that "The risk of full-scale war increases by the day."

All Blacks defeat South Africa in Tri Nations rugby

The All Blacks defeated South Africa in the third match of the 2006 Tri Nations rugby union series. The final score was 35 points to 17. The match was played at Wellington's Westpac Stadium.

The previous week South Africa had gone down nil to 49 at the hands of Australia in Brisbane. The loss to Australia saw South Africa drop in the IRB international rankings. Prior to South Africa's opening Tri Nations match, they had unconvincingly beaten Scotland in a two-test series at home in June, which was followed by a loss to France. As expected, coming into the match in Wellington, head coach Jake White and his players were under considerable pressure to perform.

The crowd was shocked when South Africa scored the opening try of the match, when Fourie du Preez charged down a Dan Carter kick, to score just 17 seconds after kick-off. Percy Montgomery added the conversion for a surprising 7-0 lead to the South Africans. However, the All Blacks were able to get in front by halftime, with Carter kicking four penalty goals and Piri Weepu scoring on the stroke of half-time.

More New Zealand penalties followed within the second half, however, when Breyton Paulse scored an impressive try off a cross-field kick, South Africa were

back in the game, with the All Blacks leading 25 to 17 with just under 10 minutes remaining. The match was sealed with another penalty kick by Carter, and a late try from All Black captain Richie McCaw.

Iconic gay couple split

Julie and Hillary Goodridge, the lesbian couple who were the lead plaintiffs in the breakthrough case, *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, have decided to separate.

Mary Breslauer, a local political consultant and spokeswoman for the Goodridges confirmed the separation on July 20. In a telephone interview in to *The Boston Globe* newspaper, Breslauer stated, "Julie and Hillary Goodridge are amicably living apart. As always their number one priority is raising their daughter, and like the other plaintiff couples in this case, they made an enormous contribution toward equal marriage. But they are no longer in the public eye, and request that their privacy be respected." She also added that they are not filing for divorce and did not comment anymore on their plans and gave no other details except that couple is focusing on what's best for their 10-year old daughter Annie.

"Unfortunately, lesbian and gay couples break up just as heterosexual couples," said Joyce Kauffman, a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based gay and lesbian family law lawyer. "It's a fact of life. There are stresses and strains on all of us. And sometimes relationships can't beat that stress. It happens to gay people just as well straight people."

Kris Mineau, president of the conservative public policy group,

the Massachusetts Family Institute who are trying to put an amendment on the 2008 ballot that would repeal same-sex marriage rights in Massachusetts said the group doesn't plan to make an issue out of the separation.

Mineau, "We are opposed to homosexual marriage because we are concerned about the impact on children. So our thoughts and prayers go out to their little child, a little girl named Annie -- 10 years old, I believe. And this is just bringing more grief upon her life, I'm sure."

The Goodridges, who are considered by supporters of gay marriage as the face of the gay marriage cause, met at Harvard University 21 years ago in a course about divesting from South Africa, in which a intense courtship followed. Years before the legalization of gay marriage in the state, they considered themselves to be committed partners.

They and several other gay couples, with the help of Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, filed a lawsuit in which the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled 4-3 on November 18th, 2003 to legalize gay marriage in Massachusetts.

They were married by a Unitarian Universalist minister on May 17, 2004, the first day that same-sex marriages were legal under the court ruling. Annie served as flower girl and ring-bearer.

The separation was first reported in Bay Windows, a Boston-based LGBT newspaper on July 20.

Today in History

1881 - The International Federation of Gymnastics, the world's oldest international sport federation, was founded in Liège, Belgium.

1952 - King Farouk of Egypt was forced to abdicate by army officers in the Free Officers Movement.

1967 - The 12th Street Riot began in the predominantly black inner-city area of Detroit, Michigan, United States.

1970 - Qaboos overthrew his father Said Bin Taimur to become the Sultan of Oman.

1986 - Sarah Ferguson married Prince Andrew at Westminster Abbey, joining the British Royal Family as the Duchess of York.

2001 - Megawati Sukarnoputri became the first female president of Indonesia.

July 23 is Parents' Day in the United States (2006), Revolution Day in Egypt.

Quote of the Day

"Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness."

~ Raymond Chandler

Word of the Day

gerrymander; v

1. To divide a geographic area into voting districts in such a way as to give an unfair advantage to one party in an election.

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+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
+1-202-742-5918
(outside the U.S.)
+44-871-218-6397
(U.K. / Europe)

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