



Top Stories

Australian Guantanamo detainee David Hicks gets British citizenship

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

US President Bush says 30,000 civilians killed in Iraq war

United States President George W. Bush put a number on the death toll of Iraqi civilians, saying "30,000 Iraqis, more or less, have died as a result of the initial incursion and the ongoing violence against Iraqis..."

Featured story

Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney not seeking second term

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

Wikipedia Current Events

• U.S. President George W. Bush admits responsibility for going to war in Iraq in 2003 on the basis of faulty intelligence, but maintains his decision was still the right choice.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Doctors in Pakistan marvel at the survival of Naqsha Bibi, rescued last Saturday, 63 days after she was buried in the 8 October 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

•The President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announces that Brazil will clear its IMF debt of \$15.5bn two years early.

•11 Hindus have been sentenced to life imprisonment for their roles in the murder of Muslims in the 2002 Gujarat violence.

•An Israeli Air-Strike in the Gaza Strip leaves four Palestinians dead. Israel claims that all four were militants and were about to launch a rocket attack into Israel.

•Israel has approved further expansion of the Jewish Settlements within the West bank. A further 300 Jewish houses will be added to the Maale Adumim settlement.

•The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, describes the holocaust as a myth. He also said that Europe should house the Jews of the world, rather than the Palestinians.

•In Finland interior ministry asks police to investigate PAF, a gambling association of Åland due to illegal internet gaming in mainland Finland

Arias leads opinion polls in Costa Rica

A cid-gallup poll shows former head of state Óscar Arias Sánchez

is currently atop in opinion polls as the likely next president with 45% in the poll. Arias declared his intention to run after the legislature decided to bring back presidential re-election in 2003. He will be running for the National Liberation Party. He has been outspoken in favor of the ratification of CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement).

Others receiving votes include Ottón Solís with 20% (Citizens Action Party, PAC), Ricardo Toledo with 10% (Social-Christian Unity Party, PUSC), Otto Guevara with 8% (Libertarian Movement, ML), and Antonio Álvarez Desanti with 6% (Union for Change, UPC).

Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney not seeking second term

Earlier today at 6pm EST, Mitt Romney, the Governor of Massachusetts announced he would not seek a second-term for the highest office in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The announcement did not come as a surprise due to the fact the Romney announced he would make an announcement on his political future last month. Also, Romney has also been visiting key primary states for the 2008 presidential election and during the 2004 presidential election, Republicans told the press, "to keep an eye on Romney."

Romney was elected in 2003, replacing Jane Swift and his term

ends in January 2007. If he does decide to run for the presidency, he will have ample time when the terms ends. So far, Romney has denied that he is running for President and may possible change his mind and run for re-election. He also said that he endorse his Lieutenant Governor, Kerry Healey if she decides to run for governor.

Romney, born in Detroit, is the son of former Governor of Michigan George W. Romney. Becoming governor isn't Romney's first foray into politics; Romney ran against senior Massachusetts senator and Kennedy family member, Ted Kennedy. Romney won 41% percent of the vote against Kennedy in the closest election in Kennedy's entire tenure in the United States Senate. Romney was also CEO of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee which was in charge of planning the 2002 Winter Olympics from 1999 to 2002, he took charge after the 2002 Winter Olympic bid scandal. He also sat on the board of Massachusetts-based office supply giant, Staples, Inc.

Siméus responds to the dismissal of Haitian justices

On Wednesday, two days after provisional prime minister Boniface Alexandre announced that five supreme court justices had been dismissed, presidential candidate Dumarsais Siméus responded critically to the decision. Siméus said that it is, "...a sad and scary day for Haiti, for the rights of our 9 million citizens and for the future of freedom, democracy and separation of powers in Haiti." Some have attributed the firing of the justices to the decision by the court to allow Siméus to be on the ballot for president. The decision

has been reached twice, most recently on December 8.

Siméus characterized the firings as a violation of the separation of powers, claiming that they are motivated by a desire to obtain greater power in the government. According to Siméus, "judges of the Supreme Court and the Courts of Appeal are appointed life. Their term begins at the time they take their oath of office. The Supreme Court justices are appointed by the President from a list submitted by the Senate of three persons per court seat.

They may be removed from office only because of a legally determined abuse of authority or be suspended following an indictment leveled against them. They may not be reassigned, without their consent, even in the case of a promotion. Their service may be terminated during their term of office only in the event of a duly determined permanent physical or mental incapacity."

Israel preparing for attack on alleged Iranian nuclear sites

The London Times has reported that, according to military sources, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has ordered Israel's armed forces to be prepared by the end of March for an attack on alleged secret uranium enrichment sites in Iran.

Israel has officially denied that it plans to attack Iran. However, Sharon warned, "Israel—and not only Israel—cannot accept a nuclear Iran. We have the ability to deal with this and we're making all the necessary preparations to be ready for such a situation."

Israel is now at "G" readiness, which is the highest stage.

Israel's general election is on March 28, which coincides with the March deadline set by Sharon. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is currently the frontrunner to lead the Likud party, claimed that if Sharon does not attack "then when I form the new Israeli government, we'll do what we did in the past against Saddam's reactor, which gave us 20 years of tranquillity".

The uranium enrichment sites are said to be concealed in civilian locations.

Uniting Church at Auburn destroyed by fire

The Uniting Church at Auburn in Sydney's inner west has been destroyed by fire overnight.

According to a press release by New South Wales Police, police and fire brigade personnel arrived at the church at approximately 1:35 a.m. local time to discover the church well alight.

Around 30 firefighters fought the blaze for two hours before bringing it under control.

The church is located near an Islamic centre and police are not sure if the fire is linked to the racial violence in Sydney over the past two days. Police are treating the fire as suspicious and will be continuing their investigations today.

ALP appoints SLW Group for 2007 election campaign

The Australian Labor Party has appointed SLW Group to run it's advertisement campaign for the 2007 Australian Legislative Election.

STW Group was successful in gaining the \$10 million account it was revealed today. The team dubbed "07" will be lead by senior executives, Luke Dunkerley and Neil Lawrence.

ALP campaign director Tim Gartell said that Lawrence had a wealth of experience with political campaigns, being part of the advertisement team responsible for the election of a Victorian Labor government in the 1980s. He also added that Lawrence had worked on the campaign for election of Australian Republican Movement representatives to the Australian Constitutional Convention in 1998.

Present polling data from Newspoll suggests that the ALP is beginning to regain support in the electorate, narrowly polling a higher percentage of primary support since late October, 2005, ending almost 10 months of being behind John Howard's coalition government in polling.

CPJ names and shames countries who jail journalists

The non-profit Committee to Protect Journalists has published its 2005 list of countries that have jailed journalists. Top of the list is China, claimed to be holding 32 of the 125 editors, writers, and photo-journalists detained during the year. This is the seventh consecutive year that China has been top of the CPJ list.

Following not so far behind China is the communist state of Cuba, accused of detaining 24 journalists. In third and fourth place are the African nations of Eritrea (15 journalists detained) and Ethiopia (13 journalists detained).

Analysis of the detailed breakdown in the CPJ report reveals that they rank the United States alongside the Junta of Myanmar (Formerly known as Burma) in sixth place on the list with five detained journalists each. According to CPJ, they have excluded journalists only briefly detained such as New York Times reporter Judith Miller, instead focusing on those who are detained longer term.

The majority of charges and accusations that have been levelled against journalists are related to "anti-state" activities such as revealing state secrets, and acting against the interests of the state. The report does not include journalists who have not officially been confirmed as detained by a state.

Police investigates PAF in Finland

PAF, Ålands gambling monopoly, has been challenged again by the Finnish authorities because of an attempt to offer internet gambling to the Finnish mainland. In Mainland Finland, the state-owned gambling institution RAY ("Raha-automaattiyhdistys" in Finnish) holds a legal monopoly of gambling. The RAY give all profit to welfare.

At the beginning of this year, the PAF was sentenced for violation of gambling law. On December 14, the Interior ministry of Finland put PAF under police investigation again. Finland's interior minister Kari Rajamäki said that the PAF has continued its gambling in Finland and ignored its last sentence.

Åland is an autonomous part of Finland.

Jury convicts Murdoch of

outback murder

A jury has delivered a unanimous guilty verdict in the Darwin trial of the man charged with the murder of missing British backpacker Peter Falconio.

It took the jury more than eight hours to reach a verdict. 47-year-old Broome mechanic, Bradley John Murdoch, has also been found guilty of the assault and deprivation of liberty of Mr Falconio's girlfriend Joanne Lees. Mr Falconio's body has never been found.

Murdoch flagged down Mr Falconio and Ms Lees on a remote Central Australian highway in July 14, 2001. He then shot Mr Falconio and bound Ms Lees with cable ties and threatened her with a gun.

Telling jurors that he "entirely agreed" with their verdict, Chief Justice Brian Martin sentenced Murdoch to a mandatory life sentence. Murdoch's defence lawyer, Grant Algie, indicated an appeal would be lodged against the conviction. "Obviously we are disappointed with the result," he said.

Outside court, Ms Lees said she hoped Murdoch would tell her and Falconio's family the location of her partner's body. "Today marks an intense period of distress for myself and the Falconio family. This will enable us to take another step (forward)," she said.

The eight-week trial heard from 85 witnesses and had more than 300 exhibits tendered. The court heard that Mr Falconio and Ms Lees were travelling around Australia when they were flagged down by Murdoch. Murdoch told them he saw sparks coming out of the exhaust of the couple's orange

Kombi van and took Mr Falconio to the back of the vehicle to show him. Ms Lees heard a gunshot before Murdoch bound her hands with a pair of cable ties. She managed to escape the van, and hid in bushes for hours until she flagged down a road train.

DNA matching Murdoch's was found on the T-shirt Ms Lees was wearing when she was found. The court heard it was 150 quadrillion times more likely to match the DNA of Murdoch than any other person in the Northern Territory. Matching DNA was also found on the gear stick of the van and inside the cable ties.

In his defence, Murdoch claimed he had nothing to do with the crime. He admitted to the fact he was a drug-runner, detailing numerous trips across Australia. His former drug-running partner also gave evidence, saying he believed Murdoch was filmed at a truckstop after Mr Falconio was murdered.

Murdoch has been in prison since August 2002. He was arrested in Port Augusta over the abduction and rape of two women in South Australia. He was acquitted of those charges, but immediately arrested over the Falconio case.

Australian Guantanamo detainee David Hicks gets British citizenship

Australian Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks has won British citizenship, opening the door for a possible bid to have him freed from the US detention facility in Cuba.

Justice Lawrence Collins of the British High Court has overturned the British Government's refusal of citizenship to Hicks, whose mother

was born in England. Justice Collins said the Government had "no power to withhold or deprive citizenship".

Justice Collins said: "In my view it would be improper to fail to give assistance which otherwise would have been given, simply because the claimant was believed to be involved in terrorism and has not had any previous connection with this country," he said.

Hicks' lawyer, Stephen Grosz, said the decision was a breakthrough. He said there was now no reason why Hicks should not enjoy the same protection as the nine other British citizens released without charge from Guantanamo Bay on representations of the British Government.

The British Government has repeatedly condemned Guantanamo as an abuse of legal process. Lawyers acting for British Home Secretary Charles Clarke immediately announced that they would take the matter to the Court of Appeal. But Justice Collins refused the British Government a stay of his judgement, meaning that the Government is compelled to proceed with Hicks' citizenship application.

The British Government is anxious not to award Hicks citizenship as it fears that Hicks' reaction would be to immediately renounce his Australian citizenship. This would make Mr Hicks the primary responsibility of the British Government, which could not then strip him of his British citizenship as it would leave him stateless.

Mr Hicks's lawyers argue that the Australian government has refused to plead for his release and has made no attempt to prevent his trial by a US military commission.

Whereas the UK government acted to remove its citizens imprisoned at Guantánamo, and would be compelled to call for the release of Mr Hicks.

After today's ruling, his lawyers will now press the British government to make arrangements for him to take the required citizenship oath and pledge. They will then urge the Home Office to seek his release from the detention centre, in Cuba, and bring him to the UK.

Hicks, a former kangaroo skinner and Muslim convert was caught in Afghanistan in December 2001. He faces charges including conspiracy to commit war crimes and aiding and abetting the enemy, all of which he denies.

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer says David Hicks' citizenship is not a matter for Australia. Mr Downer says the Australian Government is neutral about the decision and that it is a matter between Hicks and the British Government.

"Once he is a British citizen then what the British Government does in relation to him is matter between him and the British Government - it is not a matter that will involve us and we have made that clear all along," he said.

Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley says the outcome is embarrassing and that the Government should have taken a stand in favour of a proper judicial process for Hicks. "That's the position not taking a strong stand in favour of a proper judicial process puts us in."

Greens Senator Bob Brown implored the Federal Government not to impede Hicks's progress to

Britain. Senator Brown is concerned the Government will lean on the British Government to appeal.

"It's been an affront to the dignity of Australia, not just the rights of Hicks, that for four years the Australian Government has recognised the kangaroo court system, this military commission and recognised that in Australian law, backed by the Labor Party, when the Australian courts were the right place for Hicks to be right from the outset," Senator Brown said.

Federal Liberal MP Peter Slipper has declared, "he's their problem and good riddance". Mr Slipper has since claimed he was joking.

News of the ruling is still to reach Hicks but his lawyers say the Home Office must comply with it or appeal. The British Home Office has 14 days to appeal against a High Court ruling. Hicks's Australian lawyer, David McLeod, says his client will remain an Australian citizen as well.

Business Brief for December 14, 2005

Risks Digest points out "quite a coincidence"

You have probably heard about the recent Mizuho Securities stock-trading snafu. Mizuho mistakenly tried to sell 610,000 shares of J-Com Co., a company traded on the Tokyo stock market, for just 1 yen each. In fact, it was trying to sell 1 share for 610,000 yen.

Various newspapers, as well as Jeremy Epstein writing in Monday's Risks Digest, pointed out there was a similar snafu on the Tokyo stock market four years ago. Epstein quoted an earlier Digest from 2001 which described

the story of a UBS Warburg trader, instead of entering an order to sell 16 Dentsu shares at 610,000 yen each, accidentally put in an order to sell 610,000 Dentsu shares for 16 yen each.

Epstein commented:

"That was also on the day of a "public debut" (aka IPO). However, it was a bargain - [the earlier snafu] cost UBS Warburg about \$100M vs. about \$235M [this year] for Mizuho Securities.

"I assume it's just coincidence that these two failures were both on the Tokyo Stock market."

Peter G. Neumann, the Risks Digest moderator, added in a footnote:

"I knew the new case sounded familiar! Perhaps the 610,000 is a default number for an erroneous field? That's quite a coincidence."

Neumann noticed quite a coincidence indeed. But could the recurrence of the number 610,000 in both stories possibly be more than a coincidence?

Ruby on Rails hits the big 1.0

Ruby on Rails, a open-source Web development framework, finally reached version 1.0.0 yesterday. The Rails movie page has been updated for the occasion. This represents a significant milestone for the Rails Core Team.

Technology Brief for December 14, 2005

A World Bank lead economist speaks on Bird Flu

In an online discussion Milan Brahmbhatt, World Bank lead economist for East Asia and the Pacific, answered a few questions about Bird Flu. Brahmbhatt said

that the first thing to note is that "economic impacts can only be based on very broad assumptions." Brahmbhatt said that estimations of economic impacts are based on the SARS epidemic of 2003.

Brahmbhatt said "the most immediate economic impact might arise actually not from actual death or sickness, but from the efforts of people to actually avoid becoming infected, and this was at least the experience during SARS, when people tried to avoid infection by minimizing face-to-face interactions with other people, and this resulted in a very severe demand shock for services sectors."

Brahmbhatt indicated that since a pandemic flu would be a global disease that wouldn't end as quickly as SARS did that the severe demand shock for services would occur globally and last longer. "this could entail a loss of world GDP of four to five percent of world GDP, which, according to Oxford, would amount to the sort of staggering of figure of \$1,500 to \$2,000 billion." Brahmbhatt continued. Brahmbhatt said "One study for the US calculated that a mild epidemic similar to that which occurred in 1968 might lead to US losses with a present value of perhaps \$100-200 billion in today's dollars." Brahmbhatt said that the World Bank will continue to calculate the economic impact as more information about the disease becomes available.

Gold prices drop

Japanese gold buyers took in profits causing gold prices to drop. Gold has risen 8% since the start of December. Gold rose to \$540.90 a troy ounce on Monday, the highest level since January 1981. Gold has now dropped over \$20 in

late London trading. If gold stays above \$500 for the remainder of the trading day it will mark the 10th successive day of trading above the mark. Gold has not traded above \$500 for 10 days in a row since 1983.

Other precious metals were affected by gold's drop. Silver has dropped 8% from an 18 year high of \$9.23 a troy ounce. Platinum has fallen \$24 from a 26 year high of \$1,015 an ounce. Palladium is down 9% to \$269 an ounce.

Advisors are walking both sides of the Gold fence. "It has been a substantial rise in prices and the recent moves seem to be a case of profit taking before the end of the year," said, chief economist at Commonwealth Securities Craig James, "But the fundamental situation is still solid. We believe the price of gold is well supported at \$475 an ounce."

Tobin Gorey of Commonwealth Bank of Australia said "Gold has had a good run and the Fed lifting rates by an expected quarter-percentage point wasn't going to reverse the selling trend we've seen in recent days."

"We're seeing a lot of book-squaring and portfolio readjustment away from gold as the end of the year approaches," Gorey continued.

Today in History

533 - Forces led by Belisarius defeated Gelimer and the Vandals at the Battle of Ticameron, completing the "Reconquest of North Africa" under Byzantine Emperor Justinian I.

1256 - The Hashshashin stronghold at Alamut in present-day Iran was captured and destroyed by Hulagu Khan and the Mongols.

1791 - The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, collectively known as the United States Bill of Rights, were ratified.

1891 - James Naismith invented basketball.

1914 - World War I: The Battle of Łódź between Russia and Germany ended.

1994 - Netscape Navigator 1.0 was first released.

December 16 is Esperanto Literature Day

Quote of the Day

"Trouble arises when either science or religion claims universal jurisdiction, when either religious dogma or scientific dogma claims to be infallible. Religious creationists and scientific materialists are equally dogmatic and insensitive. By their arrogance they bring both science and religion into disrepute." ~ Freeman Dyson

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