



### Top Stories

#### Trade hall roof collapses in Poland



At least 65 people have died, and at least 145 were injured when a roof collapsed at a trade hall in Katowice, Poland. Over 100 people are still feared to be trapped in the rubble.

#### Aboriginal Sovereignty Day Declared



Representatives of Australian Aboriginal Sovereign Nations at a gathering in Canberra, have declared that the 26th of January would be known as Aboriginal Sovereignty Day.

### Featured story

#### Bloggers investigate social networking websites

Bloggers have begun investigations into MySpace and Facebook, two new "social networking" sites of explosive popularity among teenagers and college students.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- ABC World News Tonight co-anchor Bob Woodruff and cameraman Doug Vogt are seriously injured by an improvised explosive device near Taji, Iraq.
- An explosion in a firecracker warehouse killed 16 people in Henan on Chinese New Year.

### Wikipedia Current Events

- Tarja Halonen is re-elected in the second round of the Finnish presidential election with 51.8% of the votes, defeating the other candidate Sauli Niinistö.

#### Rare snow storm in Portugal

Today an uncommon snow storm covered much of Portugal. Apart from mountainous regions, snow is usually a rare vision in this south European country. This being due to its flat terrain and mild mediterranean climate. However, January 2006 saw a cold wave sweeping across Europe, and since early morning snow fell in seaside towns like Figueira da Foz, in central Portugal, and the storm reached record south locations such as Algarve.

Lisbon, the portuguese capital, saw snow for the first time in 52 years. Other towns with a record snowfall were Leiria, Santarém, Évora, Setúbal, Portalegre, Sesimbra, Palmela, Fátima, Pombal, Abrantes, Torres Novas and Ourém.

Highways and roads were closed in much of central and south Portugal. In Montejunto, one hundred people were evacuated from their vehicles. The storm caused electricity to be cut in Elvas and other parts of the Alentejo region. A number of car accidents and fallen trees were reported to have only resulted in minor injuries. In Lisbon, the city government demanded subway stations to remain open overnight,

so that homeless people could find shelter.

At 1500GMT, phone companies saw a record level of calls and text messages due to surprised people contacting and warning eachother.

#### Bob Woodruff injured by improvised explosive device in Iraq

ABC News anchorman Bob Woodruff and his camera operator Doug Vogt have been seriously injured in an explosion. Early reports indicate that both men sustained head injuries in the blast.

Woodruff was evacuated to the Balad Airbase 68 kilometers north of Bagdad and is currently undergoing surgery. "Bob and Doug are in serious condition and are being treated at a U.S. military hospital in Iraq," ABC said in a statement.

Reports say Woodruff was taping a report inside an Iraqi mechanized military vehicle near Taji, Iraq when the vehicle ran over and detonated an improvised explosive device. ABC also reports that exchanges of small arms fire took place shortly after the explosion. MSNBC reports that Woodruff and Vogt were wearing body armor and helmets when the explosion occurred, measures that may turn out to have saved their lives. The Associated Press is reporting that the two men were standing in the hatch of the vehicle at the time of the explosion, and that no other people were injured.

Woodruff and Vogt had been embedded with the 4th Infantry Division that was accompanying an Iraqi Army unit.

ABC also said that both Woodruff and Vogt were wearing body armor and helmets.

The U.S. military headquarters in Baghdad has confirmed the attack took place. However, no further information has been made available.

Vogt, a 46-year-old Canadian based in France, is an Emmy-award winning cameraman for ABC News with 25 years of experience.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 61 journalists have been killed in the line of duty in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

Woodruff became the permanent co-anchor of ABC's World News Tonight, with Elizabeth Vargas on January 3, 2006, replacing the late Peter Jennings.

### **Firefighters find burning body parts in oil drums**

New South Wales Rural Fire Service officers called to extinguish a small bushfire in the Tomerong State Forest, about 210 kilometers south of Sydney, discovered two oil drums containing burning body parts.

The firefighters called nearby Nowra police who established several crime scenes in the area. It is believed the drums contained the remains of two people who police believe lived in the area.

NSW Police Superintendent Kyle Stewart told the ABC that officers were confronted with an horrific scene. "[It was a] fairly horrific

scene, the two bodies were on fire at the time, or the barrels in which they were located, were on fire when the RFS responded and certainly that doesn't add to the pleasantness of the situation," he said.

A 27-year-old man and a 36-year-old woman have presented themselves to police. Police say they are assisting detectives with their inquiries.

### **World celebrates Chinese new year**

Millions of people celebrated the arrival of the Chinese Year of the Dog, throughout the world's time zones.

Chinese families spent New Year's Eve cleaning their houses to get rid of bad luck from the past year, before celebrating with reunion dinners.

Throughout China and the world's Chinatowns, Dragon dancers danced and fireworks went off to mark the arrival of the new year.

In the Chinese lunar calendar, the Chinese Year of the Dog ends on February 17, 2007, making it 385 days long, or 13 months. The last time a Chinese year was this long was in 1944.

### **Corby's star witness convicted of rape**

John Patrick Ford, the Australian prisoner who testified at Schapelle Corby's Bali drug trafficking trial, has been convicted of 11 charges relating to the rape and assault of a woman.

Ford's trial was postponed to allow him to travel to Bali in the custody of Australian Federal Police officers to testify that he had overheard a jailhouse confession. Ford alleged he had heard another prisoner

claim ownership of the marijuana found in Corby's possession. He told the Balinese court that Corby was the victim of an Australian domestic inter-airport drug-smuggling operation. She is currently serving a 20-year prison term after being convicted in that case.

In December 2005, a County Court jury convicted Ford of 11 charges, including rape, intentionally causing injury, threatening to inflict serious injury, false imprisonment, aggravated burglary, burglary, making threats to kill and stalking, but a suppression order issued by the court prevented publication of the convictions until the pre-sentencing hearing on Friday, January 27, 2006.

Ford's lawyer, Tom Danos, told the hearing that Corby had written to Ford thanking him for risking his own welfare by agreeing to testify. Danos urged the court to be lenient in sentencing Ford, claiming that his victim had effectively forgiven him for his crimes and that he deserved a lighter sentence for co-operating with authorities investigating the Corby case.

Ford has been attacked twice in jail since testifying at Corby's Bali trial. Since returning from Bali in March, 2005, Ford has remained in protective custody, to prevent further attacks. Danos claimed that this would make any jail sentence particularly difficult for his client.

County Court Judge Margaret Rizkalla adjourned the pre-sentencing hearing to a date yet to be set.

### **Australian government hopes to establish triage by phone**

The Australian federal government hopes to slash hospital emergency department waiting queues by setting up a 24-hour national medical hotline.

A government source said that the National Health Call Centre Network would be manned by registered triage nurses 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Triage nurses would perform a diagnosis over the phone based upon the description given by the patient. The patient would then be referred to the nearest emergency department, their local GP or pharmacy – as determined by the nurse.

The issue is expected to be discussed at next month's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Canberra. It is believed that the states and territories are supportive of the system.

If agreed upon by COAG, the service will be jointly funded by state/territory and the commonwealth governments at a cost of \$40 million a year. The service would take 18 months to setup.

The service will be ran from a centralised call centre and be managed by a private contractor.

Julia Gillard, the opposition's spokeswoman for health said any national call service needed to be linked with local GPs and medical services.

Gillard claims that under a Labor government, an after-hours "Pizza Hut" style service would be implemented, with a single national number connecting to a local call centre.

"You would be talking to people in the locality you are in and who know the local services," she said

The Australian Medical Association, an organisation representing more than 27,000 doctors in Australia has slammed the proposal saying it will only deter people from seeking appropriate medical treatment.

### **Amélie Mauresmo wins Australian Open**

French tennis champion Amélie Mauresmo yesterday won her first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in Melbourne. Mauresmo was winning 6-1 2-0 when her opponent, Belgian player Justine Henin-Hardenne, retired, citing a stomach complaint.

After winning a rally in the second game of the second set, Henin-Hardenne approached the umpire and complained of feeling unwell. She then consulted her trainer before returning to the court. After losing two points, she approached the net and told Mauresmo she was too ill to continue, ending the game in 52 minutes.

Henin-Hardenne apologised to her opponent, the tournament organisers and a disappointed crowd of 15,452 people. "I'm feeling very disappointed for sure to end the tournament this way. I am feeling very sick and couldn't stay longer and continue," she said.

She later told a press conference that she believed anti-inflammatory medication she had been taking for a shoulder injury had made her feel ill and left her with no energy. "I felt it when I woke up, but I tried. I knew at the beginning of the match that I could not win it," she said.

Henin-Hardenne's retirement gave Mauresmo her third victory by default in the tournament. She reached the fourth round after Dutch player Michaella Krajicek retired with heat exhaustion. In the semi-final, Mauresmo was again the beneficiary of a retirement when Belgian player Kim Clijsters retired with an ankle injury.

Until now, 26-year-old Mauresmo was the only former world no.1 to never have won a Grand Slam title. She said in a post-match interview that when she returns home to her base in Geneva, Switzerland, she will toast the win with a bottle of 1937 Château d'Yquem wine which she has been saving to celebrate her first grand slam title.

"I bought a bottle about three or four years ago. Very good one. Very old one also. I keep it. I thought, "You know, this one is going to be for my Grand Slam, my first Grand Slam title,"" she said.

Mauresmo's win comes seven years after the then unseeded player reached the 1999 Australian Open final, the last time she has reached a Grand Slam final. She lost to Martina Hingis and was berated by the press and several players for her muscular build and for acknowledging her then partner, Sylvie Bourdon, believing if they were open about their relationship, people would be less inclined to gossip. At the time, Lindsay Davenport complained that playing Mauresmo was like playing against a male player. While Martina Hingis accused her of being "half a man."

Henin-Hardenne's retirement is the first time a player has retired from a women's Grand Slam final

since Brazil's Maria Bueno retired in 1966 during a final against Australia's Margaret Smith Court.

Mauresmo is now ranked world no.2 and is the first Frenchwoman to win an Australian Open since Mary Pierce won in 1995. Mauresmo takes home the Australian Open trophy and prize money of \$AU1,220,000, while Henin-Hardenne walked away with the runner-up prize money of \$AU610,000.

### **Documents allege U.S. Army kidnapped wives of enemy fighters**

United States military documents indicate that the U.S. Army has taken and incarcerated wives of suspected enemy fighters for "leveraging" purposes against their husbands; but Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a U.S. command spokesman, said only Iraqi women who pose an "imperative threat" are being held.

A U.S. intelligence officer claimed that, in one instance, the young mother of a nursing baby was locked up and in another case, one American colonel suggested to another colonel that they lure the husband of a kidnapped wife by putting a note on the family's door telling him "to come get his wife."

Female detentions by coalition forces have become more of an issue since kidnappers seized American journalist Jill Carroll and demanded that all Iraqi women detainees be freed.

Thursday the U.S. military did free five women. All of the released women had been accused of "aiding terrorists or planting explosives," but an Iraqi government commission found there was insufficient evidence to continue holding them.

Hind al-Salehi, an Iraqi human rights activist, claims that U.S. units sometimes detained wives to pressure men into turning themselves in.

Busho Ibrahim Ali, Iraq's deputy justice minister, denied Ali's claims and said hostage-holding was a tactic used under the regime of Saddam Hussein and that "we are not Saddam."

However, newly released Pentagon documents said; "During the pre-operation brief it was recommended by TF personnel that if the wife were present, she be detained and held in order to leverage the primary target's surrender," wrote a 14-year veteran intelligence officer. The intelligence officer said he objected, but that when they raided the house a senior sergeant, who was the team leader, seized her anyway.

"The 28-year-old woman had three young children at the house, one being as young as six months and still nursing," the intelligence officer wrote.

In the released documents most names and signatures are blacked out.

In a second e-mail, a staff officer asked another officer, "What are you guys doing to try to get the husband — have you tacked a note on the door and challenged him to come get his wife?"

The deputy commander of the brigade advised his higher command two days later, "As each day goes by, I get more input that these gals have some info and/or will result in getting the husband. These ladies fought back extremely hard during the original

detention. They have shown indications of deceit and misinformation."

The reply was, "CG wants the husband." (CG meaning commanding general).

Johnson said this indicated justification for the detention of the woman, "It is clear the unit believed the females detained had substantial knowledge of insurgent activity and warranted being held."

### **FDA approves therapeutic use of insulin inhalant**

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of an inhalable form of insulin for treating both forms of diabetes in adults. The product, manufactured by Pfizer Inc. is called Exubera and is a inhaled powder form of recombinant short-acting human insulin (rDNA).

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that, when released into the blood, controls the upper limits of glucose presence in the bloodstream. Diabetics cannot produce (enough) insulin on their own, and have to control their blood sugars by appropriate diet, exercise and medication. Untreated Diabetes can have a serious adverse effect on health, it can lead to higher risk of cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, retinal damage and diabetic shock, which can be fatal. Insulin has been used for the treatment of diabetes for many years now, but some patients find it difficult (and costly) to use as it has to be injected into the body, usually several times a day. Currently, about five million Americans take insulin injections. Also, the use of any form of insulin can cause blood sugar to drop below safe levels, a condition

called hypoglycemia. As a result, the use of insulin must be accompanied by a careful and regular monitoring of blood sugar levels.

The FDA has issued guidelines that the inhalable form should not be used by smokers, patients with asthma, bronchitis, or emphysema as tests have shown that its use can reduce the breathing capacity of the lungs. Other side effects associated with Exubera therapy seen in clinical trials included cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, and dry mouth. The FDA has given its approval on the basis of safety studies of short-term use and studies of its effects over long-term use are underway.

Pfizer has said the product wouldn't be widely available until June or July and that exact prices haven't been set. A Pfizer spokesperson has said that the price will be "competitive" to injected insulin.

### **Trade hall roof collapses in Poland**

The roof of a trade hall in Chorzów near Katowice, Poland has collapsed. Officials said there are at least 66 fatalities and at least 160 people were injured. More than 125 people are still believed to be trapped inside the building.

"Luckily nothing happened to me, but I saw a macabre scene, as people tried to break windows in order to get out. People were hitting the panes with chairs, but the windows were unbreakable. One of the panes finally broke, and they started to get out by the window," said survivor Franciszek Kowal.

Victims have been transported to hospitals in the mining area.

The trade hall was holding a pigeon exhibition [1] and the collapse is believed to have been caused by large amounts of snow on the roof. At least 500 people were believed to be inside when the roof collapsed.

Jaroslaw Wojtasik a spokesman for the Katowice fire brigade said, "the weight of snow likely caused the roof to cave in at about 5:30 p.m., less than two hours before the event was scheduled to close for the evening."

"From our crisis centres, we have found there are about 20 fatalities. We don't know if foreigners are among them," said Andrzej Gaska, spokesman for the regional police department.

Rescuers are concerned that people trapped may die from hypothermia due to the freezing temperatures (currently about -15 degrees Celsius in Chorzów ).

People standing outside the building were helping rescuers and those that were injured into emergency vehicles.

### **Aboriginal Sovereignty Day Declared**

Representatives of Australian Aboriginal Sovereign Nations at a gathering in Canberra, have declared that the 26th of January would be known as Aboriginal Sovereignty Day. January 26th (Australia Day) is Australia's official national day - commemorating the landing of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove in 1788.

While the rest of the country celebrated the Australia Day holiday with medals, barbecues, fireworks and beer under the Union Jack, hundreds of people at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra lit a ceremonial fire and

discussed the land that once belonged to their ancestors.

Indigenous Australians communities, past and present

Indigeneous Elders have gathered this week at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy for the Corroboree for Sovereignty convergence, in response to what they say is the continual Government threat to control the historical Tent Embassy site.

The gathering identified the 34 year-old Tent Embassy on the grounds of Old Parliament House in Canberra, as a significant place of social, spiritual and political importance to Aboriginal Peoples - a symbol of the assertion of Aboriginal Sovereignty. The Aboriginal Embassy, not considered an official embassy by the Australian government, has come under review recently in a bid to remove the campsite and dwellings originally founded on Australia Day in 1972.

The Tent Embassy calls on all Aboriginal Sovereign Nations to "stand up against the illegal occupation of our country and continue to resist the oppression of our people." The Tent Embassy say that "until there is true justice for our people, these issues will not go away and we will continue to resist."

Members of the Embassy will take a sacred fire to Melbourne in March for the 2006 "Stolenwealth Games" campaign, in an effort to highlight the plight of Aboriginal people. The fire will contain a "message of peace, healing and justice, and create a focal point for unfinished business."

The group calls on all Aboriginal Nations to send representatives to

the Embassy to commemorate and review the issues of Land Rights in Australia. The Tent Embassy also announced the establishment of the National Tribal Law Council.

Indigenous leaders, including Marji Thorpe, Gary Foley, Robbie Thorpe and Michael Mansell claim that Native Title and Reconciliation haven't adequately addressed Indigenous rights. They say: "Native Title has mainly embroiled Indigenous peoples in complex legal processes where they have (generally unsuccessfully) had to prove their fundamental human rights to the land."

The campaigners, known as the Black GST, say the process "puts the onus on Indigenous peoples to somehow prove continuous connection with their land, an impossible task in many situations given the effects of our dispossession and attempted genocide."

On Australia Day the diverse and vibrant group marched peacefully through Canberra, gathered at the Embassy on the lawns in front of Old Parliament House and called for recognition of indigenous sovereignty over the land.

#### Australain Aboriginal Flag

"We're wanting to let all the people know that all the land in Australia has been given back to the Aboriginal people... and the sovereignty now lies with all Aboriginal nations," a spokesperson Robert Corowa said at the Embassy.

To many Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people, Australia Day was is labelled "Invasion Day" - in recognition of the colonisation of the continent by the British, he said. "We call it invasion day. The

most important thing is that everybody in Australia who's now living here... we strongly encourage them to come to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and place a leaf in our fire."

Legal director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC), Michael Mansell, says the current Australia Day celebrations should be scrapped and a new national day chosen. Mansell said Australia Day would forever remain a racist blot on Australia's political landscape as long as the event was held on the anniversary of the landing of the First Fleet.

"There can never be reconciliation between whites and Aborigines so long as the anniversary of the coming of white people is the basis for celebrating Australia Day," he said. "A fair and just society cannot be built on celebrating gains by one race at the expense of another."

Mr Mansell has also reported the theft of an Aboriginal sign from the TAC premises. The sign reading: "AUSTRALIA DAY Yes, let's celebrate: MURDER, INVASION, RAPE, THEFT" was removed on the 25th of January hours after being installed on the Launceston premises.

Mansell says that he will replace the sign in an effort to "the obvious need to expose the myth, as expressed in the national anthem, that Australia is a free and fair country" and called for "white society" to punish the offenders.

"This is another instance of the continuing trend in Tasmania of racist attacks on both people and property by extreme elements of white society who don't like the truth, who don't like Aborigines

and other races. As with the racial attacks on middle Eastern people in Sydney, these Tasmanian incidents show how Australia under the Howard government is becoming more openly xenophobic," he said.

Activists in Brisbane yesterday burned an Australian flag to protest against celebrations marking European settlement in Australia. Around 300 protesters staged an "Invasion Day" demonstration. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie condemned the action.

"I don't care whether they're black or white ... I don't believe we should burn the Australian flag, particularly at this time (when) we all know we live in an unsettled world," he said.

One protester said he believed the wrong flag had been burned: "I just felt deep down that it should have been the British flag they burnt not the Australian one."

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has strongly opposed the compulsory singing of the Australian national anthem in schools.

NSW Premier Morris Iemma wants to make it compulsory for NSW schoolchildren to sing the national anthem each day before class. The plan has strong support from both sides of Parliament in Tasmania as well as the Multicultural Council of Australia and the Australian National Flag Association.

However some Aboriginal support groups say forcing the singing of the national anthem diminishes individual enthusiasm for participation.

Michael Mansell says, "more

importantly, the anthem is about the white people and immigrants and excludes Aborigines." He said the words "for we are young and free" were a clear reference to the last 200 years of colonisation by Europeans and dismissed the ownership of the country by Aboriginal people.

### **West Papuans refugees forced to fly 4000ks despite tuberculosis fears**

West Papuan asylum seekers who arrived in Australia last week, were forced to make a 4000 kilometre journey to Christmas Island despite suspicions they had tuberculosis. The West Papuans were herded on to an RAAF Hercules last week and flown to Christmas Island.

Two of the group, a man and his child, have now been flown the 2,600 kilometres to Perth, Western Australia from the remote Indian Ocean island. Air force personnel had initially refused to fly them, concerned that the flight crew's health would be at risk.

"It's a complete farce, absurd" said one health official. "It has not only posed an unnecessary health risk, it has been hideously expensive."

The West Papuans were among a group of 43 refugees found last week on the far north-west coast of Cape York in Queensland. They had made a five-day journey from the Indonesian province in an outrigger canoe. They arrived with banners accusing Indonesia's military in the province ruled by Jakarta of genocide and intimidation. Their 25m traditional boat was fitted with an outboard motor and was flying the outlawed West Papuan flag.

Amid media scrutiny and the

disapproval of the Indonesian Government, the boat people underwent health checks before being sent to Christmas Island. X-rays and other medical examinations strongly indicated that at least one man had tuberculosis, yet the group were flown to Australia's Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre.

Upon landing at the Island, health officials recommended the patients be transferred to Perth. However, the crew of the RAAF Hercules refused to take them, saying they were not "adequately equipped".

A Department of Immigration spokesman (DIMIA) said an alternative flight was arranged. "At this stage there has been no positive diagnosis for tuberculosis," the spokesman said.

The removal of the asylum seekers to Christmas Island has been met with fierce criticism from many refugee rights groups and opposition parties, who say it was impractical, potentially traumatising and hugely expensive. The Immigration Department says it has interviewed most of the asylum seekers but won't say if they have made formal asylum claims.

Rallies in Sydney, Melbourne, Darwin, Canberra and Brisbane were held this week, in support of the West Papuan asylum seekers. Refugee rights advocates protested the forced transfer to the remote Christmas Island facility.

Melbourne auxiliary bishop Hilton Deakin told about 130 people demonstrating outside DIMIA headquarters in Melbourne that, "we know that already the Indonesian authorities, in

Canberra and beyond, are trying to get to them."

Yet the he Indonesian embassy in Canberra denied making any approach, saying: "I can guarantee that there has been no contact whatsoever, it hadn't been requested, it was never even sought."

But the Immigration Department has confirmed that "a junior delegation" from the embassy went to Weipa last Thursday seeking access to the asylum seekers. A spokesman for the Immigration Department said the Indonesians arrived in Weipa on Thursday but by then the Papuans had already been put on a plane for Christmas Island. The West Papuans were told they had a right to Indonesian consular assistance if they choose. "Not one has chosen to do so," the spokesman said.

"The majority of these 43 people are leaders for free expression and self-determination and possible independence because of the oppression from which they suffer," Bishop Deakin said. "Massacres, rapes and all the rest of it have gone on in that country for almost 30 years."

He called on the Australian Government to cancel its training program with the Indonesian military.

Democrats leader Lyn Allison said the Australian Government had "got it wrong on this issue". The 43 asylum seekers had been "whisked off" before they could tell their story, she said.

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle has called on the government to grant access to Papuan asylum seekers. The senator says they should not

be in detention and they certainly should be allowed to communicate with the outside world.

Senator Nettle will go to Christmas Island this weekend to meet the imprisoned West Papuans. She said the immigration department is obligated under the Migration Act to allow her to meet them.

Meanwhile New Zealand Greens have offered to take the asylum seekers. "New Zealand can show the Howard government how to be compassionate, as we did back in 2001 when we took some Afghan asylum seekers from the Tampa," the New Zealand Green Party Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Keith Locke says.

"It is shocking that the West Papuan refugees, having survived 450 kilometres of open water in a flimsy craft, are now bundled off to a Christmas Island detention camp - well out of range of those Australians who wish to help them," he said.

"Under refugee law these Papuans deserve special consideration, having come directly from their claimed country of persecution, Indonesia, not via a third country, as is the case with most asylum seekers in this part of the world.

"The Papuans certainly have a good prima facie case. I know from my own visit to West Papua last April that there is substantial and ongoing harassment of the local people, particularly those who assert their right to political self-determination," said Mr Locke.

On Friday last week Indonesian security forces shot dead one Papuan protester, and wounded two others, in the Paniai district, where the 43 asylum seekers originate.

### **Bloggers investigate social networking websites**

The humble beginnings of many popular Web services, such as Google, LiveJournal, and Yahoo!, are well-documented and available on their websites, and frequently recounted in news stories about the firms. These websites are also scrutinized for any perceived violations of users' privacy or other basic rights.

However, until recently no investigation had been done into MySpace and Facebook, two new "social networking" sites of explosive popularity among teenagers and college students. American bloggers, using Google and financial records, have begun investigations into the origins and policies of these sites, making some claims that the site owners explicitly deny.

**Facebook**  
Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, an individual web developer looking to make friends at Harvard University. Although Facebook has been sued by ConnectU.com for allegedly copying its concept and data, Facebook is actually the first worldwide college network on the Internet. As one of the most popular college websites, Facebook is notable for its lack of prominent advertising. It quickly accumulated \$50,000 in debt in 2004, and it took nearly a year for it to begin turning a profit, so clearly it needed a large amount of venture capital.

In August 2005, independent blogger Josh Smith theorized that Facebook could actually be a data-gathering operation. He determined that Facebook received its initial funding from Peter Thiel, which he named as co-author of

the book "The Diversity Myth", which argues that "multiculturalism" is used to promote social intolerance on American college campuses. Smith also found that Facebook also received \$13 million in funding from "Accel Partners", a firm whose manager James Breyer formerly served as the chairman of In-Q-Tel, a venture capital firm operated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

However, both Accel Partners and Peter Thiel have invested in many dot-com companies. Peter Thiel is the co-founder of PayPal, and James Breyer has done extensive work in Silicon Valley. Investigating a firm's sources of venture capital has not often led to breakthrough exposes in the past.

More importantly, Smith discovered clauses in Facebook's current Privacy Policy which state that they "may share your information with third parties, including responsible companies with which we have a relationship". The Privacy Policy also warns that "Facebook also collects information about you from other sources, such as newspapers and instant messaging services. This information is gathered regardless of your use of the Web Site." Other bloggers have also called attention to this ambiguous statement, which seems to point towards a Facebook conspiracy theory. User "tomd" at the Reddit news website noted that "these sites provide possibly the most accurate and easiest to use resource for mining information about groups of people."

According to Chris Hughes, spokesperson for Facebook, The clause you reference in the



privacy agreement is leftover from an outdated version of the privacy policy which is currently being updated. We used to have a couple features on the site that aren't still there, such as collecting users' away messages from AIM (if they said they wanted it) and displaying mentions of their names in campus newspapers (again, upon request). That clause will not be included in the upcoming version of the privacy policy which will be released in the next couple of weeks.

The main issue surrounding Facebook is one of trust. Privacy advocates on the Web are always wary of any website that asks for detailed personal information, and Facebook takes this to the extreme by displaying entire social networks. However, most Facebook users seem to trust it deeply, providing full friends lists, phone numbers, and personal photo albums.

MySpace  
Trent Lapinski, another blogger, began an investigation into MySpace in July 2005, when it was acquired by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, parent company of FOX News. MySpace does not often receive criticism about privacy issues, as its users typically do not give out last names or other personal information, but its company history is more interesting. Lapinski was threatened with a lawsuit by MySpace's legal team when he let them know about his investigation, but on January 4, he decided to come forward with the details anyway.

MySpace expressed interest in commenting on this Wikinews article but did not respond by press time.

MySpace's CEO Chris DeWolfe and its most prominent spokesperson Tom Anderson first met in 1999 at Xdrive Technologies, a dot-com startup which gave away free storage space to Internet users. DeWolfe and Anderson went on to work together at ResponseBase, LLC., which was acquired by eUniverse, Inc., which later became Intermix Media. The relationship between these three companies is tangled indeed, and involves the MySpace name itself. According to Chris DeWolfe, "the general MySpace site" was launched in September 2003. Tom Anderson claims that "MySpace was a creative idea before it was a business." However, long before MySpace became a social networking website, the name MySpace and the domain myspace.com had been used by ResponseBase for their profitable newsletter about "Freebies, Deals, & Discounts", and a free disk space host similar to Xdrive. Newsgroup archives show multiple messages linking to copyrighted files hosted on MySpace. In 2001, MySpace's spokesperson was quoted in an article about "warez". The Internet Archive has backups of MySpace.com going back to 1999, but these cannot be accessed because MySpace's current owners have blocked the Internet Archive specifically from accessing the site.

One newsgroup message from 2001 documents the transition from MySpace to ResponseBase: Got more steaming piles of spam from "Media Now!" aka "responsebase.com". The specific username that the spams were sent to was only given to a specific company (freediskspace.com, later myspace.com) for their use only. Unfortunately they sold it, even though my business relationship with them ended in May 2001

when they discontinued the service I was using. Apparently they couldn't pay their bills and sold their list to spammers.

Actually, MySpace had simply shut down and become ResponseBase-- as evidenced by the "Freebies" newsletter above. ResponseBase also used a list of 8 million e-mail addresses purchased from Xdrive for their newsletters. In 2002, ResponseBase was booted from their ISP as an illicit spam organization-- with Tom Anderson himself listed as their billing contact. And later still, ResponseBase would be renamed to MySpace.

In 2002, DeWolfe went on to become a director of "Fog Cutter Capital Group", whose CEO, Andrew Wiederhorn, was convicted of income tax and pension felonies and sentenced to prison. Fog Cutter continued to pay Wiederhorn a salary of \$350,000 per month for 18 months while he sat in jail. Wiederhorn's wife, Tiffany Wiederhorn, is on the board of directors at MySpace's parent company Intermix Media.

Intermix Media itself has a tangled history. In 2004, Intermix (then operating as eUniverse) was named as a spammer organization on USENET. It purchased ResponseBase, shut down its operations, and reformed it as MySpace. On April 28, 2005, Intermix was sued by the State of New York for installing malicious spyware over the Internet. According to their press release: The Attorney General documented at least ten separate web sites from which Intermix or its agents were downloading spyware, providing either no warning or other misleading disclosures. In this way, Intermix and its agents downloaded more than 3.7 million

programs to New Yorkers alone, and tens of millions more to users across the nation.

Intermix also went to great lengths to protect the spyware and adware it secretly installed. The programs were hidden in unlikely locations on the computer and could not be removed through a computer's "Add/Remove" function. In addition, the programs omitted "un-install" applications, and even reinstalled themselves after being deleted.

Just before the adware investigation was announced, Intermix's primary investors sold \$25,000,000 worth of Intermix stock at roughly \$8 per share. When the attorney general announced the investigation, Intermix stock fell to \$4 per share. Intermix's former CEO, Brad Greenspan, has accused Intermix investors of insider trading.

Soon afterwards, the spyware issue was settled out of court; Intermix paid \$7.5 million to the State of New York.

According to The Economist, "As an internet business, MySpace.com considers itself to be an entirely new breed ... The community has grown virally, with no advertising." However, this leaves one crucial question unanswered: without advertising, how did the site become popular in the first place?

### Today in History

1649 - King Charles I was beheaded for high treason in front of the Banqueting House in London during the English Civil War.

1820 - Edward Bransfield of the Royal Navy landed on the mainland of Antarctica.

1933 - Adolf Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany.

1948 - Nathuram Godse bowed

before Mahatma Gandhi, wished him well, then shot him to death with a Beretta pistol.

1968 - Vietnam War: Viet Cong forces launched the Tết Offensive on Vietnamese New Year's Day.

### Quote of the Day

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

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