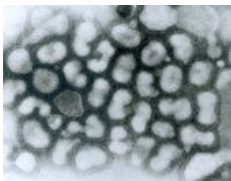




Top Stories

New bird flu outbreaks reported in Europe

Cases of the H5 type of the avian flu have been discovered in Romanian and Ukrainian fowl.



Romania has banned hunting in parts of the country and Ukrainian troops have moved from house to house in villages rounding up chickens, ducks and geese for a mass cull.

Passenger claims to have bomb, killed by air marshalls at Miami International Airport

News sources are reporting that a United States air marshall fired



a gun at an American Airlines passenger on flight 924 at Miami International Airport.

Featured story

Asylum seeker hunger strike enters seventh week

A Chinese man in Australian immigration detention is still refusing food, seven weeks after starting his hunger strike.



Wikipedia Current Events

•An Italian court rules that calling someone a "dirty negro" while committing a crime is not a hate crime.

Wikipedia Current Events

•A Federal Air Marshal shoots dead Rigoberto Alpizar on American Airlines Flight 924 in a jetway at Miami International Airport in Florida. Alpizar, a U.S. citizen who had disembarked from an American Airlines flight from Medellín, Colombia, claimed to have a bomb. No explosive has yet been found.

•Nobel Prize in Literature winner Harold Pinter accuses Britain and the United States of engaging in state terrorism in Iraq and demands the prosecution of George W. Bush and Tony Blair.

British schoolgirl told to return home for wearing crucifix

Sixteen-year-old Sam Morris was suspended from school this week for wearing a crucifix, a well known Christian symbol. A student of the Sinfin Community School in Derby, she was told by the school's deputy headmaster, Howard Jones, to remove the crucifix around her neck. After refusing to do so, trouble began to erupt.

Mr. Jones talked to the girl for up to 30 minutes, trying to convince her to take off the crucifix. However, the pupil, who is studying for her GCSE exams, did not waver and continued to wear it. It was then that Mr. Jones decided to give the girl a one-day suspension as a "last resort," saying that Sam violated the school's jewelry policy.

Debra Saunders, the student's mother, was unhappy about the

situation and wonders if the school is trying to discriminate against Christians. Sikh students are permitted to wear bracelets called karas, which are a mandatory part of their religion. However, it appears that wearing a crucifix is deplorable, since the school's policies prohibit it.

"She thinks it's very unfair when other people are allowed to wear religious symbols," Sam's mother said, referring to her daughter. "It just ends up creating a divide between the pupils. Everyone is being told that they should be living in unity, but this rule is not right. Sam has just as much right to celebrate her own religion."

Mr. Jones, the school's deputy headmaster, disagrees, saying that the school's policy is "even-handed and fair." He went on to say the following, "As a Christian, I don't have to wear a crucifix but Sikhs don't have that option and we have to be understanding. We live in a multi-faith society."

The Derby City Council also weighed in on the matter. One of their spokespeople stated, "It is lawful to ban crucifixes while allowing other religious symbols, but whether it is desirable is another matter." The spokesperson went on to say, "For some people, wearing a crucifix could be a deeply religious gesture, which is why personal needs should be taken into account."

In the meantime, Sam has returned to school, sans crucifix.

Passenger claims to have bomb, killed by air marshalls at Miami International Airport



An American Airlines Boeing 757

A United States federal air marshal shot dead an American Airlines passenger named Rigoberto Alpizar on American Airlines Flight 924, a Boeing 757, at Miami International Airport, in Miami, Florida, USA. Reports indicate that during the flight, the passenger claimed to have a bomb in his carry-on bag. The passenger ran out of the door of the airplane when the flight arrived in Miami, but was intercepted by the marshalls and told to get on the ground. The passenger did so, but then reached for a bag, at which point a marshall shot and reportedly killed the passenger. No bomb was found when authorities searched the airplane.

The flight was en-route to Orlando from Medellin, Colombia, and had landed in Miami. The shots were fired in the boarding bridge — the corridor that connects the aircraft to the terminal. Reports also indicate SWAT teams are surrounding the plane. According to CNN, a federal official indicated that this is the first time an air marshall has fired a weapon near an airplane.

MSNBC reports that another passenger told a local TV station that the man started "running crazily through the aisle" after the plane landed, as a woman travelling with him ran after yelling

that her husband was bipolar and had not taken his medication.

Microsoft sued due to case of Xbox 360s overheating



A Chicago owner of an Xbox 360 console is filing a class action lawsuit against Microsoft, the company that manufactured the console. The lawsuit is based on the widely circulated claims that the console overheats, resulting in complete lockups of the system or various error messages. Robert Bryers, the man who has brought this lawsuit against Microsoft, claims that the company rushed the console to market to beat competitor releases. He further claims that this rushed release resulted in the company including a faulty power supply and central processor that overheat, resulting in the damage of heat-sensitive chips within the console. Microsoft denies that the problems are widespread.

The lawsuit, filed on Friday in an Illinois federal court, seeks unspecified damages and legal fees, as well as a recall and replacement of the affected consoles.

Asylum seeker hunger strike enters seventh week

A Chinese man in Australian immigration detention is still

refusing food, seven weeks after starting his hunger strike.

Jen Wen Zhang, a detainee at Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, has refused food since October 20. Mr Zhang and five other Chinese asylum seekers began the strike in protest at Australia's Mandatory Detention policy. Three of the six hunger strikers ended their protest in November and a fourth detainee also pulled out.

The Department of Immigration (DIMIA) says Mr Zhang is continuing his hunger strike after being hospitalised a fortnight ago. Now back in Villawood he is being closely monitored. A DIMMIA spokesperson said Mr Zhang was being urged to end his strike. The government continues to resist Mr Zhang's protest. "As the minister said, his actions will not influence his migration status or outcomes," said the spokesperson.

Victorian Greens refugees spokesman, Peter Job, has been speaking to Mr Zhang, and said the asylum seeker is determined to continue to strike despite his ailing health. Mr Job said Mr Zhang believes he was denied a fair hearing from the Immigration Department and the Refugee Review Tribunal, but was taking political action for all detained asylum seekers.

"He felt he had no option but to fight in the only way he could, with his body," said Mr Job. "But above all, he spoke of his dread of long-term detention, telling of waking continually in the morning with a sense of profound despair and foreboding due to his incarceration, and telling me he feared the mental health damage he had seen in so many long-term detainees," he said.

Mr Job says he has tried to convince Mr Zhang to stop the hunger strike, but says he is in a desperate state. "He is very upset, he feels that he will be in great danger if he returns to China," Mr Job said. "He said he'd rather die here in Australia than go back to China, where he's convinced he'll be persecuted."

Refugee Action Coalition (RAC) spokesman Ian Rintoul said the Immigration Department has been riddled with problems and too often rejected long-term detainees who are genuine refugees.

"The government itself has recognised there have been many mistakes in the department's processes, there have been many problems with the way asylum seekers have been dealt with," Mr Rintoul said. "That's why we're desperately trying to urge the government to intervene in this particular case."

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said in mid November that the Government has done all it can for the Chinese asylum seeker. "I don't support this kind of protest, I don't think anyone does, I recognise the risk it can play for the protesters themselves," she said. "I've written to them urging them to get off their protest and making it clear to them that the Government doesn't consider cases while people are engaging in this sort of potentially very harmful protest."

Another Villawood detainee, Motahar Hussein, says Mr Zheng's health has drastically deteriorated and suspects that vital organs have experienced permanent damage.

"Though DIMIA continuously

attempts to devise creative ways of crushing Mr. Jun Wen Zhang's spirit, he will not be easily intimidated," said Mr Hussein in a media release. "He is willing and determined to continue with his peaceful and civilised protest. He believes he has no other option. He finds himself compelled to do so by the Howard Government's policy of inhumane and indefinite detention. He is prepared to continue to the supreme and utmost sacrifice of his own life, hopefully, in an attempt to expose DIMIA's attitude of injustice and corruption."

South Korean regulators fine Microsoft \$32 million

South Korean antitrust regulators fined the Microsoft company 32 billion Won which is equal to around US \$32 million. It also ordered Microsoft to make substantial changes to the Windows operating system. Regulators demanded that Microsoft produce two different versions of Microsoft Windows within 180 days.

One version must be stripped of the Windows Media Player and instant messenger software. The other version must come with links to Web pages that allow consumers to download competing versions of such software, the commission said.

These regulations will be in effect for the next ten years, but after five years Microsoft can request a review of the market.

A Microsoft spokesman said the company would appeal the decision in court.

"We are very disappointed with the commission's decision," said Tom Burt, a Microsoft vice president and deputy general counsel.

"Ultimately, we will file a lawsuit in Korean court challenging the decision."

Similarly in March of last year, Microsoft was ordered by the European Union to pay €497 million for antitrust violations. Microsoft was also asked to share Windows operating system code with other companies and offer Windows without the media player.

Microsoft is also appealing this ruling.

RepuTex announces Australia and New Zealand's most socially responsible corporations



RepuTex has announced this month a list of the most socially responsible companies in Australia and New Zealand. RepuTex, according to its website, is "an alternative to existing ethical investment methodologies which rely primarily on negative screening systems." The list covers 66 organisations. RepuTex services large to small organisations which want their situation assessed. The organisations are assessed across four sectors; Corporate Governance, Environmental Impact, Workplace Practices and Social Impact, producing a final result. This year, the Westpac Banking Corporation gained the only AAA rating followed by Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited and Australian Postal Corporation with AA ratings.

Global CEO of RepuTex, Ms Laurel Grossman said "more companies are recognising the value of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and the vital role it plays in

managing mainstream financial risk," adding "this year 66 companies across Australia and New Zealand were rated in the A range (-A to AAA), up from 58 companies last year."

Legal Sony graffiti advertising backlash



Defaced Sony graffiti advertisement

A new advertising campaign in USA for the Sony PSP which looks like graffiti and is often sprayed on previously vandalized walls has come under attack from other graffiti artists. A collective group of graffiti artists and street artists are now banding together, vandalizing the look-alike graffiti advertisements. The campaign has offended a lot of graffiti artists and street artists, drawing responses like "keep your desperate corporate long arm out of a movement that is the only thing that is ours!"

But not all the responses have been negative, with many artists defending Sony saying they have the right. Other advertising companies have also voiced their support. "Sony and PSP have every right to use this type of media," Floyd Hayes, the head creative director at Cunning Work said. "They have done it for (a) very long time very successfully and spoke the language of the streets without being patronizing." Sony says it is paying the building owners like Casa Maria for for the right to advertise on their walls.

Casa Maria was paid \$100 for two weeks' use of its wall, said co-owner Mario Arana. Tats Cru, the graffiti crew responsible for the designs, have also been targeted with insulting slogans on Sony's advertisements.

US Secretary Rice responds to European enquiries on alleged CIA prisons

The US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed concerns raised by the EU, the Council of Europe and several european countries about the CIA's detention practices. Media reports and Human Rights groups have alleged that the CIA transported such prisoners through european countries, which could violate European laws and the sovereignty of countries involved. US Secretary Rice claimed that the United States has respected the sovereignty of other countries, has not transported detainees from one country to another for the purpose of interrogation using torture and has not transported anyone to a country when we believe he will be tortured.

Speaking before she left US Ms Rice said, "We consider the captured members of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates to be unlawful combatants who may be held, in accordance with the law of war, to keep them from killing innocents. We must treat them in accordance with our laws, which reflect the values of the American people. We must question them to gather potentially significant, life-saving, intelligence. We must bring terrorists to justice wherever possible."

Secretary Rice said that European nations should realize that interrogations of terrorist suspects

have produced information that has saved European lives. However, Secretary Rice provided no specific cases.

Tom Malinowski, a Human Rights Watch official in Washington said "Secretary Rice made extra-legal rendition sound like just another form of extradition. In fact, it's a form of kidnapping and 'disappearing' someone entirely outside the law."

The CIA practice known as "extraordinary rendition" is used to interrogate terrorist suspects outside the US, where they are not subject to American legal protection.

Anthony D Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), referring to the Khalid El-Masri case, says "Kidnapping a foreign national for the purpose of detaining and interrogating him outside the law is contrary to American values". He continues "Our government has acted as if it is above the law. We go to court today to reaffirm that the rule of law is central to our identity as a nation." ACLU states the government has to be held to account over "extraordinary rendition".

Australian researchers confirm stress makes you sick

Australian researchers say they have scientifically proven that stress causes sickness. The Garvan Institute in Sydney has discovered that a hormone, known as neuropeptide Y, (NPY) is released into the body during times of stress. Their findings show the hormone can stop the immune system from functioning properly.

"Neuropeptide Y is one of those

hormones that gets unregulated or released from neurones when stressful situations occur...it's known for example that it regulates blood pressure and heart rates so your heart rate goes up but it hasn't been known that it actually can affect immune cells as well," said Professor Herbert Herzog, one of the researchers.

Herzog feels it is good to finally have proof of something people have suspected for so long.

"Now we have proven without doubt that there is a direct link and that stress can weaken the immune system and that makes you more vulnerable when you for example have a cold or flu and even in the more serious situations such as cancer can be enhanced in these situations," said Herzog.

The Garvan Institute study centres on two key events that enable the human body to recognise foreign substances and control invaders. When our body encounters a pathogen (bacteria and viruses), the immune cells retain and interrogate suspects. Their activation is made possible by NPY. These cells then return to the lymph nodes, which are found all over the body, with information about the foreign invaders. The lymph nodes are where decisions about defence are made.

"Most of us expect to come down with a cold or other illness when we are under pressure, but until now we have mostly had circumstantial evidence for a link between the brain and the immune system," said lead Garvan researcher, associate Professor Fabienne Mackay. "During periods of stress, nerves release a lot of NPY and it gets into the bloodstream, where it directly

impacts on the cells in the immune system that look out for and destroy pathogens (bacteria and viruses) in the body."

In the case of bacteria and viruses, TH1 cells are part of the attack team that is sent out on the 'search and destroy' mission. But when their job is done they need to be turned 'off' and the immune system reset. The same hormone, NPY, that activates the sentry cells now prompts the TH1 cells to slow down and die.

"Under normal conditions, circulating immune cells produce small amounts of NPY, which enables the immune cells on sentry duty and the TH1 immune cells to operate - it's a yin and yang kind of situation. But too much NPY means that the TH1 attack is prevented despite the foreign invaders being identified - and this is what happens during stress," added McKay.

The impact of stress on the body has been observed in athletes. PhD researcher at the University of Queensland, Luke Spence, together with the Australian Institute of Sport, studied elite and recreational athletes over five months.

They found elite athletes were more susceptible to respiratory diseases under stress.

"A lot of elite athletes put themselves through vast amounts of physical stress in their training, but also their emotional, psychological stress of feeling the pressure of Australia on their shoulders, wanting to compete and wanting to do their best," said Spence.

It's not just athletes who are prone to stress. Pressures at work

and at home may cause emotional and mental stress that can be equally damaging. Almost a third of all work absenteeism in Australia is due to illness, costing employers over \$10 billion a year.

"I think it has a huge impact for the work force and also for employers - if their employees are constantly stressed, constantly under pressure, they are more likely to get sick," Spence said.

Further research could lead to the development of new drugs which may inhibit the action of the neuropeptide Y hormone.

Herzog warns people to minimise stress before it becomes a problem.

"Relaxation methods like yoga will help you to prevent that but there will still be people out there that are not responding to that and treatment by interfering with the system will be important," he said. "There's obviously some time until such a treatment will be available but this is something we will definitely work towards."

The Garvan research will be published in the Journal of Experimental Medicine, Volume 202, No. 11.

Lawsuit filed against CIA for the use of torture

A German man, Khaled al-Masri, has filed a lawsuit against the CIA for alleged torture when he was held prisoner for five months in Afghanistan last year. He was arrested in 2004 in connection with the September 11 attacks when he was stopped in Macedonia. After being arrested, he was flown to Afghanistan for questioning.

Masri said his cell in Afghanistan was cold, dirty and in a cellar, with no light and one dirty cover for warmth. The first night he said he was kicked and beaten and warned by an interrogator: "You are here in a country where no one knows about you, in a country where there is no law. If you die, we will bury you, and no one will know."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is representing Mr. al-Masri in the lawsuit filed on Tuesday in Alexandria, Virginia seeking damages of at least \$75,000. The main defendant is former CIA director George Tenet.



U.S. Secretary of State Rice meeting with German chancellor Merkel

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in Germany and would not comment on the lawsuit but the new German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "I'm happy to say we have discussed the one case, which the government of the United States has of course accepted as a mistake..."

A senior U.S. official accompanying Condoleezza Rice to Romania, said that Rice had not admitted to any mistakes in the handling of Masri. "We are not quite sure what was in her head," he said, referring to Merkel.

Business Brief for December 7, 2005

Verizon overhauling employee pension plans

Verizon announced Monday that it will stop making contributions to the pension plans of non-union managers and will instead offer 401(k) plans starting in 2006. The plan is intended to cut labor costs and will effect 50,000 management employees. Verizon hopes the change will save \$3 billion over the next 10 years.

Microsoft plans to invest \$1.7 billion in India

Microsoft plans to invest \$1.7 billion in India over four years, nearly doubling the company's workforce in the country bringing the total employee count to nearly 7,000. Most of the money will be invested on its existing R&D center, its global software delivery unit, and opening retail outlets more rural areas. Microsoft also plans to release an edition of the Windows operating system specifically for India.

Today in History

1854 - Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogmatic definition of Immaculate Conception.

1941 - World War II: Takashi Sakai and the Imperial Japanese Army invaded Hong Kong and quickly achieved air superiority by bombing Kai Tak Airport.

1941 - The Holocaust: The Chelmno concentration camp, the first Nazi extermination camp to use poison gas, began operations.

1980 - Mark David Chapman shot former Beatle John Lennon outside the Dakota apartments in NYC.

1991 - Leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine met to dissolve the Soviet Union and establish the Commonwealth of Independent States.

December 08 is Constitution Day in Romania.

Quote of the Day

"It is better to ask some of the questions than to know all the answers." ~ James Thurber

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