



Top Stories

JonBenet Ramsey murder suspect on his way to America

The man being held in Bangkok on suspicion of murdering six-year-old JonBenét Ramsey more than ten years ago has started his extradition flight to the US.

Australia's "most powerful" windfarm approved

The Victorian government has announced plans to build what it says will be Australia's "most powerful wind farm." The \$380 million wind farm comprises 116 turbines and is expected to generate enough energy to power over 130,000 homes.

Featured story

UK seeks pardon for executed World War I soldiers

The UK Defence Secretary announced a plan to seek a group pardon for more than 300 British soldiers executed during the First World War for offences such as cowardice and desertion, including Pte. Harry Farr, whose family had appealed for a full, posthumous pardon.

Wikipedia Current Events

• With nearly all votes counted, the presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo heads toward a run-off election after neither candidate wins a fifty percent majority. Full provisional results show Kabila with 44.81 percent of the vote, to Bemba's 20.03 percent. There has been reports of automatic

Wikipedia Current Events

gunfire, and MLC representatives accused Kabila's Republican Guard of killing one of its men and injuring three policemen.

•Taliban insurgency: More than 90 die in heavy fighting this weekend in Afghanistan.

• UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has expressed deep concern over Saturday's Israeli commando raid deep inside Lebanon, calling it a truce violation.

•The Lebanese government vowed on Sunday to crush any attempt on the Lebanese side to breach the ceasefire.(Reuters)

•The first named storm to form in the Central North Pacific basin since the 2002 Pacific hurricane season, Tropical Storm Ioke, forms and threatens Johnston Island and the Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

•Iran test fires the Saegheh missile, a short-range surface-to-surface missile with a range of between 80 and 250 kilometres in the desert near Kashan. It comes a day after the army commenced exercises.

Volcano eruption in Ecuador kills six and destroys several small villages

The eruption of volcano Tungurahua on August 16 destroyed several small villages in the Ecuadorian Andes. At least 6 people have been killed and about 4000 residents of the affected area have been evacuated.

The 5,023 m high volcano spat lava, stones and ash for several hours on Wednesday night. A 10km high ash cloud spread over an area of 740 by 180 km. Towns like Ambato or Riobamba, 30 km away from the volcano have been covered with up to 5cm of ash. Pyroclastic flows descending on the northwestern slopes of the volcano left a path of destruction behind.

At least seven small villages and hamlets have been completely destroyed. The ash and rocks blocked the Chambo and the Peula river and the road Ambato - Baños, one of the main connections between the Ecuadorian highlands and the amazon region. The Institute for Geophysics has lost an important part of its equipment installed on the slopes of Tungurahua, limiting their capability to monitor the volcanic activity.

The Hydroelectric power plant Agoyan near Baños has been shut down since Wednesday night. On Thursday, air traffic in the whole country was limited due to ash layers on several airports. On Thursday the provinces of Chimborazo, Tungurahua, Cotopaxi and Bolivar have been declared a disaster area. Losses in agriculture due to the ash cover are estimated at \$150 Million.

On Friday, volcanic activity decreased to a calm that remained into Saturday evening, but the Ecuadorian Institute for

Geophysics warns that a further eruption may be imminent.

In 1999, after a long period of rest, the volcano started an eruptive process that continues to this day. After the first eruptions in October 1999 that produced a major ash out-fall and led to the temporary evacuation of more than 25,000 inhabitants of Baños and its surroundings, the activity continued on a medium level. In May 2006 it increased dramatically culminating in violent eruptions on July 14 and August 16.

UK soldier killed in southern Afghanistan

The Ministry of Defence has tonight confirmed that a British soldier has been killed whilst fighting with insurgents in southern Afghanistan.

The unnamed troop was killed in a gun battle with Taleban forces in the volatile Helmand province at around midday local time.

A spokesman from the Ministry of Defence said: "The soldier died as a result of injuries sustained during the contact. Three other British soldiers received minor injuries." The MoD also said that they are in the process of informing the soldier's family about his death.

Defence Secretary Des Browne said: "I was deeply saddened to be informed of the death today of a British soldier and the injuries of three others as they supported the NATO mission in Afghanistan," he said. "I wish to express my sincere condolences to their families and friends. My thoughts are with them at this difficult time."

So far, twenty British armed forces personnel have died in Afghanistan.

Today, it has been reported that around seventy Taleban fighters were killed when they clashed with Afghan security forces and Nato-led troops.

Australia to detain Burmese boatpeople on Nauru

Eight Burmese boatpeople, who arrived off Western Australia's Ashmore Reef last week, say they wish to claim refugee status. The group of 8 men, aged between 24 and 40, are being held in detention on Christmas Island by the Australian Federal Government. They will be sent to Nauru after identity interviews and medical checks are completed.

According to The Age newspaper, the men are from a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border, and may be from the Karen tribe, who are battling Burma's brutal military Government. Karen rebels have been at war with the central Government for 57 years.

An Immigration department spokesman confirmed that the eight men claimed to be from Burma. Two of the men have contacted immigration lawyers seeking assistance with asylum claims. David Manne, from Melbourne-based Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, said the other six were likely to do the same. "There's a very strong likelihood that they are genuine refugees," he said.

The men were first spotted by the Australian Customs Service at Ashmore Reef, 610km north of Broome, WA on August 13. They were sent by Navy vessel to Christmas Island - 2,400 km northwest of Perth, WA. The men have been held since Friday as part of the Howard Government's Pacific Solution to keep asylum seekers out of the country.

In 2005, the Department of Immigration began construction of an Immigration Reception and Processing Centre on Christmas Island, due for completion late in 2006. The facility is estimated to cost \$210 million, and will contain 800 beds.

The news of the boatpeople's arrival became public last week as Prime Minister John Howard scrapped controversial new migration laws. The proposed laws would have excised the Australian mainland for immigration purposes.

Ashmore Reef, already excised from Australia's migration zone, means the men have no legal entitlement to be brought to Australia for processing. They have no access to the Australian court system to argue their claims or contest the rulings of the Immigration Department.

Mr Manne said he was concerned that the circumstances of the men's confinement could hamper their attempts to communicate with lawyers. He said the Burmese men should be afforded the same rights as the West Papuans or Vietnamese asylum-seekers who recently made it to Australian shores. "It's absolutely crucial these people be given a fair go, so that they can actually speak with us properly about the issues," he said. Mr Manne says he has made several requests of the Department of Immigration in Canberra.

"They're asylum seekers... they believe that they'd be persecuted if sent to Burma, and we have agreed to act on their behalf,". He was unable to say whether the group was dropped off by people smugglers, as Immigration

Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone claims.

"What we do know is they're seeking refugee status, that is, protection from brutal human rights abuse," he said. The Burmese regime has recently waged an aggressive attack on Karen insurgents - forcing thousands of villagers to hide in the jungle or seek refuge in Thailand. There are 140,000 refugee camps in seven camps along the Thai-Burma border.

Australian Greens Senator Kerry Nettle says the government must allow the Burmese group to be brought to Australia to process the asylum-seeker's claims. "The government needs to ensure that all asylum seekers are offered legal support," she said. "The best way to ensure the Burmese asylum seekers have full access to their lawyer is to bring them to Australia while their asylum claims are assessed."

Meanwhile the near-bankrupt Nauru Government has urged Aust to "speed up asylum seeker processing" in their country. Nauru says Australia is taking far too long to process asylum seekers. Currently two refugees remain on Nauru - both Iraqi men. The men have been held in detention on the remote tiny island for five years.

According to The Age, the Nauru Government has approved a plan to impose financial penalties on Australia if asylum seekers are forced to languish on the near-bankrupt island. The report says if they have not been processed and either returned or resettled within three months, their visas will have to be renewed each month, with the cost increasing by \$500 for each renewal.

Nauru's Foreign Minister David Adeang raised serious concerns about the mental state of the detainees. He says Muhammad Faisal's condition worsened sharply after he was re-interviewed by ASIO. Mr Adeang has asked for the Government to evacuate the Mr Faisal immediately, he says he is also concerned about the mental health of the other Iraqi man left on Nauru. The Australian Government claims advice from ASIO that the man may be a "security threat."

Nauru is the world's smallest island nation, covering just 21 km². Since 2001 it has accepted aid from the Australian government. In exchange for this aid, Nauru houses an 'offshore' detention centre for Australia.

400 Australian soldiers sent to Afghanistan

400 Australian soldiers have been officially farewelled at parade in Darwin, NT, ahead of their deployment to Afghanistan on Tuesday. Wishing the soldiers well, Defence Minister Brendan Nelson says there is a high risk associated with the mission.

"We know that this is a dangerous mission but it's also an extremely important one," he said. "They will go beginning this week and be deployed over the next few weeks."

The group will work around the southern Oruzgan Province. Rising violence in the Taliban heartland province earlier this month prompted Australian Prime Minister John Howard to further strengthen the capability of the Reconstruction Task Force (RTF). Approximately 150 personnel will be added to the 240-strong force announced in May.

Defence says the RTF will form part of the Netherlands-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Oruzgan province under NATO.

More than 1800 people have been killed in fighting in Afghanistan this year, 92 of them foreign soldiers. A contingent of 190 Australian special forces, supported by a 110-member helicopter detachment, has suffered a steady flow of casualties since September year, with 11 wounded — a rate of one a month. The Age reports the Howard Government has "kept secret" how soldiers suffered the wounds, or the extent or nature of the wounds.

Dr Nelson said the soldiers would perform command, construction, communications intelligence, protection and logistics support. "We must stick with our allies and stand up for our values," he said. He told the troops they would be "dealing with people who are fanatically opposed to our way of life and everything we stand for".

Dr Nelson says the Australian contribution will also include skills training for the local population to "ensure the benefits of the deployment continue long after our personnel have returned home."

"Jihad" Jack Thomas acquitted of terrorism conviction

Melbourne man Jack Thomas has been acquitted of terrorism offences in Victoria's Court of Appeal. His convictions for receiving funds from a terror group and using a false passport were quashed on Friday. Mr Thomas was earlier sentenced to five years in jail.

Jack Thomas, 33, known as "Jihad Jack" was convicted under new

Australian anti-terror laws. He was found guilty in February of accepting cash and a plane ticket from an al-Qaeda agent in Pakistan. But was cleared of 'intentionally providing resources for al-Qaeda'. The former taxi driver was sentenced to five years in prison in March.

The Court of Appeal ruled Thomas's interview with Australian Federal Police (AFP) in Pakistan was inadmissible. Thomas appealed his conviction on the grounds that interviews conducted in Pakistan after his arrest in 2003 breached Australian law and should not have been allowed as evidence at his trial.

He was interviewed without access to a lawyer, having already been interrogated during two months in custody in Pakistan. Mr Thomas' lawyers argued that he was earlier threatened with torture from foreign security agencies.

His lawyer said Mr Thomas, who is married and has three children, accepted the money and plane ticket because he wanted to return home. Mr Thomas said he never had any intention of becoming an al-Qaeda operative.

Lawyer Rob Stary said Thomas wanted to thank his legal team and staff at a hospital he had spent the past several months in psychiatric care. "He's in a debilitated condition as a result of what's transpired," Mr Stary said.

Liberty Victoria president Brian Walters, SC, welcomed the decision, saying: "We believe that the Court of Appeal has righted a great injustice."

Prosecutor Nick Robinson is calling for a retrial based on a television interview with the ABC. The

defence counsel has labelled the submission "bloody-minded." Rob Stary said the defence team would counter with arguments that prosecutors withheld a statement from a prisoner now held overseas. "The AFP has withheld important information that would have contradicted other evidence," he said.

Thomas' brother, Les, who took part in a protest rally outside Barwon Prison this weekend in support of 13 detainees facing charges of "terrorism", said the 13 Melbourne men faced a similar predicament to his brother.

Les Thomas said the 13 were victims of a government "scare campaign" and "media demonisation" and were being held in solitary confinement in Barwon's high security Acacia Unit, despite not being convicted of any crime. He said the men faced greater "persecution" than he claimed his brother had faced because most were of Middle Eastern background. "These people have not been convicted of any crime, but they're already being punished in extremely punitive circumstances," said Les Thomas.

Ten of the 13 were arrested in pre-dawn police raids in Melbourne and Sydney last November, and another three were arrested in March this year.

Jack Thomas was the first person to be convicted under the controversial new Australian anti-terror legislation.

JonBenet Ramsey murder suspect on his way to America

The man being held in Bangkok on suspicion of murdering six-year-old JonBenét Ramsey more than ten years ago has started his

extradition flight to the US.

Forty-one year-old John Mark Karr, an American school teacher, is flying on Thai Airways Flight 748 from Bangkok to Los Angeles International Airport. According to Thai police, he is being accompanied by American security officials.

Lt Gen Suwat Thamrongsrisakul, from the Thai immigration police, said: "He is very calm, and not scared. He said was ready to go back home."

In a press conference on Wednesday, Karr confessed to killing the child beauty queen by accident. "I was with JonBenét when she died. I loved JonBenét. She died accidentally. I am so very sorry for what happened to JonBenét. It's very important for me that everyone knows that I love her very much, that her death was unintentional, that it was an accident."

Despite his confession, Karr's then ex-wife said that he was in Alabama with her when the murder occurred.

JonBenét was found beaten and strangled in her Colorado home on the day after Christmas in 1996.

Pair taken off plane because of "suspicious" behaviour

Two men who were reportedly seen acting suspiciously on a flight bound for Manchester had to be taken off the plane, it has emerged today.

According to Monarch Airlines, a number of passengers informed staff of their worries surrounding the pair's behaviour in Malaga on Wednesday. As the passengers' requested, the two men were then removed from the Airbus A320,

which was carrying 150 people.

They were then questioned by police for several hours and allowed to fly back to the United Kingdom at the end of the week.

A Monarch Airlines spokesman said: "There were two passengers on the flight who came to the attention of the other people because they were apparently acting suspiciously. The flight attendants were sufficiently concerned to alert the crew who in turn informed the security authorities at Malaga airport."

According to reports, the men were of Asian appearance, and their alleged suspicious actions have not yet been revealed.

Patrick Mercer, a homeland security spokesman for the Conservative Party, told the Mail on Sunday today: "For those unfortunate two men to be victimised because of the colour of their skin is just nonsense."

Australia's "most powerful" windfarm approved

The government of Victoria has announced plans to build what it says will be Australia's "most powerful wind farm." Planning Minister Rob Hulls has given the go ahead to a new \$380 million wind farm at Mount Gellibrand in the state's south-west.

"I'm pleased to announce that I have approved Australia's most powerful and Victoria's largest wind farm to date," Mr Hulls said. "This project is expected to create anywhere between 110 and 120 jobs during construction and up to 25 full time positions during the life of the wind farm," he said.

The massive windfarm will be located 120 km west of

Melbourne, close to the regional centre of Colac. The windfarm comprises 116 turbines of the 2 MW class - with an overall capacity of 232 MW. The windfarm will produce over 700,000 MWh annually of clean energy which is enough to supply approximately 132,000 Victorian households. German company Pro Ventum International is undertaking the project

Minister Hulls said only nine objections had been lodged against the project. Local landowner Tim Gore, who plans to have 32 turbines on his property, said he was not concerned about potential noise from the turbines. Pro Ventum International say they will commence work on an Environmental Management report the next few weeks.

Wind farm critic Tim Le Roy said there was no environmental benefit from the project at all and the Victorian government would better spend its money on geo-thermal energy.

The turbines, each 125 metres tall, will be visible from the Princes Highway between Geelong and Colac, sited at the foot of Mount Gellibrand.

In October last year, Colac Otway council's chief executive officer, Tracey Slatter, said the proposal would benefit the shire: "...we're looking at reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and with the demand of energy set to increase it is important that we do consider these renewable energy sources," she said.

American athlete Marion Jones tests positive for EPO

Track Star Marion Jones, winner of 3 gold medals in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, has tested positive for

the performance enhancing drug, EPO. The hormone helps create extra red blood cells which allows the user's body to absorb extra oxygen.

Jones was expected to compete in yesterday's Golden League meet in Zurich, Switzerland, but left early in the morning for "personal reasons." It was announced earlier today (UTC) that she had tested positive for EPO. Jones faces a two year ban if her B test sample comes back positive.

Jones has a history of association with steroid users and dealers. In 1999, her then husband CJ Hunter tested positive for a similar drug, Nandralone. He had to withdraw from the 2000 Sydney Olympics, and received a two year ban.

Jones later divorced him, and in 2002 started a relationship with another track star, Tim Montgomery, who were both coached by Trevor Graham.

Montgomery set a record in the 100 meter sprint of 9.78 seconds at a race in Paris that year. He was banned for two years and stripped of his record due to evidence in the Federal BALCO investigation. In the BALCO investigation, several witnesses stated that Marion Jones was taking banned substances recieved from BALCO.

Jones' coach, Graham, has been involved with 10 other athletes that tested positive and were ultimately banned for the use of illegal substances. Justin Gatlin, also coached by Graham, also tested positive for artificial Testosterone, but has not been banned or stripped of his record.

Another American athlete, cyclist Floyd Landis tested positive for excessive levels of adrenaline after

winning the Tour-de-France, which may lead to him being the first winner in the tournament's history to be stripped of the title.

South Carolina attracting Republican hopefuls

2008 Republican presidential hopefuls are spending a lot of time in South Carolina in the run-up to the 2006 off-year elections. All the interest in the Palmetto State is widely viewed in the light of its place of significance in the GOP's primary calendar.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) leads in most early polls. And he also leads in the pack in handing out campaign contributions to down-ticket Republican hopefuls. Since the beginning of the year, Sen. McCain's Straight Talk America PAC has contributed \$172,750 to South Carolina Republican candidates, according to campaign finance reports. In contrast, Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has contributed roughly \$73,000 during the same period.

McCain has also picked up some influential support recently. Former State Attorney General Charlie Condon, veteran consultant Bob McAlister and current Attorney General Henry McMaster have all assumed leadership roles in McCain's Straight Talk America PAC. McCain was in South Carolina this week to raise money for Republican Adjutant General Stan Spears, who is running for reelection.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani also visited South Carolina this week. Mayor Giuliani headlined a fundraising dinner for the state Republican Party. While Giuliani focused his speech on the War on Terror, some were more interested in the New Yorker's position on social issues.

Conservative reporter Byron York, who attended the event, quotes Palmetto Family Council President Oran Smith saying, "Gay rights, abortion, guns [Giuliani is pro-gun control] ... any one of them would be a disqualifier, but the three of them together are absolutely insurmountable."

Representatives from McCain, Romney, and Giuliani's camp all say their man is still deciding whether or not he will run for president in 2008.

Today in History

1772 - A bloodless coup led by Gustav III was completed with the adoption of a new Instrument of Government.

1831 - Nat Turner led a slave revolt in Southampton County, Virginia.

1911 - Mona Lisa, an oil painting by Leonardo da Vinci, was stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris.

1976 - Operation Paul Bunyan was carried out in response to the Axe Murder Incident in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, almost triggering a second Korean War.

1986 - A limnic eruption from Lake Nyos in Cameroon killed up to 1,800 people and 3,500 livestock in nearby villages.

August 21 is Independence Day in Latvia (1991), Ninoy Aquino Day in the Philippines.

Quote of the Day

That is not dead which can eternal lie,

And with strange aeons even death may die.

~ H. P. Lovecraft ~

Word of the Day

torporific; adj

1. Inducing torpor; tending to cause apathy or lethargy.

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