



Top Stories

Australian Guantanamo detainee David Hicks gets British citizenship

Australian Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks has won British citizenship, opening the door for a possible bid to have him freed from the US detention facility in Cuba. The British High Court overturned the Blair Government's refusal of citizenship to Hicks. Hicks' lawyer said the decision was a breakthrough.

Violence cuts short visit of Dominican Republic president

Protests against the president of the Dominican Republic turned violent on Monday in Haiti, where tires were burned and thrown at the presidential palace in the capitol city of Port-au-Prince. Leonel Fernandez, leader of the neighboring Dominican Republic, was staying as a guest at the palace.

Featured story

Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney not seeking second term

Commonwealth of Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney has stated that he will not seek re-election to the office of governor.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Bulgaria starts withdrawing its troops from Iraq.
- High levels of radiation found at a chemical factory in Chechnya.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Senator John McCain persuades President George W. Bush to accept a ban on torture.
- The United States House of Representatives has requested that the Bush administration give Congress details on any secret detention facilities overseas.
- Iraqi Police claim that they captured Musab al-Zarqawi and then released him by mistake.
- Hamas, the Palestinian opposition party whose armed wing has carried out scores of attacks against Israeli civilians, make a large series of gains in municipal elections.
- At least 39 people, 33 of whom were patients, die after a fire breaks out in a hospital in the city of Liaoyuan, near Changchun in China's Jilin Province. The cause of the fire is unknown.
- An Israeli man, Yossi Shok, a resident of the settlement of Beit Hagai, succumbed to his wounds at Hadassah Ein-Kerem hospital in Jerusalem after sustaining serious wounds in a drive-by shooting attack south of Hebron. The Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Islamic Jihad's al-Quds Brigades claimed joint responsibility for the attack, saying it came in response to recent targeted killings by Israel.

Imprisoned Haitian priest may need US doctors

Supporters of jailed priest Jean-Juste say that he needs medical

treatment in the United States. His attorney, Bill Quigley, told reporters that the priest, who was considered a potential presidential candidate before his arrest and long detention, may have cancer and should be released so that he can seek medical attention in the United States. A doctor, Dr. John Carroll, who examined Jean-Juste said that an abnormal white blood cell count, as well as swelling in his neck and under his arms could be early signs of cancer. The government of interim President Alenxandre said that their doctors have examined the priest as well and said no signs of cancer exist.

Jean-Juste has been in jail since July when he was arrested at a funeral of a popular Haitian journalist and poet. He was originally detained for questioning related to the murder but also allegations of illegal weapons possessions have been brought up. He's yet to be charged in any crimes. The doctor who made the claim of possible cancer is a supporter of Jean-Juste and some might think that this is an exaggeration to allow Jean-Juste out of Haiti to plan his political future.

Report: Bush secretly authorized NSA domestic eavesdrop of international conversations without courtwarrants

In 2002, President Bush secretly authorized National Security Agency (NSA) to spy on Americans making contact with persons in

other nations inside the U.S. to search for terrorist activity.

According to a New York Times report, the NSA monitored the international telephone calls and international e-mail messages of "hundreds, and perhaps thousands of people" inside the United States over the past three years without warrants.

According to the Times, John Yoo, the former deputy in the Office of Legal Counsel, justified the domestic spying in a classified Justice Department legal opinion by arguing that these activities were covered by congressional approval of the war on terrorism. That legal argument was similar to another 2002 memo authored primarily by Yoo, which outlined an extremely narrow definition of torture. That opinion, which was signed by another Justice official, was formally disavowed after it was disclosed by the Washington Post.

President Bush insists that he has not compromised civil liberties, but has refused to confirm or deny the claims. Senior members of congress from both parties called for an explanation. Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Arlen Specter, stated that "there is no doubt that this is inappropriate". Senator Trent Lott defended the NSA directive saying "I don't agree with the libertarians. I want my security first. I'll deal with all the details after that."

Traditionally the Federal Bureau of Investigation seeks such warrants and conducts most domestic eavesdropping. The domestic mandate of the NSA has been traditionally limited to the surveillance of foreign nationals and embassies. They obtained court orders to do missions in

Washington, New York and other cities.

Several national security officials say the jurisdiction granted the NSA goes far beyond the USA PATRIOT Act granted by the Congress. Under the act its necessary to seek a F.I.S.A. (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) warrant every time law enforcement include eavesdrop within the U.S. Some officials say they consider warrantless eavesdropping inside the United States to be unlawful and possibly unconstitutional.

One government official involved in the operation said he privately complained to a Congressional official about his doubts about the program's legality. But nothing happened. "People just looked the other way because they didn't want to know what was going on," he said.

The New York Times, who broke the news, delayed the publication for a year after the White House said it could jeopardize investigations and alert would-be terrorists under surveillance.

Police warn Sydneysiders to stay away from Eastern beaches

New South Wales Police Commissioner Ken Moroney has warned people to stay away from Cronulla, the Eastern suburbs beaches, Central Coast beaches, Wollongong and Newcastle this weekend, as more violence is expected. Police will be using new powers to set up roadblocks, implement alcohol bans, and search vehicles. There will be 1,500 extra police patrolling on Saturday, and 2,000 on Sunday.

"Our latest intelligence tells us that large numbers of people are planning to go to these areas on Sunday to cause riotous behaviour. In the interests of public safety it is my duty to warn the public that these areas have been identified as targets."

"Anyone who wants to travel to these identified areas is very likely to get caught up in long traffic delays and may well have their car searched by police if they want to enter these areas", Commissioner Moroney said. "Any unnecessary travel is almost certainly going to cause traffic gridlock and make it a much harder job for police."

There have been six days of violence in Sydney after riots in Cronulla on Sunday, sparked by an assault on a lifesaver the previous weekend. The police operation, dubbed Operation Seta, has been attempting to manage the problems. The number of police assigned to Operation Seta has gradually increased throughout the week, from a couple of hundred on Monday night, to the 2,000 expected this Sunday.

US offers to eliminate duties on Cotton, Africa says it's not enough

"The United States is willing, under the duty-free, quota-free commitments we will make, to provide duty free access cotton for these West African countries" the US trade representative announced at the WTO talks in Hong Kong Thursday. The US is under heavy pressure to drop Cotton tariffs and subsidies.

Mali, Burkino Faso, Benin, Chad, and Senegal complain that the tariff free offer does not address the subsidies United States provides to domestic cotton

growers. Some countries claim the subsidies against the WTO's anti-dumping policy.

"The real problem for African cotton producers is dumping on the world market, resulting from domestic and export subsidies. That is why we need to agree this week on additional disciplines on domestic support" EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson said.

"They don't take in any cotton. They export cotton. Their textile industries have all moved abroad. Why would they import any of our cotton? What they need to do is halt the subsidies. Without subsidies they can't produce" Francois Traore, president of the African Cotton Producers Association, said.

Portman argued cutting global tariffs are as least as important as cutting subsidies.

India has a 10% tariff on cotton imports, under current WTO rules it could raise the tariff to 100% at any time. China imposes a 1% tariff on the first 4 million bales, after which a tariff of 5% to 40% is applied. By comparison the US allows a small amount of cotton at low duties and then applies a 20% on the remainder.

A bill in the US Congress this week contains a cotton program known as Step 2, which pays exporters and millers to buy US cotton. The WTO has declared the program illegal.

"We know with certainty that it's the US subsidies that are causing problems for our farmers." Mamadou Salissou Habi Niger's minister of trade said.

African cotton producers have said

that they will not endorse any deals that emerge from the Hong Kong talks if rich countries do not reduce cotton subsidies to their own farmers.

Sydney's newest motorway to open today

The Westlink M7 motorway is set to open today some eight months ahead of schedule.

The 40 Km long motorway runs from the Hills Motorway (M2) at Baulkham Hills and ends at the South Western Motorway (M5) at Prestons. The motorway features 17 interchanges for access to and from Western Sydney suburbs.

The most complicated interchange along the motorway is the Lighthouse Interchange at Eastern Creek. This interchange links the Westlink M7 with the Western Motorway (M4). It is the largest interchange in the Southern Hemisphere.

The motorway will be officially opened by Prime Minister John Howard and will be opened in stages. Motorists will be able to tell if an interchange is open as it will be indicated by signs.

Westlink M7 claim that the road will take more than 200 people and 12 hours to open and is the longest section of motorway to ever be opened in one day in Sydney.

The Westlink M7 motorway has been funded by the Commonwealth Government and private enterprise and is owned by Westlink M7. It is Australia's first toll road to use distance based tolling, with tolls ranging from 40c to \$5.97 depending on distance travelled. Tolling is fully electronic with motorists requiring an

electronic tag or pass. There are no tollbooths as cash is not accepted.

The Westlink M7 motorway will be free to travel on until January 15, 2006.

Business Brief for December 16, 2005

Layoffs continue but many employers say there is a worker shortage

General Motors and Ford are laying off workers by the thousands and analysts predict a decline in housing production yet according to a CNN Money article labor experts and executives say there is already a shortage of workers. Retiring baby boomers plus a growing economy expected in 2006 may move the labor market in favor of job seekers.

"I would say by the end of next year, it could take 12, 13, maybe 14 weeks to fill a spot, and that's when you'll see upward pressure on wages," said Jeff Joerres, chairman and CEO of Manpower.

Deloitte Consulting and the National Association of Manufacturers have conducted a survey finding that more than 80% of surveyed manufacturers say they are experiencing a shortage of qualified workers. 90% say they have a moderate to severe shortage of qualified skilled workers. 83% say these shortages are affecting their production.

"They've been getting lean and pushing the efficiency envelope for a decade," Dick Kleinert, a principal with Deloitte who conducted the NAM survey, said "So in this latest survey, when we asked what was the most important factor in their success,

being a low cost producer status ranked only No. 3 on the list. What ranked as No. 1 attribute was having a high performance work force."

GM offers \$15 billion in tech contracts

Despite being in financial trouble General Motors is holding \$15 billion in tech contracts. The five year contracts, planned to be awarded within weeks. The 40 contracts will be the largest group of contracts ever awarded at the same time.

EDS, spun off by GM in 1996, carried out \$2 billion in business with GM last year 10% of EDS' revenue. EDS's contract will expire in June.

GM plans to break up it's tech outsourcing budget into smaller pieces and standardize its outsourcing operation so that it can remove a partner without effecting the entire operation. This will shake up the \$300 billion tech outsourcing industry.

"This is revolutionary, If it works for both sides, in a couple of years you'll see a lot of other companies doing it." George F. Colony, president of Forrester Research said.

Ralph J. Szygenda, GM's CTO, said he decided that the whole outsourcing industry was broken when GM's Hermes web site, intended to sell cars in Brazil, kept crashing. The site was run by EDS, IBM, and a few others. When Szygenda held a meeting to find out why, "there was a lot of finger-pointing, and nobody would fess up to the problem," he said. "I realized this wasn't going to work. And I saw it wasn't just a GM problem. It was an industry problem."

So now Szygenda intends to implement his plan. Either GM's way, or the highway.

What about the little guys? Szygenda intends to place \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion aside on innovative technology. "We use hundreds of start-up companies," he says. "We're not closing out innovation."

Tabacco company Philip Morris wins big

Altria, parent company of Philip Morris is preparing for a major restructuring following a victory in Illinois with the state Supreme Court throwing out a \$10 billion judgement. The 4-2 decision rule that "light" and "low tar" had been authorised by the FTC. The decision paves the way for Altria to spin off Kraft Foods, a long-expected move held up by major tobacco litigation cases.

Today in History

1843 - A Christmas Carol, a fictional novella about Ebenezer Scrooge, was first published by Charles Dickens.

1862 - American Civil War: General Ulysses S. Grant issued General Order No. 11, expelling Jews from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky.

1903 - Orville and Wilbur Wright aboard the Wright Flyer conducted the first successful flight of a powered fixed-wing aircraft.

1944 - Malmédy massacre: Waffen-SS troops under Joachim Peiper shot at about 150 unarmed prisoners of war with machine guns near Malmedy, Belgium.

1989 - The Simpsons made their debut as an animated series on the Fox television network.

December 18 is National Day in Bhutan (1907)

Quote of the Day

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach." ~ Charles Dickens

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