



Top Stories

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

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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

- The 2006 National People's Congress opens in Beijing, beginning a 10-day session of China's parliament. Premier Wen Jiabao makes a Working Report and vows for support for the poor.

Deported Australian granted visa after two years in Serbian limbo

An Australian resident, deported to Serbia in 2004, will return home to Sydney this week. The Immigration Department says Robert Jovicic will be given a special purpose visa and his status as a permanent resident will be reinstated.

He became a nationless man, impoverished, battling mental health problems and sleeping on the streets of Belgrade. Mr Jovicic, 39, was born in France and arrived in Australia as a two-year-old with his Serbian-born parents. Like nearly one million Australian residents eligible for Australian citizenship, Jovicic never officially became an Australian citizen.

Ex-Federal Immigration Minister, and now Attorney General, Philip Ruddock ordered Jovicic's deportation on character grounds in June 2004 - after he was jailed for committing crimes in support of a heroin addiction. Mr Jovicic says he had since kicked his drug habit.

The current Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said it was a

"very hard decision" to allow Mr. Jovicic to return to Australia. "[the community] expected to be protected from non-citizens who break the law. On balance, after some anguished consideration, I decided to allow him to return," the Minister said. She said Mr Jovicic was not stateless, he had just refused to apply for Serbian citizenship.

His family say Serbia revoked his citizenship after discovering "the paperwork used by Australian authorities to deport him was invalid". They claim he has since been unable to work, access doctors, welfare or even book a hotel. His family also claims that he does not speak Serbian, and has not been permitted to work because of this. He says he is grateful his ordeal is nearing an end.

Robert Jovicic's sister says people have no reason to fear her brother's return to Australia. "People need to be reminded that he's not a drug addict any more. He stopped using a long time ago," Susanna Jovicic said. "If people fear that he's going to re-offend, I think that he's more chance of winning lotto," she said. "All he wants is his life back. I think that's the most paramount thing that people need to understand. Once he'd done his time, I know that in jail he stopped (using heroin). He came out, he started a new life."

Ms Jovicic said the family is yet to pursue compensation. "I can tell you right now, we have not had a

conversation about compensation..." she said. "We just want him home." She says the first priority will be to seek medical treatment. Her brother's health problems include scoliosis, an enlarged prostate, mental illness, sand in his kidneys and the need of a catheter to urinate.

She said Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone's decision to allow his return "validates our belief that Robert was wrongly deported," she said. "I think anybody who has been deported has the legal right to return. The family will be there at the airport waiting for him and it will be quite emotional."

Minister Vanstone said in a November 2005 media release: "Mr Jovicic is not an Australian citizen: Mr Jovicic, a convicted criminal, had his Permanent Visa cancelled in October 2002 under Section 501 of the Migration Act by the former Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock... As an adult between 1984 and 2002, Mr Jovicic was convicted on charges of burglary, theft, possessing stolen property and possessing prohibited substances. In 1998 Mr Jovicic applied for Australian citizenship but was refused on the grounds that he was not of good character."

Commonwealth Ombudsman John McMillan found Senator Vanstone's department had unfairly deported people with criminal records who had lived in Australia since they were children. However, Vanstone said she supports the changes to the Migration Act which allow the Immigration Minister to "deport non citizens who break the law on character grounds and make the decision unappealable."

Minnesota GOP's CD raises privacy concerns

The Minnesota Republican Party is distributing a CD as part of a lobbying effort seeking a definition of marriage amendment, which would outlaw gay marriage.

Along with its pitch for the definition of marriage amendment, the CD asks people their views on various controversial issues, including abortion, gun control, and illegal immigration.

The CD has raised privacy concerns after it was discovered that the information is reported back to the Minnesota Republican Party along with the name of the person filling out the questionnaire, while the CD does not reveal that the data is being sent.

Gov. Pawlenty has said that the CD "should make clear that [it] is mining information."

Ayman al-Zawahri releases new video tape

Ayman al-Zawahri, Al-Qaeda's second in command, has released a new videotape.

In the tape Zawahiri says that Jesus and the Prophet Mohammed "are not sacred anymore."

Zawahiri also referred to the Prophet Muhammad cartoons saying, "they did it on purpose and they continue to do it without apologizing, even though no one dares to harm Jews or to challenge Jewish claims about the Holocaust nor even to insult homosexuals. The insults against Prophet Muhammad are not the result of freedom of opinion but because what is sacred has changed in this culture. The Prophet Mohammed, prayers be upon him, and Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, are not

sacred anymore, while Semites and the Holocaust and homosexuality have become sacred."

In the video, Zawahiri also called for Muslims to attack the west. He also said Muslims need to prevent the West from "stealing Muslims' oil."

"(Muslims have to) inflict losses on the crusader West, especially to its economic infrastructure with strikes that would make it bleed for years. The strikes on New York, Washington, Madrid and London are the best examples. We have to prevent the crusader West from stealing the Muslims' oil which is being drained in the biggest robbery in history. Reaching power is not a goal by itself ... and no Palestinian has the right to give away a grain of the soil. The seculars in the Palestinian Authority have sold out Palestine for crumbs... Giving them legitimacy is against Islam."

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.

The Mardi Gras event was the culmination of a month of gay-pride festivities. Many parade participants adopted the theme of the film *Brokeback Mountain*. The parade was led as usual by the motorcycle group, *Dykes on Bikes*. Amongst the frivolity and colour, onlookers saw "Kate Moss

dancers" snorting 'cocaine', and the gun-weilding - apparently gay-friendly - Dick Cheney. A lampoon of Prime Minister John Howard - a pirate ship carrying "Captain Crook" was also featured.

A Mardi Gras participant, Filipino Fyljoy Volefdico, 25, said: "I think within Australia there is really a lot of culture and it's great when the whole community comes together and celebrates it."

Jay Lynch, who met his partner at the event two years ago, said: "It has become a meeting ground for gays from around the world and as discrimination continues it's important we can connect on this level, and continually redefine what it means to the community."

Chair of the New Mardi Gras board, Marcus Bourget, said the event is about providing a powerful voice for the lesbian and gay community. Describing the parade as "a great Aussie tradition", Bourget said he was proud of the event. "We've run a fairly sophisticated marketing campaign this year, which has led to gradual growth internationally," he said.

Newcastle woman Donna Newella said Mardi Gras had become many things to many people, "It is not just about gays and lesbians," she said. "It's about all different issues that have arisen," she said "freedom of speech, being able to represent one's identity and being able to put a political point across."

The first Mardi Gras took place on June 24, 1978 as a protest against a ban on homosexuality in Australia. It began as an improvised street party following a gay-rights rally. However when a city official interrupted the

festivities, things turned ugly. On that night there were 53 arrests and many allegations of police brutality. Homosexuality was later decriminalised in Australia in 1984.

Local businesses realise the economic importance of the event, which is a huge money-spinner, they say. Visitors to Sydney for last year's Mardi Gras contributed an estimated \$46 million to the State's economy. Organisers say about 6000 international visitors, the majority from Britain and the USA, attended this year's event.

"We came all the way from America to see this," Mrs Phyllis Drucker 67, from Los Angeles, said. "We were told it's the best in the world, and we're going to have a ball."

A float entitled "Love Between the Flags" highlighted the need for racial harmony and cultural acceptance following last year's Cronulla riots. Creative director Graham Browning said the theme of the parade, "I believe", aimed to reflect political and social issues. The NSW Police service, with 45 members also marched in the parade.

Mardi Gras parade chief Deborah Cheetham, an internationally renowned soprano, rejected suggestions the parade was passe. "Maybe we're just in that period of transition. It's not tired," said Cheetham, who led the parade with her partner and 14-year-old daughter. "There will always be a need for Mardi Gras."

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore said the parade was a celebration of Sydney's diversity. "When you're a child the thing that really excites you is either Christmas or the Royal Easter Show and I think

as an adult Mardi Gras is the only equivalent," Ms Moore told reporters.

"I didn't want to miss any of this," said 17-year-old Jennifer Mackay from outer Sydney, who arrived with three friends 10 hours before the start.

"It's like Christmas for the gay and lesbian community," said the parade's creative director, Graeme Browning.

Iranian refugee child granted \$400,000 in compensation for "psychological harm"

Eleven year old Iranian refugee boy, Shayan Badraie, who suffered psychological injuries during his time spent inside Australia's immigration detention centres, will receive a Federal Government payout of \$400,000 in compensation. The government will also pay his family's legal bill of more than \$1 million.

Between 2000 and 2002 the Badraie family were incarcerated behind the razorwire of the (now mothballed) Woomera Detention Facility, a remote desert camp in outback South Australia - and later sent to the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. In 2001, video footage of his condition was smuggled out of Villawood, inciting national debate over Prime Minister John Howard's controversial policy of detaining children.

Badraie's family lawyer, Rebecca Gilsenan, said the family are "looking forward to living a normal life in the community. The settlement will enable the treatment he needs to somehow rectify the damage done in the detention centres. The fact the Government has settled the case indicates a serious concern on

their part they were going to be found guilty of negligence," Gilsenan told reporters.

Shayan, his father and stepmother arrived in Australia in 2000, and were sent immediately to the notorious Woomera desert camp. During his 17 months incarceration, Shayan stopped drinking, eating and speaking.

"He witnessed a series of incredibly traumatic and violent events, the sort of events no adult or no child should be exposed to," Gilsenan said. "Within a year of being detained at the detention centre... he had developed psychiatric illness to the point of diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and later depression," she said.

The court heard evidence from former senior immigration official Philippa Godwin that detention could damage the mental health of refugees - directly contradicting the Government's claims the centres were safe. Opposition immigration spokesman Tony Burke said: "Children should never have been put in detention and money will never undo the damage and pain."

The Department of Immigration said the agreement was "no admission of guilt". Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone says she does not believe a \$400,000 is a backdown. Vanstone said an offer was made to the Badraie family's lawyer some time ago but they turned it down.

Compared with similar countries, Australia has some of the toughest policies in the world against refugee arrivals. Policies include immediate mandatory detention of boat arrivals, the detention of workers and students who

overstay their visas are sent to detention camps under harsh conditions. Immigration detainees often languish in limbo with some up to 6 years while their cases are being heard. These camps have been condemned by many international human rights groups.

Greens senator Kerry Nettle says "hundreds of children have been mentally scarred by their time in immigration detention and further claims are planned." She blames the Federal Government's policy of mandatory detention.

"The Government has accepted the responsibility for the health consequences of their policy of mandatory detention," Senator Nettle said. "There is a raft of children, we are talking hundreds of children, and adults, who have had their mental health significantly impacted by the policy of mandatory detention."

She rejected that the Federal Government deserve congratulations over settlement: "To have gone through these proceedings, and spent the amount of money they have spent, to put Shayan's mother in the witness box for two weeks, is not an indication of a willingness and public accountability by the Government to accept responsibility for their actions," Senator Nettle said.

Lawyer Rebecca Gilsenan says the landmark case may pave the way for more litigation by other refugee families. It is the first time the Department has conceded that a child has been psychologically harmed in its detention.

Gilsenan says the outcome sets a precedent for other detainees. "The problems that Shayan experienced were systemic

problems rather than ones that were just specific to him, although the particular treatment that he received was disgraceful," she said. "So it's quite possible that there are other children or even adults out there who lived in a similar environment during that time in immigration detention and possibly have similar problems."

She says she hopes the systemic problems highlighted in the case will now be addressed. "I can only hope that the Government takes notice of this and doesn't continue to spend taxpayer money on having to compensate people for treating them in a disgraceful way in immigration detention."

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Today in History

1521 - Ferdinand Magellan and his crew reached Guam and were greeted by the Chamorros.

1836 - Texas Revolution: Mexican forces captured the Alamo after a 13-day siege.

1857 - The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Dred Scott Case, a landmark decision that led to several constitutional amendments.

1869 - Dmitri Mendeleev presented the first Periodic Table of Elements to the Russian Chemical Society.

1987 - British ferry M/S Herald of Free Enterprise capsized while leaving the harbour of Zeebrugge, Belgium, killing 193 on board.

March 06 is Independence Day in Ghana (1957); Great Lent begins in Eastern Christianity, Casimir Pulaski Day in Illinois (2006).

Quote of the Day

"Give thought to life and liberty."

~ *Cyrano de Bergerac*