



Top Stories

East Timor: President Gusmão takes emergency powers to quell unrest

President Xanana Gusmão has taken special security powers in a bid to quell the violence raging in East Timor.

Iraq to investigate Haditha "massacre"

The Iraqi government is to launch a formal investigation into claims American soldiers murdered civilians in the Iraqi town of Haditha in November 2005.

Featured story

In the land of the open source elves: Interview with "Battle for Wesnoth" creator David White

If you've always wanted to live in a world populated by elves, dwarves and wizards, you don't need to pay for a World of Warcraft subscription or buy the Special Extended DVD Trilogy Edition of The Lord of the Rings just yet. You could instead give Battle for Wesnoth a try.

Wikipedia Current Events

• The Government of Spain confirms that known terrorists Imad Yarkas, who was already convicted in Spanish courts, Driss Chebli, Sadik Merizak and Abdelaziz Benyaich were released from prison. The government did not provide a rationale behind the release, but a statement was issued saying one will be provided in the coming days.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Iran refuses to negotiate with the U.S. over its nuclear program.
- The 16th World Economic Forum on Africa is convened in Cape Town, South Africa.
- France, Britain, Germany, the United States, Russia and China agree on a package of incentives and sanctions for Iran.
- The new Italian Justice Minister, Clemente Mastella, announced that left-wing militant Adriano Sofri could be pardoned before the end of the calendar year

John W. Snow resigns as United States secretary of the treasury

John W. Snow resigns as Secretary of the Treasury, George W. Bush has nominated Goldman Sachs CEO Henry Paulson to succeed him.

Henry Paulson is nominated by President Bush to serve as the American Treasury Secretary, succeeding John Snow. If confirmed, he would be the first Wall Street figure to hold the post during the Bush administration.

Australian house of representatives has "no rules": Gillard

The Australian Labor Party has accused speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, David Hawker (Liberal, Wannor) of failing to be impartial.

During question time today, opposition leader, Kim Beazley

(Labor, Brand) asked the government to confirm comments made by Cameron Thompson (Liberal, Blair), which asked for Prime Minister John Howard (Liberal, Bennelong) to explain his role in the failed merger of the Nationals and Liberals in Queensland. According to Mr Beazley, Mr Thompson claims that the president of the Liberal party in Queensland was appointed by Mr Howard and that his actions would have been known and agreed upon by the Prime Minister.

The house's speaker refused to allow Mr Beazley to debate his question claiming it was not relevant. Mr Beazley argued that his question directly related to Mr Howard in his capacity as Prime Minister and to disallow his question was "shutting down accountability".

The opposition's next woe came when Stephen Smith (Labor, Perth) asked the Prime Minister to confirm accusations that the government's new industrial relations laws (called Workchoices) had placed pressure on the low pay commission to lower the minimum wage of Australian workers. Mr Howard took the opportunity to attack Mr Beazley's role as Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 1993 saying that he had contempt for the unemployed.

Anthony Albanese (Labor, Grayndler) raised a point of order, claiming that the Prime Minister's answer was irrelevant. This was

refused by the speaker, who said that Mr Howard was attempting to answer a "lengthy question". Mr Albanese then interrupted Mr Howard as he was continuing his attack on Mr Beazley telling the speaker that the question was very specific and that Mr Howard's answer was irrelevant. Mr Albanese was ordered to resume his seat, and when he failed to do so was ordered out of the house.

Following Mr Albanese's ejection, Mr Smith argued that the Prime Minister was not answering his question before also being ordered out of the house by the speaker. As Mr Howard began to continue his answer, Julia Irwin (Labor, Fowler) interrupted Mr Howard. Mrs Irwin was then ordered to leave the house.

The opposition found itself another member short in the house after Julia Gillard (Labor, Lalor) was removed for calling Health Minister Tony Abbott (Liberal, Warringah) an "idiot". Ms Gillard's comment followed Mr Abbott tabling a document written by Medibank Private relating to a media campaign to counter negative views on its sale. Part of the document claimed that Medibank Private had "established a hypothetical but possible scenario: Julia Gillard arguing that the sale will mean higher premiums".

Mr Abbott joked that "Medibank Private sure know the member for Lalor (Julia Gillard)".

It was Ms Gillard's second ejection in two days. She was removed from the house yesterday for calling Mr Abbott a "snivelling grub", the same term Mr Abbott labeled an opposition MP last week without being removed.

Following the house's question

time, Mr Abbott and Peter Costello (Liberal, Higgins) accused Lindsay Tanner (Labor, Melbourne), Wayne Swan (Labor, Lilley) and Kim Wilkey (Labor, Swan) of deliberately blocking a camera's view of Mr Howard during one of his answers. Mr Tanner said "It's not our fault he's short" and Mr Wilkie said that he never raised from his chair and that Mr Abbott needed to "get his facts straight".

Following her removal, Ms Gillard told reporters that speaker of the house, Mr Hawker had double standards. "We've reached a stage ... where there are no rules in the House of Representatives," Ms Gillard said.

"Four Opposition members were tossed out of Parliament today. I don't think anybody watching question time could say that's a fair result."

"We've seen double standards in operation all week" she said.

She said that it was not unusual for people to walk around the chamber and talk to each other during question while government members were speaking.

"At the end of the day there is wandering around and chatter in question time," she said.

"But why is that? Because the quality of what's coming off the government front bench doesn't bear listening to" she said.

Firefighters battle fire at Los Angeles International Airport
A fuel storage tank at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) caught fire today.

The 1-million gallon storage tank caught fire at about 8:30 a.m. local time (PDT) according to Ron

Myers, a spokesman for the LAX fire department. Myers said that planes were not at risk and no flights were cancelled, delayed or diverted. No injuries were reported and no evacuations were ordered.

The fire is said to have been caused by a spark from a welder performing work on the tank. Reports say the fuel container was mostly empty, but authorities are still investigating.

Fatal coal mine accident in western Turkey

A mine accident killed at least nine miners in a coal mine in western Turkey. A methane explosion collapsed a mine shaft about 150 meters below the town of Odakoy, in Balikesir Province, near the border with Bursa Province. Rescue work was slowed by the presence of gas, with rescue workers having to be hospitalized for methane poisoning.

Turkey suffers relatively frequent mine accidents, especially due to methane pockets either igniting or poisoning miners. Some observers fault old & untrustworthy equipment, or a disregard for safety regulations.

Toronto transit workers strike 'illegally'

Toronto – Nearly a million commuters were immobilized and some businesses closed as Toronto Transit Commission workers walked off the job yesterday and formed picket lines outside subway stations, bus terminals and other TTC facilities. None of their buses, streetcars or subway trains were operational.

Some service in the Greater Toronto Area continued through other transit services, but was of limited use without a link to downtown Toronto.

TTC workers said they'd been locked out, but Toronto Mayor David Miller and the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruled yesterday that the walkout was illegal and ordered employees back to work. They complied with this order.

Service resumed sporadically during the evening (after rush hour) and is expected to continue as normal today.

Military helicopter crashes into TV tower in Georgia, U.S. killing four

An United States military MH-47 Chinook helicopter has crashed in Colquitt County, Georgia after clipping a wire connected to the WFXL television tower. It is not known whether the wire was the cause of the crash, or if the helicopter was having problems prior to the incident.

According to Lisa Eichhorn, a spokeswoman for Fort Rucker, Alabama, at least 5 soldiers were on board the helicopter. Four of the five soldiers have been killed. The surviving soldier only suffered cuts on his hands and above his eye. The names of the victims are not known and the military says they will not release any names for at least 24 hours after family members have been reached.

Authorities also say that the 1,000 foot tower "has a conspicuous tilt," said Ken Clubb, a chief engineer on the scene of the crash.

Reporters and onlookers were being kept from the scene mainly as a result of the possibility that the tower may collapse. A reporter for WTXL, an ABC affiliate out of Tallahassee, FL was arrested at the scene.

Investigators from Ft. Rucker,

where the chopper was scheduled to land, were en route to the scene.

Three terrorists gunned down by police in India

An attack against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh headquarters in Nagpur was thwarted by the Maharashtra police early today morning. The militants were driving a white Ambassador car and were armed with AK-47s. They were confronted and killed by security forces as they tried to break through the security cordon surrounding the building.

Nagpur Police Commissioner S.P.S Yadav said that the car was chased by police after it broke through the first barrier about 200 metres away from the headquarters. When confronted, the militants opened fire and were killed after a five-minute shootout. Yadav also said that two policemen had been injured in the incident, one of whose condition was serious. The identities of the three men is yet to be established. A diary was also recovered from the terrorists.

A high level security alert has been declared in Nagpur and other sensitive areas in the vicinity. R.S.S chief Ram Madhav urged the government to take more steps to safeguard the offices of the organisation. This is the second time the police has prevented a major terror attack from taking place in Maharashtra. Last month the Anti-Terrorist Squad had recovered 30 kilograms of RDX, 17 AK-47 rifles and 50 hand-grenades from a jeep in Aurangabad. Eleven suspected militants were also arrested.

Ubuntu releases 6.06 LTS version of popular Linux distribution

The Ubuntu Foundation released its fourth version of the popular GNU/Linux operating system distribution yesterday. Codenamed "Dapper Drake", the release improves on its predecessor, Breezy Badger, or 5.10. The 6.06 LTS version will be the first to offer Long Term Support: three years on the desktop and five years on the server.

Upgrades to existing Ubuntu 5.10 installations can be accomplished by typing ALT-F2, and entering the command: `gksudo "update-manager -d"`

Because the software in the GNU/Linux operating system comes with permission for everyone to modify and redistribute it, there are many versions (called "distributions") of the operating system available. Ubuntu builds on the popular Debian GNU/Linux distribution. Like Debian, it is made almost entirely of free software.

Users quickly swarmed the Ubuntu Foundation's servers trying to download the new version. The servers are currently responding slowly; moderators at the Ubuntu Forums suggested that users download with BitTorrent if at all possible, which is much less prone to such slowdowns.

Although its first release was only a year ago, Ubuntu Linux has quickly become one of the most popular Linux distributions. It is intended to be user-friendly without being insecure by design, a charge sometimes leveled against other beginner-friendly distributions like Linspire. The distribution is offered for free, and CDs are available for order via the

Internet without charge (including shipping).

Reported Bigfoot sighting in Clarence, New York a hoax

Hans Mobius, 72, a former candidate for mayor in Buffalo, New York, a horse farmer and owner of properties 1109-1121 Elmwood in Buffalo where a hotel is proposed to be placed, reported that he had taken pictures allegedly of "Bigfoot" to which experts later dismissed as a "hoax."

While Mobius was taking photos of a wooded area on his Clarence, New York horse farm on Tuesday, he caught the creature in a photo who was running out from behind a John Deere tractor nearly 200 feet from him. The creature appeared to have two legs and have fur all over its body.

"I called my friend and said, 'I think I saw Bigfoot.' I told my wife and daughter to keep it to ourselves. But my daughter said, you'd better send [the pictures] to somebody," said Mobius.

Mobius claims that the incident is not a hoax and that he believes that it is possible he could have seen the creature. "I don't want to come across as a nutcase here. It's the damned craziest thing," he added also saying he "saw this thing out of the corner of my eye. It looked like he might have been confused." Mobius says it then vanished into the woods.

However; experts are convinced the incident is a hoax.

"It's obviously a man in a suit. Look at the forearms. There's not natural taper at the wrist. It looks like a sleeve transitioning into a glove," said a professor of primatology, paleontology,

evolutionary morphology and anatomy at Idaho State University, Doctor D. Jeffrey Meldrum.

"[The hair] looks unnatural. It disperses light like artificial fur would. That raises real questions about the credibility of the photos. Is someone pulling a prank on him? Or is it him having a laugh, just killing time at others' expense,?" added Meldrum.

"There's no doubt in my mind that what we're looking at is a guy in a gorilla suit," said professional videographer David Bittner, who helps to identify the authenticity of videos and photos with Meldrum.

The last Bigfoot sightings occurred in Batavia, New York in the 19th century and in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties in Western New York.

Satellite images show destruction of Zimbabwe community

Human rights group Amnesty International has released satellite images showing how the Zimbabwean community of Porta Farm, which once housed some 10,000 people, has been completely destroyed. Taken in 2002 and 2006, the photos starkly contrast the previous built-up area with the empty scrubland that remains.

According to Amnesty International, residents of Porta Farm were given less than 24 hours notice to leave their homes. Human rights monitors reported that several people died in the chaotic environment of the ensuing demolitions and forced evictions. Two children were reportedly among the dead.

Zimbabwe's forced evictions programme (called Operation

Murambatsvina) has been widely condemned both within Zimbabwe and beyond. A 2005 report on Operation Murambatsvina by United Nations Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka estimated that it has cost 700,000 people their homes or livelihoods. She was present at Porta Farm during the second day of its demolition, and was shocked by the brutality of the evictions.

Residents of Porta Farm had fought eviction in the past, winning judgements from the High Court of Zimbabwe that they should not be evicted unless the government provided suitable alternative accommodation. However the High Court dismissed a contempt of court action that attempted to stop the 2005 evictions, giving no reason.

The Zimbabwean government (led by President Robert Mugabe) says that the programme is in the public interest and was not against the law. It has denied responsibility for the deaths.

Chemical Explosion in Billingham

There were been several large chemical explosions at the Terra Nitrogen UK chemical plant (previously owned by ICI) in Billingham, Teesside, England. The explosions started at 0015 BST. People living in Billingham and nearby Middlesbrough were advised to stay inside and keep windows closed if at all possible. Nearby roads were closed off for approximately two hours by police, for safety reasons.

Cleveland Fire and Rescue previously declared the incident a "major emergency", but was brought under control later in the morning. An ammonia leak was also reported, with nearby residents noticing the smell was

contained, but is not cause for concern as it ignited immediately on release, preventing any fumes getting into the atmosphere. The plant was safely shut down later in the morning.

The explosion, resulting in a fire "involving mixed gases" was the immediate ignition of an ammonia gas leak, said a spokesman for the fire brigade.

The fire was visible for up to 10 miles, and the blast was heard up to 20 miles away.

In the land of the open source elves: Interview with "Battle for Wesnoth" creator David White

If you've always wanted to live in a world populated by elves, dwarves and wizards, you don't need to pay for a World of Warcraft subscription or buy the Special Extended DVD Trilogy Edition of The Lord of the Rings just yet. You could instead give Battle for Wesnoth a try — an open source turn-based strategy game in a fantasy setting. For the practically minded, "open source" means that you do not have to pay to download or play the game. It was created by volunteers and can be freely shared. Even the multiplayer online part of the game is free (no ads or spyware either).

But Wesnoth, as it is often abbreviated, is notable not only because it is free. While its graphics are simple by modern standards, the sheer number of units and scenarios that are available for the game is staggering. This is where the "open source" philosophy comes truly into play: anyone can contribute art or new campaigns. As of May 2006, the forum where users can share and discuss their

own art contained over 25,000 messages. Most of this art is made available under the same open source terms as the game itself.

Battle for Wesnoth lets you command armies of units such as archers, swordmen, mages and gryphons during the course of a campaign consisting of multiple missions. Typically, your mission is to defeat an enemy leader, but some scenarios let you liberate a prisoner, find a lost artifact, traverse dangerous territories, and so on. Your best units can be taken from one mission to the next, "levelling up" in the process. Even units of the same type vary in their abilities, making the tactical use of the right unit at the right time very important.

The game is reminiscent of turn-based strategy classics such as Heroes of Might and Magic or Warlords. Throughout each campaign, the player is informed of the progress of the story. For instance, in the "Heir to the Throne" campaign, the player follows the story of Prince Konrad, who must reclaim the throne of Wesnoth from an evil queen.

The game was originally designed by David White, who is still the project's lead developer. We exchanged e-mails with David about the state of open source gaming, the future of Wesnoth, and the collaborative aspects of game development.

David, thanks for taking our questions. Open source games suffer from the problem that very few people have all the abilities needed to make a good game: programming, graphics, story development, sound effects, music, and so on. When you started Battle for Wesnoth, how did you deal with this?

Not very well. :)

Version 0.1 of Wesnoth was developed entirely by me, and it was ugly. It had awful graphics, and no sound or music at all.

I think the best way to deal with the problem is to make an early version of the game which showcases the desired gameplay. Then, people with the appropriate skills who like the game will contribute. This worked out well with Wesnoth, anyhow, as I soon attracted a fine artist, Francisco Munoz, and once the graphics were decent, more people started wanting to help.

I noticed that the forum allows anyone to submit art for the game. How important have contributions from ordinary players been for development?

Well, as with almost any free software project, contributions from users have been very important. In the area of art, this is definitely so, though making a substantial contribution of art generally requires a reasonable amount of skill, so the number of people who can contribute art is somewhat limited.

This has meant that the number of people who contribute art is much smaller than, say, the number of people who contribute bug reports or feature requests. Still, there are plenty of good pixel artists out there, and we have had many good contributions from our community.

Also, within the game itself, it's possible to directly download new campaigns from the Internet, many of which have been created by players. Do you think that, in essence, we are seeing the

beginnings of applying "wiki" principles to game development?

On one hand, I see the ability to directly download new campaigns as a mild convenience -- it wouldn't be much more difficult for the user to, for instance, go to a web page and download campaigns.

On the other hand, it does blur the line between 'developer created content' and 'user created content' and so, like a Wiki, makes it much easier for any user to contribute to the game.

I think that for an Open Source game, making it as easy as possible for users to contribute content is a key way to help make the game succeed. We have tried hard to do this in Wesnoth. I don't think that with something dynamic like a game, it's quite as easy to make absolutely anyone be able to edit it or contribute as easily as they can in a Wiki, but we have tried to make it as easy as possible.

How do you moderate user-submitted content? Are there scenarios or graphics you have rejected because they crossed a line -- sexual content, excessive violence, etc.?

Well, there are basically three levels of content acceptance: 'Official': content can be accepted into the game itself -- the content will reside in our SVN repository, and will be in the tarballs released by developers. 'Campaign Server': Content can be allowed on the campaign server (the server which users can connect to in-game to download more content). 'Disallowed': Finally, content can be disallowed on the campaign server, which means that the

creator could only distribute it using their own channels (for instance, having a web site people could download it from).

Content only makes it to (1) if the developers happen to like it very much. We don't have any firm rules as to what is allowed and disallowed, and a campaign that has short-comings from the developer's point of view might still be allowed if it is exceptional in other areas. As an example of this, the campaign 'Under the Burning Suns' contained explicit references to religion. To avoid controversy, we wanted to avoid references to religion in Wesnoth. However, recognizing the exceptional quality of the campaign, we decided to accept it into the official version of Wesnoth in spite of this one aspect we didn't like.

Artwork containing nudity has also been a controversial point in the past, as has violence (particularly explicit depiction of blood). We generally take the point of view that we will review each item as it comes, rather than making blanket rules.

With regard to whether we allow things onto the campaign server, (2), our general policy is that to be allowed onto the campaign server, the content need only be licensed under the GPL. However, we reserve the right to remove content that we consider to be distasteful in any way. Fortunately, our content submitters are generally very reasonable, and we haven't had to exercise this right.

Our aim is to keep Wesnoth appropriate for users of any age and background -- of course, it contains some level of violence, but this is not depicted very explicitly, and only parents who do

not want to expose their children to animated violence of any level need be concerned. For this reason, we also do not allow expletives on our forums or IRC channels.

How do you feel about games like "Second Life", where players trade user-generated content for money?

I've never understood the appeal of games like that. I don't enjoy cheating in games, and to me buying items with real money seems like cheating -- except worse, since it actually costs money.

What changes to the game or gameplay do you anticipate in the coming months and years?

Well, we've avoided making many gameplay changes at all, since very early on in Wesnoth's development. Wesnoth is meant to be a simple game, with simple gameplay, and 'changing' gameplay will probably lead to it being more complex. We want to keep it simple.

Changes will probably focus on improving existing features, and making the engine a little more customizable. Enhancing the multiplayer component is big on the list -- we've progressively added more and more features on the server. We also want to add more graphical enhancement. For instance, a particle system to allow various combat effects.

If you had unlimited resources at your disposal to improve the game, what would you change about it?

Wesnoth was always designed to be a simple game, with simple goals. It has exceeded all the

expectations I originally had for it. There is still some 'polishing' work going on, but really I don't think there is too much I would dramatically change.

Probably the largest thing I can name is a much better AI than we currently have. I'm pretty happy with the AI developed for Wesnoth -- I think it's much better than AIs for most commercial games -- but it could be better. That's the only area of Wesnoth that I think could really be very dramatically improved.

I am pretty happy with our in-game graphics. Some people compare our graphics to modern commercial games, and think our graphics are laughably poor. We often get comments that our graphics are around the same quality as those seen in SNES or Genesis games, or PC games from a decade ago. (These people should try playing a strategy game on the SNES/Genesis/PC from this long ago; Wesnoth's graphics are much better).

I am very happy with our graphics overall. I think our artists have done an excellent job of making the game look attractive without detracting from functionality. Adding 3D graphics, or changing the style of the 2D graphics would only be wasted effort in my mind -- I think we've achieved a great balance of making the game easy and clear, while making it look good.

With unlimited resources, I would like some more storyline/cutscene images, and a nice new title screen, but these are relatively small concerns I think.

There are some enhancements to multiplayer I would like added -- multiplayer campaigns is a long-

time feature request. As are more options and features on the multiplayer server.

Overall though, if I had 'unlimited resources', I'd much rather develop an entirely new game. We don't have enough good Open Source games -- it's a waste to pour all the resources we have into one. :)

Wesnoth has dwarves with guns, World of Warcraft has gnomes and goblins with explosives and flying machines -- where do you, personally, define the limits of the fantasy genre? Are there scenarios playing in a steampunk world, or ones with modern technology? Would you allow those?

Actually we have Dwarves with 'Thundersticks' :) -- mysterious weapons that make a loud sound and do lots of damage, but are clumsy and unreliable. The developers do not comment on whether or not these 'thundersticks' are or are not like 'guns' on earth. We like to keep Wesnoth slightly mysterious, and leave some things up to the player's interpretation, rather than spell it out.

We once used to have dragoons with pistols, and other weapons like that, but we made a very intentional decision to remove them.

I don't like categorizing things into 'genres'. Many people debate whether Wesnoth is an 'RPG', or 'strategy game', etc. I think the debate of what genre something is in is largely irrelevant.

We do have a vision for what the world of Wesnoth is like though -- and Wesnoth is a world of ancient-era weaponry, with a little magic. Of Elves and Dwarves and Orcs.

Very much inspired by Tolkien. I actually originally chose this setting because my focus was on technical excellence -- writing a good, solid engine -- not on creating a new fantasy world. I decided to stick with a very well-known, proven theme, figuring I couldn't go wrong with it.

We probably wouldn't allow anything that departs dramatically from the world we've made into the official version of the game, but we'd be happy to have it on our campaign server. The main attempt at a 'total modification' of Wesnoth is a project known as Spacenoth, which has a sci-fi/futuristic theme: <http://www.arcune.org/start.htm>

At this time though, there is no release of this project. I hope they do well though.

How do you feel about turn-based games like "Heroes of Might and Magic" with their massive army-building and resource management? Do you think there's going to be an open source equivalent of this type of game soon?

I haven't played Heroes of Might and Magic very much. The few times I have played it, I thought it was boring to be honest. I don't like the type of game where one marches armies around a 'large map' and then must 'zoom in' to a different 'battle field' every time a battle takes place. I find games like that to take far too long, and tend to become tedious.

I would prefer a civilization or perhaps colonization type game. FreeCiv is nice, though it's close to being a clone of Civilization II. I'd like an original game that had the same sort of theme as civilization, but with new and innovative rules.

Every online game and community is also a social space. Have you met interesting people through Wesnoth whom you would not have met otherwise? Are there other stories you can tell from the community -- have there been real world meetups, chat rooms, etc.?

I've come into contact with lots of very interesting people through Wesnoth, and have learned a great deal from them. The Wesnoth developers -- many of whom are from Europe -- used the LSM conference in France in 2004 as an opportunity to meet each other. Nekeme, an organization dedicated to developing and promotion Free games was kind enough to sponsor two developers to go. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend, but the developers who did had a very nice time.

We have several IRC channels on irc.freenode.net, and the most popular ones -- #wesnoth and #wesnoth-dev are usually fairly busy with both discussion about Wesnoth, and friendly discussion of other topics.

Also, the developers have tried to make a habit of playing "co-operative multiplayer" games against the AI. During these games, we use the in-game chat facility to get to know each other better, and discuss improvements to the game.

Are there other open source games that have personally impressed you, or that you enjoy playing?

I'm afraid I haven't played many. I like RPGs, and I know lots of people love NetHack and similar games, but I much prefer party-based and generally more storyline-oriented RPGs.

FreeCiv is pretty well-done, though I am happy to play commercial games, and so I think Civilization 3 and Civilization 4 are both technically superior in virtually every regard. I think that's an inevitable problem when you make an Open Source game a straight clone of a commercial game.

Probably the most promising Open Source game I've seen is GalaxyMage, but it still has a long way to go.

Honestly, I don't play that many games. I like playing commercial RPGs, usually console-based, with my wife, and I occasionally like playing the commercial Civilization series. To play an Open Source game, it'd have to be very good, and appeal to my tastes, and I haven't found any Open Source games like that, sadly.

States Challenge IR laws in High Court

High Court proceedings have commenced with every Australian state challenging the legality of the Howard Government's radical new industrial relations workplace reforms.

Acting Employment Protection Minister John Kobelke said the new laws reduced the pay, employment conditions and job security of many Western Australian workers and their families.

The minister said the proceedings challenged the validity of John Howard's Work Choices legislation which came into effect on March 27, this year.

All the state governments have objected to the legislation on the basis that it is unconstitutional and New South Wales led the

combined states' legal challenge.

Mr Kobelke said it will remain to be seen whether the Howard government has the right to overrule established constitutional practise by its reliance on the corporations power to underpin its Work Choices legislation.

The corporations power of the Constitution enables the Commonwealth to regulate foreign, trading or financial corporations but the Acting Minister disputed the corporations power gave the Commonwealth 'a blank cheque' over industrial relations.

John Kobelke said, 'contrary to assertions from Canberra, the scope of the corporations power has yet to be judicially settled.'

"No other Federal Government has attempted to do what the Howard Government has done with the corporations power,' the minister also said.

Mr Kobelke said he believes the High Court challenge will be one of the most significant constitutional cases in modern history and that the Carpenter government opposes the potential ill-effects of the legislation on workers and their families.

"The laws threaten the very essence of federalism and if the Howard Government has its way, the corporations power will be used to sideline the States."

The High Court proceedings concluded yesterday, with a decision not expected until next year.

Racist scuffle on Anti-OBE Teachers' forum

A Western Australian teachers'

website has come under fire by the Education and Training minister for publishing racist comments. Education and Training Minister, Ljiljana Ravlich, today expressed concern about racist, abusive and offensive comments appearing on the anti-outcomes based education website PLATO.

Minister Ravlich said she was disgusted by some of the highly offensive comments made by members belonging to the group, People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes.

'Some of the comments are obscene and, quite frankly, I worry that these people might be teaching our children,' she said.

PLATO has since confirmed the abusive comments were made by a teacher who is employed in the non-government education sector in Western Australia.

The PLATO website was established to express dissent about the controversial Outcome Based Education system after Minister Ravlich insisted it continue to be used despite claims it was ineffective.

Last month the ongoing controversy even prompted a response from Prime Minister Howard who criticized the OBE method of teaching school children used in WA, describing it as 'gobbledegook' and that it could be 'dumbing down' the high school english syllabus.

One member from the school teachers' forum named, 'Fed up teacher,' launched a vicious and racist verbal attack on a member who posted a comment supporting the OBE system.

When the member objected to

being labelled a 'nazi' and the use of the term because her parents had suffered under the nazi regime, her response drew a further personal attack.

The posting by Fed up teacher said, 'the nazis had the right idea, it is a pity they didn't get to your parents before you were conceived, you really are a pathetic piece of trash that somehow escaped the final solution.'

Minister Ravlich condemned the attacks as disgusting and said it was just one of many offensive postings appearing on the website.

'The website is littered with insults, foul language and abusive and racist comments,' said Ms Ravlich.

The minister said PLATO has only about sixty members and as such was not broadly representative of the 'thousands of dedicated and professional teachers in Western Australian schools.

Taiwan MP shoves proposal in mouth

Amid chaos over a proposal about creating direct transport links with mainland China, Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party deputy, Wang Shu-hui, snatched the written proposal and shoved it into her mouth. Opposition members failed to get her to cough it up by pulling her hair. She later spat the proposal out and tore it up. This is the third time that the DPP's actions have stopped a vote over this issue.

During the incident another DPP members, Chuang Ho-tzu, spat at an opposition member.

The amendment to the Statute Governing the Relations Between

the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area would have permitted direct transit between mainland China and Taiwan, which now has to be routed through an intermediate—usually Hong Kong. Opening such links is supported by the opposition pan-blue alliance, which controls the legislature, but opposed by the independence leaning DPP government.

Direct transport links between Taiwan and mainland China have been banned after the two sides split amid a bloody civil war in 1949. The Communist government in the mainland and opposition politicians in Taiwan supporting Chinese reunification have vowed to lift the ban, but their efforts have repeatedly been blocked by the ruling DPP, which cites national security concerns.

Scientists discover prehistoric cave with unknown lifeforms

Scientists in Israel say that a cave containing an ecosystem with unknown lifeforms have been discovered in the Israeli city of Ramle. The cave was found when miners were drilling in a rock quarry.

"Until now eight species of animals were found in the cave, all of them unknown to science," said a biologist at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr Hanan Dimantman. He also said that all of the lifeforms were found alive except for one.

At least eight species of unknown lifeforms were found which closely resemble scorpions. Dimantman also said that the cave has been sealed off from the outside world, receiving no sunlight for at least 5 million years, when parts of Israel were under the Mediterranean Sea. The lifeforms consist of four freshwater and seawater species

and at least four terrestrial species. Scientists believe that they are related. Bacteria was also found, which scientists say served as food for the lifeforms. DNA tests have shown these lifeforms to be "unique" and unknown in science.

"Every species we examined had no eyes which means they lost their sight due to evolution," added Dimantman. "This is a cave of fantastic biodiversity."

The cave has been closed off so that researchers can examine it further.

Today in History

1495 - Friar John Cor recorded the first known batch of scotch whisky.

1779 - Benedict Arnold was court-martialed for malfeasance.

1922 - A police force in Northern Ireland called the Royal Ulster Constabulary was founded.

1938 - The first Superman comic was published.

1980 - The Cable News Network began broadcasting.

June 02 is International Children's Day, Madaraka Day in Kenya.

Quote of the Day

"Surprise becomes effective when we suddenly face the enemy at one point with far more troops than he expected. This type of numerical superiority is quite distinct from numerical superiority in general: it is the most powerful medium in the art of war." ~ Carl von Clausewitz

Word of the Day

limpid; adj

Definition

1. Clear, particularly transparent or bright.

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