



Top Stories

No final embrace for condemned man

Convicted Australian drug trafficker Van Tuong Nguyen has been denied permission to embrace his mother and twin brother before his execution.

Bush speaks of goals for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, decries calls for timetable

U.S. President Bush stated his commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq and outlined goals for training Iraqi security forces that will guide such withdrawal. As expected, he did not set a timeframe for this withdrawal.

Featured story

First face transplant performed on French woman

Surgeons in France have performed a face transplant operation on a French woman who had lost her nose, lips and chin after being savaged by a dog.

Wikipedia Current Events

- South Africa becomes the fifth country in the world where same-sex marriages are recognized, after Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The Constitutional Court declared that current marriage laws are unconstitutional and must be changed within a year.
- The European Central Bank raises interest rates for the first time in five years, from 2.0% to 2.25%. This will affect the cost of money in the twelve Eurozone

Wikipedia Current Events

countries.

- A Buddhist manuscript written on birch bark in the first or second century CE passes from a private collection to the University of Washington library, becoming part of the Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project.
- Van Tuong Nguyen is executed by hanging in Singapore.
- Muriel Degauque is identified as the Belgian suicide bomber who killed herself in Iraq on November 9, 2005.

First quantum byte created

The Institute of Quantum Optics and Quantum Information at the University of Innsbruck in Austria has created an entanglement of eight quantum particles, yielding a quantum byte or "qubyte", or eight qubits. This is an important step toward the realization of a practical quantum computer, which would use superposed quantum states to perform complex calculations. A detailed writeup of this work is available in English and German. The formal paper was published in the December 1st issue of Nature.

Contributors to the breakthrough are researchers from IQOQI under the supervision of Rainer Blatt and Hartmut Häffner in coaction with Otfried Gühne and Wolfgang Dür of the Innsbruck research group directed by Hans Jürgen Briegelhave.

With a trap using magnetic fields

they captured eight calcium ions, lined them up, and set them up in "W states" using a complicated laser technology. A quantum byte with eight ions provides a computing matrix of 65,536 (0-255 x 0-255) elements that are mostly independent. It is suggested that the method should be scalable so that the number of ions could be increased. This experiment proves that the kind of ion traps used in Innsbruck are the most promising technology for the realization of large computing matrices.

Australian drug trafficker to be executed in Singapore tomorrow

Convicted Australian drug trafficker Van Nguyen will be executed at Singapore's Changi prison tomorrow at 6:00am SGT (8:00pm tonight UTC, 9:00am AEST). Nguyen was caught with 396.2 grams of heroin, more than 25 times the amount that mandates a death sentence.

Following an appeal to the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong by Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Nguyen was able to hold hands with his mother and brother as he said goodbye for the last time.

Supporters will hold a vigil outside the prison before his death.

Former UK Law Lord urges de-proscription of Iranian opposition group MEK

Former UK Law Lord Slynn of Hadley, along with 1,300 British lawyers, urged Home Secretary

Jack Straw in a press conference at the British House of Lords in London to remove the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group, from the EU's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

They voiced their protest in an statement called " A Call for Justice". The statement reads: "... For detailed reasons, which are beyond the realm of this statement, renowned international legal experts have concluded that there is no legal basis for the proscription of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran - PMOI. Terror tag on the Mujahedin is the by-product of the failed policy of appeasement with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Continuing the MEK proscription is nothing by more concession to the mullahs with serious consequences both for the region and world peace. "

The MEK is militant organisation seeking to overthrow the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Apart from the EU, the United States also consider the MEK to be a Foreign Terrorist Organisation.

No final embrace for condemned man

Convicted Australian drug trafficker Van Tuong Nguyen has been denied permission to embrace his mother and twin brother before his execution.

Following a request from Nguyen's mother, Kim Nguyen, and supported by strong international pressure, Singapore declined a contact visit, but will allow them to hold hands.

In a statement released by Singapore's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, government officials said contact visits were too traumatic and destabilising for both prisoners and family members.

In response, Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, said, "My view is that a prisoner who is to be executed confronts the greatest of all destabilisation to have his life taken away from him, so I don't really identify with that statement."

Mr Downer then conceded that "it'll perhaps be very meagre compensation, of course it will be, but it will be nice that they can touch each other...it's better than nothing."

An unnamed Singaporean lawyer claimed contact would be made through a hole in the wall. "I think they will bring him to another room and there will be an aperture through which they can reach," the lawyer said.

The 25-year-old Australian man was convicted of trafficking 396 grams of heroin, an offence which carries a mandatory death penalty under Singapore law. He received no remissions for a full confession.

He will be executed by hanging at 09:00 AEDT tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Australians attended protest vigils in Sydney and Melbourne tonight. Tim Goodwin from Amnesty International told the Sydney crowd that the death penalty is not an acceptable punishment. "It is ineffective, it is dangerous, it is extreme and it is the most barbaric, brutalising punishment," he said.

Iraqi rebels seize control of Ramadi's inner city

Reuters reports that around 400

armed men launched an attack on the town of Ramadi, seizing control of various streets in the inner city. They allegedly set up checkpoints and distributed leaflets declaring that Al-Qaeda in Iraq, a group led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was taking over the city.

Reuters reports that there were no U.S. forces in the streets and that the the U.S. military did not immediately respond to a request for information about the situation.

Ramadi is at the south-west of the so-called Sunni Triangle and its population is around 400,000.

Orrin Hatch accidentally compares Iraq to Vietnam

While discussing his reasons for opposing immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) had a slip of the tongue, accidentally referring to Iraq as Vietnam. "The Democratic Party seems to be taken over by the Michael Moore contingent in their attitude toward Vietnam, and they continually call for a withdrawal of troops at a time when we haven't finished the job." Hatch was speaking on Fox news. His spokesman, Peter Carr, said that Senator Hatch became confused because he had been reading an article earlier in the day comparing the two conflicts.

Hatch has been a Utah Senator since 1976, when he defeated Sen. Frank Moss (D) on a platform of term limits for U.S. Senators. He is currently running against Democrat Pete Ashdown for another term, and is expected to win reelection.

First face transplant performed on French woman

Surgeons in France have performed a face transplant operation on a French woman who had lost her nose, lips and chin after being savaged by a dog. According to Iain Hutchison, an oral-facial surgeon at Barts and the London Hospital, the transplant is the first one to use skin from another person.

Doctors say the woman's new face will be a "hybrid" between her donor's face and her own face before the attack. In the five hour long operation, the donor's tissues, muscles, arteries and veins were attached to the patient's lower face. It is more favourable to use skin from another person's face instead of skin from another part of the patient's body, as the texture and colour of the skin are more likely to match.

A statement released by the hospital in Amiens said that the 38-year-old patient, who wishes to remain anonymous, has not been able to eat or speak properly since the attack in May this year. The woman was reportedly in "excellent general health" and her graft looked normal.

Ethical concerns, psychological impact, concerns relating to immunosuppression and consequences of technical failure have prevented teams from performing face transplant operations in the past, even though it has been technically possible to carry out such procedures for years.

Mr Hutchison warned of several problems with face transplants, such as blood vessels in the donated tissue clotting and

immunosuppressants failing or increasing the patient's risk of cancer. He also pointed out ethical issues with the possibility of beating heart donors carrying on breathing after the ventilator is switched off.

According to Stephen Wigmore, chair of British Transplantation Society's ethics committee, it is unknown to what extent facial expressions will function in the long term. He said that it is not certain whether a patient could be left worse off in the case of a face transplant failing.

Mr Michael Earley, a member of the Royal College of Surgeon's facial transplantation working party, commented that if successful, the transplant would be "a major breakthrough in facial reconstruction" and "a major step forward for the facially disfigured."

Bush speaks of goals for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, decries calls for timetable

U.S. President Bush re-stated his commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq and outlined goals for training Iraqi security forces that will guide such withdrawal. The presidential speech followed from a newly released White House document titled the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq.

Speaking to Midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland on Wednesday, November 30, the President said "As the Iraqi forces gain experience and the political process advances, we will be able to decrease our troop levels in Iraq without losing our capability to defeat the terrorists. These decisions about troop levels will be driven by the conditions on the ground in Iraq and the good

judgment of our commanders."

The strategy outlined is what the administration has been following since 2003, claimed White House Press Secretary Scott McCellen, and the lengthy document is simply an unclassified version for the public to review.

As was expected, Bush did not set a timeframe for U.S. troop withdrawal, which is in direct opposition to recent calls for such a timetable by congressional leaders.

He characterized those calling for a withdrawal deadline "sincere, but... sincerely wrong." Bush continued, "setting an artificial deadline to withdraw would vindicate the terrorists' tactics of beheadings and suicide bombings and mass murder -- and invite new attacks on America." These calls for a clear strategy outlining the administration's plan to accomplish its goals come after growing US casualties, continuing violence in Iraq and a growing public dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the war.

Bush admitted that there had been "some setbacks in training Iraq's security forces", and that their performance is still "uneven in some areas". Earlier, in a congressional briefing, Gen Casey, the top US commander in Iraq had said that so far only one Iraqi battalion out of 120 being trained was capable of mounting operations without support from US forces. The strategy document released also stated that "It's not realistic to expect a fully functioning democracy able to defeat its enemies three years after Saddam is finally removed from power.", prompting questions about when the administration

made such a determination. In the White House press briefing Scott McClellan did not directly answer a question about which, if any of the short, medium and long term goals set out in the strategy has been achieved, saying that "I want to say we've made real progress on all three fronts of the strategy for victory".

Senator John Kerry (D-Mass) said the president was ignoring what his own generals are telling him: "That the large presence of American forces on the ground that feeds the insurgency". Democratic politicians generally dismissed the speech as a repeat of old rhetoric.

Harry Reid (D-Nev) , the Senate minority leader, accused Mr Bush of "recycling his tired rhetoric of 'stay the course'." He had "again missed an opportunity to lay out a real strategy for success in Iraq that will bring our troops safely home".

Steve Clemons said Mr Bush's war aims failed to address the strains on US armed forces imposed by Iraq. "It's a very expansive commitment and it blows by the structural questions," He added that those problems could only be resolved by a withdrawal, changing the current rules limiting the frequency of combat tours for individual units, or by moving towards a draft. He said Mr Bush was trying to escape those problems by portraying Iraqi forces as more ready than they actually are. Steve Clemons is director of the American Strategy Programme at the New America Foundation.

Washington spends more than \$6bn a month to keep its forces in Iraq. More than 2,100 Americans have been killed since the March

2003 invasion.

US Gross Domestic Product grew during third quarter of 2005

The US government released a preliminary report on the US economy today. The report, produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, states that the economy grew by 4.3 percent in the third quarter of 2005. In the second quarter of 2005 real GDP increased 3.3 percent.

The rise is attributed to increases in personal consumption (4.2 percent), equipment and software (10.8 percent), government spending, and residential fixed investment (8.4 percent). Imports, which deduct from the GDP, also increased. Exports however increased.

Government consumption expenditures increased 8.1 percent. National defense had an increase of 10.3 percent. Nondefense spending increased 3.6 percent.

Gross national product, which better reflects the economy in from the employee's perspective, increased 4.4 percent in the third quarter.

Co-creator of Berenstain Bears dies at 82

Stan Berenstain, co-creator of the popular Berenstain Bears children's books, has died due to complications from cancer at age 82. Along with his wife, Jan Berenstain, Stan and Jan Berenstain published over 200 books aimed at teaching children to read and helping them with lessons such as sharing, new siblings.

The first Berenstain Bears book was published in 1962 and titled "The Big Honey Hunt". With the help of head of children's publishing at Random House, author Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, the Berenstains created a franchise that drew millions of young readers.

Until 1997, when they hired an employee to run the company's computer, Mr. Berenstain and his family managed the entire ursine enterprise, which has branched out into two television series, videos, stage musicals, toys, cereal and other products.

According to an interview of the Berenstain Bears official website, Papa Bear is based on Stan, Mama on Jan; Stan clarifies that he's "not as stupid" as Papa.

Stan fed his interest in drawing as a child, by drawing on paper bags and cardboard.

Today in History

1804 - The Crown of Charlemagne was used at the coronation of Napoleon I of France at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

1823 - U.S. President James Monroe issued the Monroe Doctrine, a proclamation of opposition to European colonialism in the New World.

1942 - The Manhattan Project: Scientists led by Enrico Fermi initiated the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction in the experimental nuclear reactor Chicago Pile-1.

1971 - Abu Dhabi, Ajmān, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaiwain merged to form the United Arab Emirates.

1975 - The Pathet Lao overthrew the royalist government in Vientiane, forcing King Savang Vatthana to abdicate, and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Quote of the Day

"I do not believe that friendship today can flower out — can come out — of political life. I do believe that if there is something like a political life-to-be — to remain for us, in this world of technology — then it begins with friendship."

~ Ivan Illich

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