



Top Stories

Iraq counting ballots

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Explosion outside Trinidad nightclub wounds more than 10

An explosion outside a popular nightclub in Trinidad's capital, Port-of-Spain, has wounded at least 10. Officials are unsure of the cause of the explosion and no group has yet claimed responsibility.

Featured story

Snakehead fish appear in large numbers near Potomac River

A week-end fisherman reported the presence of large numbers of an invasive fish that threaten the eco-system of waters near the U.S. capitol.

Wikipedia Current Events

• The Iraqi people go to the polls to vote on whether to approve the proposed constitution, amidst heavy security.

Wikipedia Current Events

• Crown Princess Mary of Denmark gives birth to her first child, a 3.5 kg boy, at 0157 local time (2357 UTC Friday). The prince, likely to be named Christian, is second in line of succession to Europe's oldest crown.

Deceased Indonesian man had suspected case of bird flu

An Indonesian died of what is suspected to be bird flu, said an official yesterday. The man had symptoms of bird flu and had some contact with chickens but tested negative on his first test.

Indonesia currently more than 85 suspected bird flu cases and two confirmed and alive cases.

There is a possibility that the H5N1 virus might mutate and adopt strands than make it highly contagious and lethal to humans. An example of such an epidemic is the 1918 disaster that killed millions around the globe.

Researchers say that Tamiflu might not be enough to hold the virus back.

Malawi appeals for further humanitarian aid

Bingu wa Mutharika, president of Malawi, has declared the massive food shortages in his country a national disaster. The declaration comes on the heels of mounting criticism from his opposition as

well as church groups in Malawi that have urged him to do more to highlight the problem. Mutharika has also been criticised for denying reports of casualties from hunger-related illnesses. The United Nations World Food Program has welcomed the declaration, stating that he is finally acknowledging the seriousness of the situation. The UN estimates that five million people will be in need of aid in the coming year.

The president has noted that all 28 districts of his country are affected and that, in addition to the 300,000 tons of food being imported from South Africa, another 144,000 will be needed.

"We are facing a national disaster affecting the lives of our people," he said.

The food shortages have been blamed on one of the worst harvests Malawi has experienced in over a decade as well as the growing HIV/AIDS crisis. Because Malawi is a landlocked country whose economy is almost entirely dependent on agriculture, poor harvests can have drastic impacts on the population. Most of the country feeds themselves through subsistence farming. Additionally, during the mid-eighties and nineties Malawi took in over a million refugees from Mozambique, which placed a significant strain on the economy but also opened it to foreign aid.

The United Nations has attempted to restructure Malawi's economy

through programs from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Relief agencies have been scrambling to deal with the crisis. UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, Per Engebak has said, "The numbers of malnourished children are many times higher than the normal emergency threshold."

It is predicted that the disaster will be worse than the humanitarian crisis that plagued the country three years ago. Admissions to Nutrition Rehabilitation Units, run by a coalition of aid agencies as well as the Ministry of Health, have risen by 25 percent.

Church groups in the country have been assisting in the emergency. The Council of Churches in Malawi, which brings together 22 denominations, has been applying pressure to the government. In addition to the food crisis, Rev Matiya Nkhoma has highlighted the problems of political instability in the country.

The food crisis is not just a danger to Malawi. The UN estimates that 12 million people are in need of aid in Southern Africa.

Iraq counting ballots

The voting ended on Saturday in Iraq as a historical moment while ballots on their proposed draft constitution are counted. Security during election day was tight, and few incidents of violence were reported.

Electoral officials estimated that as many as 10 million of Iraq's eligible 15.5 million voters cast ballots, which would yield a

turnout of around 65 percent. In the January election which approved their interim government, 58 percent of voters turned out.

President Bush said in his weekly radio address today that the weekend election is a critical step forward in the quest for democracy in Iraq. For the draft constitution to be approved after the months of negotiations by lawmakers in Iraq's transitional National Assembly, a majority of voters must support it. With what is believed to be strong support in Shiite and Kurdish communities, who together account for more than three-quarters of the population, the 50% threshold is expected to be met.

The fate of the document, however, may be in the hands of a few provinces where Sunnis may muster enough "No" votes to block it. The constitution will fail if it is rejected by two-thirds of the voters in at least three of the country's 18 provinces. With many Sunni Arab groups opposing the document, rejection is considered possible in four provinces where Sunnis account for the majority of the population.

A rejection of the draft constitution would be viewed by coalition members as serious blow to the political evolution in Iraq that followed the U.S. led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003. The transitional assembly would be dissolved, and the process of writing a new constitution would have to start all over after a new assembly could be elected in December. By contrast, if the constitution is approved, a vote would be held in December for the establishment of a new

government.

A new, permanent government, could possibly clear the way for the United States and its coalition allies to begin a withdrawal of troops from Iraq.

The election process has gone smoothly according to Carina Perelli, the head of the U.N. team providing technical assistance to the Iraqi government. Election officials said partial results from the vote could be available as early as Sunday, but that it would take several days for the result of the election to become clear.

Crown Princess Mary of Denmark gives birth to male child

Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary of Denmark has given birth to a healthy baby boy at a Copenhagen hospital at approximately 1:57 am local time this morning, ending many months of waiting for the Royal Family, the Danish public and much of the world. The baby weighed in at 3.5 kilograms and 51 centimeters long.

The royal pregnancy was made public on 25 April 2005, and in that period, many Danes speculated the gender of the child. Had the child been a female, she would be ineligible to succeed the throne, but a male would be allowed to immediately succeed the throne. The Crown Princess had experienced contractions in mid-September. The royal couple has not announced his name, but it is likely to be Christian in line with Danish tradition. Since Christian II, who died in 1559, Danish kings have alternately carried the name Christian or

Frederik.

The child will become heir apparent when his parents ascend to the Danish throne as King Frederik X and Queen Mary.

Grenade set off outside Tajik ministry

A woman set off a hand grenade outside the Tajikistan Ministry of Emergencies, killing herself.

The incident, which happened on October 9, has not been claimed by any groups. It is unknown whether the attack, and two similar happenings earlier this year, were by a terrorist group. Some Western diplomats suggest the first two bombs were linked to business disputes or political vendettas.

The woman died in an ambulance, en route to the hospital. The grenade was hidden in her handbag.

Joachim to attempt breaking record for static cycling

On 18 October 2005 at 11 am, multi-Guinness World Record holder Suresh Joachim will attempt to break the world record for the longest time in a static cycling marathon. He will attempt to pedal on the same bicycle for 100-hours at the Metrocentre in the UK, with only 15 minutes breaks every four hours.

The current record is held jointly by Niels Rietveld and Edwin Snijders, both of the Netherlands, who set the record at Sports Studio Buiten in Almere, Netherlands. The duo cycled simultaneously for 77 hours and 15 minutes, from 30 April to 3 May

2004.

If successful in his 100-hour marathon, he will beat the previous record by 22-hours and 45-minutes. The riding will hopefully cease 22 October at 3 pm.

Suresh recently beat records for longest time ironing while standing up in Brampton, Ontario, and longest time watching television, shown on Live with Regis and Kelly in New York City. He has over thirty other records to his name. Joachim lives in Mississauga, Ontario.

Joachim's record attempts are used as fundraisers for the Universal Fund For Suffering Children.

Study finds marijuana use leads to brain development in rats

In the November issue of the Journal of Clinical Investigation, researchers announce that they have found that cannabinoids promoted a generation of new neurons in rats' hippocampi. The study held true for both a plant-derived and a synthetic cannabinoid. The hippocampus is a part of the brain that contributes to learning and memory. In particular, it has been shown that the hippocampus is essential for the formation of new episodic memories.

"This is quite a surprise, chronic use of marijuana may actually improve learning memory when the new neurons in the hippocampus can mature in two or three months," said Xia Zhang, with the Neuropsychiatry Research Unit of the University of

Saskatchewan.

"Our results were obtained from rats, and there's a big difference between rats and humans," added Zhang, "So, I don't really don't know yet if our findings apply to humans. But our results indicate that the clinical use of marijuana could make people feel better by helping control anxiety and depression."

Zhang and his co-workers performed behavioral tests on two purified cannabinoids. The test results indicated that these two cannabinoids have anti-anxiety and antidepressant-like effects in rats that may depend on the ability of cannabinoids to promote the production of new neurons in the hippocampus. Marijuana contains a complex mixture of chemicals including cannabinoids and may have somewhat different behavioral effects than the purified cannabinoids tested so far.

Previous studies examining the affects of cannabis have highlighted negative aspects of the drug's use, such as short term memory difficulties, increased heart rate, nausea, and (in a very small percentage of people) hallucinations. Long term studies about cannabis use tend to be controversial as the data is seen to be biased or flawed. The most agreed upon effect of long term cannabis use is lung damage. However, proponents argue that the correlation between cannabis consumption and lung cancer is misleading suggesting that cannabis use may correlate with tobacco use or that the data is not being properly analyzed.

Explosion outside Trinidad nightclub wounds more than

10

An explosion outside a popular nightclub in Trinidad's capital, Port-of-Spain, has wounded at least 10. Officials are unsure of the cause of the explosion and no group has yet claimed responsibility. This is the fourth such bombing to occur in the area -- all the bombings have occurred near the same time each month. The explosion occurred just after 7:00 p.m. AST (2300 UTC) outside the "Smoky and Bunty" bar along a popular strip of bars and clubs.

"This is the worst type of attack on our city and against our citizens," said Minister of National Security Martin Joseph during a press conference. Joseph also announced that five suspects were detained and being questioned by police. "What is different on this occasion is that there have been arrests."

The United States Department of State and the Canadian government have issued travel warnings in response to the recent violence in the area.

Iraq to hold constitution vote today

Iraqis will vote on a referendum for the nation's proposed constitution today. It will be the second vote in the nation since the United States occupation. Local police and troops, as well as foreign troops will be on patrol to prevent violent insurgency. Schools, government offices, and the Baghdad airport are closed. Borders are shut to non-essential traffic. Votes are being recorded at 6000 polling stations throughout the country, even in the volatile Anbar province.

Most prominent politicians are endorsing the constitution; but some are not. President Jalal Talabani has appealed for a Yes vote, and called on Sunni insurgents to not disrupt the voting process. Dick Cheney, the United States Vice President calls it "vital to get a constitution in place." Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Shi'ite spiritual leader, as well as Kurdish leaders are also encouraging a yes vote. The Shi'ites and Kurds make up about eighty percent of Iraq's population, so it is widely believed that the constitution will be ratified.

Election officials in Iraq say as many as 65 percent of eligible voters have turned out to vote so far. A simple majority is needed to approve the constitution. Election results are not expected for another five days.

Australian Minister 'leaks' draft of anti-terror bill

Jon Stanhope, the ACT Chief Minister, has posted a confidential draft of the proposed Australian anti-terror bill to his website. Mr Stanhope says he hopes posting draft counter-terrorism laws on his website will open community debate about the issue and has stated that he will not comply with instructions from the Commonwealth to remove the document. The Australian Labor Party is backing his actions.

The main impetus for the action appears to be the short amount of time the Senate committee will have to debate the bill; just one day. In particular the Greens Senator Bob Brown has accused the Government of engineering the circumstances that only allow

a one-day inquiry.

"It was an extraordinary premeditated attack on the Senate committee system and effectively made the committee system a farce." said Senator Brown. Others, including the Australian Law Council, have expressed concerns about the scope of the proposed bill.

However Prime Minister John Howard has defended the process saying "It's important for the security of Australia, it was unanimously agreed to by me with the eight Labor premiers and chief ministers, and we can't have any undue delay that the legislation will be exposed for public scrutiny and it will reflect that agreement."

Concerns with the Bill

The concern with the bill has centered on a number of areas: A so-called "shoot to kill" policy, especially in the wake of the shooting of an innocent Brazilian man in London.

The inclusion and definition of sedition, which in the bill may include "to bring the sovereign [i.e. the Queen] into hatred or contempt", or to "urge disaffection" with the Australian Government.

The ability of judges to make decisions outside of the court system.

Today in History

456 - Magister militum Ricimer defeated Emperor Avitus at Piacenza and became master of the Western Roman Empire. He spent the rest of his life as the Patrician, ruling through a number of puppet emperors.

1793 - Marie Antoinette was guillotined at the Place de la Révolution in Paris at the height of the French Revolution.

1813 - The Sixth Coalition attacked Napoleon and the First French Empire in the Battle of Leipzig, the largest conflict in the Napoleonic Wars.

1940 - World War II: Hans Frank (pictured) established the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest Jewish ghetto in occupied Poland.

1978 - Karol Józef Wojtyła, a cardinal from Kraków, Poland, became Pope John Paul II, the first non-Italian pope since the 16th century and the first ever from a Slavic country.

October 16 is World Food Day

Quote of the Day

"Behold the believers of all beliefs! Whom do they hate most? Him who breaketh up their tables of values, the breaker, the law-breaker — he, however, is the creator. Companions, the creator seeketh, not corpses — and not herds or believers either. Fellow-creators the creator seeketh — those who grave new values on new tables." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

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