



Top Stories

Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras celebrated by 450,000 people

Nearly half a million people packed into Sydney's "Golden Mile" on Saturday night to applaud the city's 28th annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. Parade organisers estimated the crowd at over 450,000. They lined Oxford St - along the parade's route - in Sydney's unofficial gay district, cheering the 6,000 participants and 120 floats.

Authorities impose vehicle ban on Baghdad

As of Friday, the 3rd of March, police will be ordered to confiscate any private vehicle on the roads of Baghdad during a day-time vehicle ban. The restrictions come on top of the regular night time curfew, which ends at 6 AM, when the new curfew will kick in.

Featured story

No hotel previously on site of proposed Buffalo, N.Y. hotel location

There was no hotel at the proposed Elmwood Village hotel site, but there was one during the Pan-American Exposition in 1901, on the opposite side of the street. However; that hotel, although temporary, was not financially successful.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Milan Babić, former leader of the breakaway Republic of Serbian Krajina, commits suicide in prison while serving a sentence for war crimes.
- South Dakota governor M. Michael Rounds signs an abortion ban that conflicts with the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.
- The sentencing trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, the only person indicted in the US for a direct role in the 9/11 attacks, has opened in Virginia.
- Avian flu outbreak: Poland confirms first outbreak of H5N1, the bird flu virus, in two wild swans.
- In South Africa, former Deputy President (1999-2005) Jacob Zuma pleads not guilty of rape as his trial starts.

Thaksin rebuffs resignation calls while elite call for appointed PM

Beleagured Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra may have offered to speak with entrenched opponents such as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), but defiantly refuses to give them the satisfaction of him resigning unconditionally. Instead Thaksin has promised not to take office if his Thai Rak Thai party gets fewer than 50% of the votes. With the three main opposition parties boycotting the election, a mass abstention would be required to force the PM out in this way.

Protests led by Chamlong Srimuang's Dharma Army foundation are reportedly going to continue until the caretaker PM resigns. The former Bangkok governor led a popular but bloody revolt against the military government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon in 1992; he is now one of the prominent figures staking out Sanam Luang, calling for the resignation of Thaksin, and vowing to stay until he goes. The kick-off of this extended protest was on Sunday, with protesters from southern provinces arriving as early as 11am for a protest that saw Thailand's The Nation reporting 60,000 present for a march to the Democracy monument and on to government house.

Attacks from other directions have come alongside the mass-protests. 96 members of Bangkok's elite have put their names to a petition to go before the King. Calling for the invocation of Section 7 of the constitution to appoint an interim Prime Minister, signatories include a former central bank governor, former ambassadors, and more than a dozen senators.

2006 Oscars handed out at Kodak Theatre

At one point, Stewart jokingly chastised Hollywood for being "out of touch" with mainstream American values. Actor George Clooney later responded to these allegations, saying, "We are a little bit out of touch in Hollywood. It's probably a good thing. We're the ones that talked about AIDS when

it was just being whispered. And we talked about civil rights when it wasn't really popular. We bring up subjects. This group of people gave Hattie McDaniel an Oscar in 1939 when blacks were still sitting in the backs of theaters. I'm proud of this Academy, of this community. I'm proud to be out of touch."

Crash won the Best Picture award, a surprise for many predictors. Co-producer Cathy Schulman commented "[thank you for] embracing our film, about love and about tolerance, about truth. Thank you to the people all around the world who have been touched by this message. And we are humbled by the other nominees in this category. You have made this year one of the most breathtaking, and stunning, maverick years in American cinema, thank you."

Paul Haggis and Bobby Moresco also won best original screenplay for Crash.

Directed and co-produced by Canadian Paul Haggis, the film debuted at the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival. Film distribution rights were purchased for just USD\$3 million by Lions Gate Films. Noted film critic Roger Ebert called it his favourite picture of 2005, and the picture made many North American "10 best" lists.

Backstage, Best Director winner Ang Lee commented to the press on how Brokeback Mountain refreshed his will to direct. "Before I get into making this movie, I was very tired from two very ambitious work, The Hulk and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. I almost wanted to retire. I felt I had enough, I hit the bottom, sort of like my mid life crisis or something, and this movie teach

me how to look at myself, how to manage myself in movie making again, enjoying making them, and the movie was shot very simple, nothing special, but most important, it taught me again, it's about human emotions, drama and acting."

Winners

BEST PICTURE - Crash.

DIRECTOR - Ang Lee, Brokeback Mountain.

ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE - Philip Seymour Hoffman, Capote.

ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE - Reese Witherspoon, Walk the Line.

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY - Paul Haggis and Bobby Moresco, Crash.

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY - Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, Brokeback Mountain.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM - Tsotsi (South Africa).

ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE - George Clooney, Syriana.

ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE - Rachel Weisz, The Constant Gardener.

ANIMATED FEATURE - Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit.

CINEMATOGRAPHY - Dion Beebe, Memoirs of a Geisha.

COSTUME DESIGN - Colleen Atwood, Memoirs of a Geisha.

MAKEUP - Howard Berger and Tami Lane, The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

VISUAL EFFECTS - Joe Letteri, Brian Van't Hul, Christian Rivers and Richard Taylor, King Kong.

SHORT FILM - ANIMATED - The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation.

SHORT FILM - LIVE ACTION - Six Shooter.

ORIGINAL SCORE - Gustavo Santaolalla, Brokeback Mountain.

ART DIRECTION - John Myhre and Gretchen Rau, Memoirs of a Geisha.

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE - March

of the Penguins.

SOUND MIXING - Christopher Boyes, Michael Semanick, Michael Hedges and Hammond Peek, King Kong.

SOUND EDITING - Mike Hopkins and Ethan Van der Ryn, King Kong.

FILM EDITING - Hughes Winborne, Crash.

DOCUMENTARY SHORT SUBJECT - A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin.

ORIGINAL SONG - 'It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp' from Hustle & Flow.

Australian Prime Minister visits India

Australian Prime Minister John Howard began a visit of India yesterday. Interest in the visit has been dominated by the issue of uranium sales and Australia's stance on the recent agreement between the United States and India.

Before departing, Mr Howard gave an interview at Kirribilli House, in which he stressed the importance of Australia's relationship with India, and emphasised their economic significance. "India is one of the great coming powers of the world. The economic growth has been enormous. It's important that we do what we can to strengthen the economic relationship with India," he said.

This is Mr Howard's second visit to India as Prime Minister. He will meet the Indian President, Prime Minister, and also Sonia Gandhi and others. The visit is expected to continue until Wednesday.

Uranium sales

Alexander Downer earlier in the week welcomed the US-Indian agreement on nuclear technology, but stated that Australia did not

sell to countries that had not ratified the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Mr Howard indicated that there are still no plans to change this policy. "We don't have any plan to change our current policy. We sell uranium to countries which adhere to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty," he said.

In an interview later in the day in Delhi, Howard was less committed on the issue, and suggested that policy may change depending on circumstances. "We do have a long-standing policy of only selling uranium to countries that are part of the NPT regime, but we will have a look at what the Americans have done and when we get a bit more information about that we'll further assess it," he said.

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, Foreign Affairs Spokesperson for the Australian Democrats, accused the government of a "backflip" over the issue. "In what looks a policy backflip in less than a week, the PM now appears to be considering the export of uranium to India despite the fact that it has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," she said in a press release. Senator Lyn Allsion also called for policy to remain as it is, saying, "The Government must be consistent in its commitment to achieving a nuclear-free world."

Senator Christine Milne of the Australian Greens went further, arguing that Howard was crumbling under pressure from Washington and had backed down over the issue of uranium sales. "The deputy sheriff has once taken his running orders from US President George Bush and is yet again undermining international law. Australia has already torn up international law to follow George

Bush into Iraq and Guantanamo Bay; now the world will be less safe as they tear up the NPT," she said.

US-Indian agreement

Mr Howard adopted a wait-and-see approach to the US-Indian agreement. "Of course it has to run the gauntlet of the American political process. We're certainly not going to suddenly change our policy just because the Indians and the Americans have reached an agreement. We'll study it, and if there are things that should additionally be done that are in Australia's interests then we'll do them," he said.

New Zealand online auction web site bought for NZ\$700 million

John Fairfax Holdings Limited announced today that it will be purchasing the New Zealand online auction site Trade Me in a deal worth NZ\$700 million.

An additional NZ\$50 million will be paid out if earnings targets are met over the next 2 years.

Sam Morgan, who founded Trade Me in 1999, is set to make over NZ\$220 million.

Fairfax chief executive David Kirk said "I am delighted Sam Morgan will remain with Trade Me for a good period of time. We also welcome as new colleagues the entire Trade Me staff." TradeMe has 48 employees.

"The business will be run absolutely as it is today. There's not a lot we can do to improve the way the business has been run and developed."

The purchase follows acquisitions of other online businesses worth

A\$200 million by Fairfax since the late 1990s, which according to its competitor News Corporation have produced limited returns.

Trade Me is New Zealand's largest auction site, and became the most popular website in New Zealand in 2005.

During peak hours, Trade Me has approximately 30,000 - 50,000 people on line at any one time, and 565,000 auctions running. Trade Me has about 1.2 million members, representing a sizeable proportion of New Zealand's population of around 4.2 million people. Trade Me accounts for over 60% of New Zealand's web traffic.

The transaction needs to get final approval under the New Zealand Overseas Investment Act. This is expected to take place in April.

BBC global poll finds majority feel the US led Iraq invasion increased likelihood of terrorist attacks

The international polling firm GlobeScan conducted a survey for the BBC World Service which polled 41,856 residents of 35 countries between October of 2005 and February this year. The question asked was "Has the war in Iraq increased, decreased or had no effect on the likelihood of terrorist attacks around the world?"

The global average was that 60% felt that the likelihood had increased, while 15% felt that the likelihood had decreased. 12% felt that there was no effect, and 13% did not answer.

Out of the 35 countries polled, only Mexico and Nigeria thought the invasion lessened the likelihood of terrorist attacks. The highest percentage of people who

felt the invasion increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks was China, where 85% held that view.

Other questions asked in the poll found that a small majority existed, 45% of respondents, who felt that removing Saddam was a mistake, compared to 36% who felt the removal was the right decision. The poll also found that results were split on whether the foreign troops should remain in Iraq until the country is stable. 35% of respondents believed the troops should stay, 32% felt the troops should pull out within a few months, and 13% thought that a pull-out should occur within a few months unless the government of Iraq requested them to stay.

"It's official. Citizens worldwide think Western leaders have made a fundamental mistake in their war on terror by invading Iraq," claimed the president of GlobeScan, Doug Miller. "Short of the Iraqi government asking them to stay longer, people think the troops should leave," he said.

In the United States, the GlobeScan poll found that 55% thought chances of terror attacks were increased. In an unrelated poll conducted in the U.S. by CBS News, it was found that only 36% of U.S. respondents thought "the war is going well", and that 30% felt "Bush was doing a good job of handling the conflict." This U.S. poll also found that only 18% held a favorable view of Vice-President Dick Cheney.

In a televised interview with Elizabeth Vargas of ABC's World News Tonight, which aired last Tuesday, President Bush said, "If I worried about polls, I wouldn't be doing my job," on the topic of his low U.S. approval ratings. "I think the American people — I know the

American people want somebody to stand on principle, make decisions and stand by them and lead this world toward a more peaceful tomorrow, and I strongly believe we're doing that," he said.

"I've got ample [political] capital and I'm using it to spread freedom and to protect the American people, plus we've got a strong agenda to keep this economy growing." President Bush also said that Iraqis must choose between "chaos or unity."

Dvdrs.net closes - "can not recover from recent events"

Dvdrs.net, a site targeted by the Motion Pictures Association of America in its recent anti-piracy campaign, has closed while the site is restructured. Part of the restructuring will be the deletion of its usenet index.

In a statement posted on dvdrs.net just days before its disappearance, Descds, a site administrator, said, "The site will be closed for restructure. All reference to Usenet will be removed, the logo adapted (its a long time coming anyway) and NZB indexing sections dropped."

Descds reports that he is unhappy about Dvdrs.net being seen as a piracy network, as it has been since news of the MPAA's actions. "Since the PR press release broke we have been seen as an organized pirate network and this is unacceptable. In the first day of the press release we had 100 new members sign up looking for pirated movies. This has continued everyday since and we will not allow DVDRS to be used this way. We have not, will not and never shall host illegal files here," he said.

"We also understand that DVDRS

will always be seen, in light of recent press, as a site that dealt in illegal file sharing. We feel there is no way we can recover from this and thus will re-launch Talk DVD with some of DVDRS database and ideas."

Descds also stated that he hoped the MPAA could see that he was happy to work with the MPAA to reach a resolution, maintaining that he had done nothing wrong and that the site was far more than a usenet indexing site.

"Indexing Usenet is still a part of the site granted, but we are now far more than that with in depth articles on DVD-R/W, DVD+R/W, DVD+R DL, DVDRAM, BLU-RAY and HD DVD media, software and hardware technology. We also have a healthy movie, game and hardware review section as well as active news. Our forums are also more about technology than Usenet," Descds said in his statement.

South Dakota governor signs abortion ban into law

Governor Mike Rounds of South Dakota signed South Dakota House of Representatives Bill 1215 into law today, banning all abortions in the state except to save the life of the mother (with no exceptions for rape and incest) to take effect in July.

Today in History

161 - Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus succeeded Antoninus Pius to become co-Emperors of the Roman Empire.

1862 - American Civil War: Union forces won the Battle of Pea Ridge and cemented their control in Missouri.

1936 - Germany re-occupied the demilitarized Rhineland, violating the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties.

1950 - The Soviet Union issued a statement denying that German nuclear physicist Klaus Fuchs had served as a Soviet spy.

1965 - American Civil Rights Movement: Civil rights demonstrators marching from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama were brutally attacked by police on Bloody Sunday.

March 07 is Teacher's Day in Albania

Quote of the Day

"Give thought to life and liberty."

~ Cyrano de Bergerac

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