

Top Stories

Suicide bombers blast two Bangladeshi cities



Two bomb attacks on courts in southeastern Bangladesh have killed at least eight people and wounded at least 20 others on Tuesday morning. According to officials in the port city of Chittagong, two suicide bombers set off explosives at a police checkpoint outside the main court around 9 a.m. Two police officers and one of the bombers died.

Tens of thousands of workers demonstrate in Ljubljana, Slovenia



Despite heavy snowing, tens of thousands of workers and supporters assembled today in Ljubljana, Slovenia to demonstrate against the government programme of economic reforms.

Featured story

Further details about Bush-Blair memo stopped



The U.K. attorney general Lord Goldsmith has warned British media that further reporting of details from an allegedly leaked memo about a dispute between Tony Blair and George Bush "could be in breach of section 5 of the Official Secrets Act."

Wikipedia Current Events

- The United States military is accused by the Los Angeles Times of carrying out a media manipulation program in Iraq to gain public support.
- A new campaign against Iraqi insurgents begins with joint U.S.-Iraqi troops conducting Operation Iron Hammer in western Iraq.
- New policy document on American involvement in Iraq, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq", is published by the White House.
- Surgeons in France carry out the first human face transplant.
- Death toll in northeast China coal mine blast reaches 150.
- Giovanni Prezioso, the General Counsel of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, announces that he's leaving that post, although he'll remain until early 2006 to aid with the transition.

Xbox 360 shortages expected

The Xbox 360 arrives on shelves in Europe on Friday, but many shoppers may likely leave stores empty handed.

It is expected that at least 300,000 consoles are being made available for the European launch later this week, with only 50,000 destined for the UK. Stores are reporting that they may not even have enough stock to fulfill all of their pre-orders.

Launched in the US last Tuesday,

the Xbox 360 sold out at many retailers in a matter of hours. The console can be found on eBay however, although most prices are significantly marked up from retail, some as high as \$700 USD.

The console launches worldwide in two versions: a standard version, costing £279.99, and a core version at £209.99. The Core version does not include a hard disk which is required to play games created for the original Xbox.

The Xbox 360 will be launched in Japan on December 30. This is the first time a console has been launched in the three major markets (North America, Europe and Japan) in such a short time.

Computer professionals celebrate 10th birthday of A.L.I.C.E.



Some attendees pose by the statue of Alan Turing at the University of Surrey in Guildford, UK.

More than 50 programmers, scientists, students, hobbyists and fans of the A.L.I.C.E. chat robot gathered in Guildford, U.K. on Friday to celebrate the tenth birthday of the award winning A.I. On hand was the founder the Loebner Prize, an annual Turing Test, designed to pick out the world's most human computer according to an experiment laid

out by the famous British mathematician Alan Turing more than 50 years ago. Along with A.L.I.C.E.'s chief programmer Dr. Richard S. Wallace, two other Loebner prize winners, Robby Garner and this year's winner, Rollo Carpenter, also gave presentations, as did other finalists.

The University of Surrey venue was chosen, according to Dr. Wallace, not only because it was outside the U.S. (A.L.I.C.E.'s birthday fell on the Thanksgiving day weekend holiday there, so he expected few people would attend a conference in America), but also because of its recently erected statue of Alan Turing, who posed the famous A. I. experiment which inspired much of the work on bots like A.L.I.C.E. University of Surrey Digital World Research Centre organizers Lynn and David Hamill were pleased to host the event because it encourages multi-disciplinary interaction, and because of the Centre's interest in interaction between humans and computers.



Dr. Wallace gave a keynote address outlining the history of A.L.I.C.E. and AIML. Many people commented on the fact the he seemed to have moved around a lot in the last ten years, having lived in New York, Pennsylvania, San Francisco, Maine, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, while working on the Alicebot project. The A.L.I.C.E. and AIML software is popular among chat robot enthusiasts primarily because of its

distribution under the GNU free software license. One of Dr. Wallace's powerpoint slides asked the question, "How do you make money from free software?" His answer: memberships, subscriptions, books, directories, syndicated ads, consulting, teaching, and something called the Superbot.

Rollo Carpenter gave a fascinating presentation on his learning bot Jabberwacky, reading from several sample conversations wherein the bot seemed amazingly humanlike. Unlike the free A.L.I.C.E. software, Carpenter uses a proprietary learning approach so that the bot actually mimics the personality of each individual chatter. The more people who chat with Jabberwacky, the better it becomes at this kind of mimicry.

In another interesting presentation, Dr. Hamill related present-day research on chat robots to earlier work on dialog analysis in telephone conversations. Phone calls have many similarities to the one-on-one chats that bots encounter on the web and in IM. Dr. Hamill also related our social expectations of bots to social class structure and how servants were expected to behave in Victorian England. He cited the famous Microsoft paperclip as the most egregious example of a bot that violated all the rules of a good servant's behavior.

Bots have advanced a long way since philanthropist Hugh Loebner launched his controversial contest 15 years ago. His Turing Test contest, which offers an award of \$100,000 for the first program to pass an "audio-visual" version of the game, also awards a bronze medal and \$2000 every year for the "most human computer"

according to a panel of judges. Huma Shah of the University of Westminster presented examples of bots used by large corporations to help sell furniture, provide the latest information about automotive products, and help customers open bank accounts. Several companies in the U.S. and Europe offer customized bot personalities for corporate web sites.

Even though Turing's Test remains controversial, this group of enthusiastic developers seems determined to carry on the tradition and try to develop more and more human like chat bots. Hugh Loebner is dedicated to carry on his contest for the rest of his life, in spite of his critics. He hopes that a large enough constituency of winners will exist to keep the competition going well beyond his own lifetime. Dr. Wallace says, "Nobody has gotten rich from chat robots yet, but that doesn't stop people from trying. There is such a thing as 'bot fever'. For some people who meet a bot for the first time, it can pass the Turing Test for them, and they get very excited."

EU states warned on CIA prisons

Members of the WTO have made statements in preparation of the next WTO meeting in December.

Peter Mandelson, the EU's trade commissioner, has proposed a six-point package to help poor countries. The package includes guarantees of access to cheap drugs, special help for the 40 least-developed nations, compensation for poor countries affected by the loss of their access to Europe for bananas and sugar, relief for African cotton producers, and assistance to help countries

build their capacity to trade. The EU is holding strong on its agriculture position while keeping internal dissent in check. Mandelson warned France not to veto any agreement saying that failure of the talks would be a "huge missed economic opportunity and a huge setback for multilateralism. Those who want to frustrate us, throw logs at us and impose vetoes on us - even from within our own ranks - will not find me giving up." Resistance is expected from the US, especially in the areas of textiles, and drugs. These two areas have been a areas of contention between the US and other WTO members.

Several South American WTO members complained about the current sluggishness of talks. Brazil's WTO ambassador, Clodoaldo Huguene, said earlier this week "We are seriously concerned about the current state of the negotiations. The burden of adjustment is being placed on developing countries."

The IMF also released a policy discussion paper titled "Africa in the Doha Round". In the paper, written by IMF Africa Department Senior Economist Yongzheng Yang, states that the representatives of Africa in the current round of WTO talks may be too fixated on the markets of wealthy nations. Yang writes, "African negotiators may have overlooked the potential market access gains in developing countries, where trade barriers remain relatively high and demand for African imports has expanded substantially." According to the paper Africa has primarily sought access of wealthiest nations including the US and the EU while limiting it's attention to China and other countries who imported 30 percent of Africa's exports. Recent trade issues Africa has pushed

have included cotton exports, an area that has met much resistance to the wealthier WTO members. IMF policy discussion papers describe research in progress and are not opinions of the IMF.

The WTO has also agreed to extend an exemption for members classified as "least developed" from intellectual property rules until July 2013. These members already have an exemption, valid until 2016, for pharmaceutical products. The new extension applies to trademarks, copyrights, trade secrets, and geographical names indicating goods' place of origin. If a country improves out of the classification the exemption will no longer apply.

Virginia Governor commutes 1,000th US execution

Virginia Governor Mark Warner commuted the death sentence Tuesday of convicted murderer Robin Lovitt, preventing him from becoming the 1,000th person executed in the United States since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. Lingering doubt over Lovitt's guilt was a key factor in Warner's decision. Lovitt's sentence has now been reduced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

This is the first time Warner has granted clemency in his four years in office. All eleven previous clemency petitions have been denied. Warner chose this petition to be his first, and likely last, granted, noting that clemency should only be used in an "exceptional circumstance. Among these are circumstances in which the normal and honored processes of our judicial system do not provide adequate relief - circumstances that, in fact, require

executive intervention to reaffirm public confidence in our justice system".

Lovitt was sentenced to death in 1999 for the murder of a pool hall manager. His defense team, including former Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, argued that DNA tests could have exonerated Lovitt, but weren't performed due to a mistake by a court clerk which resulted in key evidence being thrown away after the trial.

Due to the commutation of Lovitt's sentence, Kenneth Boyd, who is scheduled to be executed in North Carolina on Friday, will likely become the 1,000th person executed since 1976.

Groups prepare for December WTO talks

The European Union's highest justice official has warned EU member states that any nations found to have hosted a covert CIA jail could have its "voting rights suspended". EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini said the consequences would be "extremely serious" if reports of such jails turned out to be true.

According to Human Rights Watch, the secret prisons are located in Poland and Romania. This comes amid an EU investigation into claims that the US ran clandestine jails in eastern Europe. In the case of Romania, a senior Euro MP has questioned whether its accession to the EU should go ahead as planned. The US has declined to confirm or deny the reports of secret jails, which became public in the US earlier this month.

Speaking at a news conference in Berlin, Mr Frattini called for tough penalties against any involved

state, saying "I would be obliged to propose to the Council of EU Ministers serious consequences, including the suspension of voting rights in the council." He said a suspension of voting rights would be justified if any country is found to have breached the bloc's founding principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Such a move would be unprecedented for the EU.

However, a diplomatic source said that to suspend a member state's voting rights in the Council of the European Union, the other 24 member states would have to vote unanimously to take such a step, which would be unlikely to happen in practice.

Mr Frattini said the Bush administration had asked for more time to deliver a response to the accusations after a senior commission official formally raised the issue on a visit to Washington last week. "Right now, there is no [US] response," he said. The allegations that the CIA held al-Qaeda suspects in secret prisons in Eastern Europe were first reported in the Washington Post on November 2, but the newspaper withheld information on the location of the prisons on the request of the U.S. government.

During his first U.S. visit, the newly appointed German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier failed to receive any clarification on the question of secret CIA prisons, but the United States has now officially recognized that this is an issue of great concern to its European allies. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice promised an official U.S. clarification on this matter in the near future.

Australian Senate passes

resolution opposing death penalty in shadow of Van Nguyen execution

The Australian Senate passed a resolution "opposing the death penalty" in response to the looming execution of Van Nguyen, the Australian man found to be trafficking drugs through Singapore, which has a mandatory death sentence policy in regards to drug trafficking matters.

There was some argument in the Senate however over the exact wording of the resolution -- the motion as originally moved by Senator Bob Brown of the Australian Greens had said "abhorrence of the death penalty", to which the Government Minister for Justice and Customs Chris Ellison moved to amend the substitute "opposition to" in place of "abhorrence of".

Green members and Australian Democrat members were angered at this, with Senator Brown saying that "Should we just say, 'We oppose that but we don't abhor it?'" and asked "Is trade so important that we cannot speak our mind on utterly important matters of life and death[?]" There was confusion to whether the Australian Labor Party supported the Government amendment, but during Senator Natasha Stott Despoja's speech their opposition to the amendment was made clear. She had noted before that "What is wrong with this place? How can two major parties be such wimps and wimp out on this word? If 'wimp' is considered inappropriate, I could say 'weak', 'timorous' or 'ineffectual'" but later apologised to the Labor Party and redirected her criticism to the Government.

Senator Ellison had noted later

that "When you look at international instruments, you do not often find the language of emotion. You do not often find language which is colourful or extreme. You find language which spells out the situation." and that "We should not bring emotion into the debate which could well hamper other efforts being made in relation to the Van Nguyen matter."

A division on the amendment was called and the motion was amended in the Government's favour 34 to 30. The motion as amendment was carried on the voices (without having to resort to a division).

Today in History

1640 - John IV was declared King of Portugal, resulting in a war with Spain.

1822 - Pedro I was crowned the first Emperor of Brazil.

1913 - The world's first moving assembly line was installed in Highland Park, Michigan for the mass production of automobiles.
1958 - The colony of Ubangi-Shari became an autonomous territory within the French Community and took the name Central African Republic.

1990 - Channel Tunnel workers from the United Kingdom and France met 40 metres beneath the English Channel seabed, establishing the first ground connection between the island of Great Britain and the mainland of Europe since the last ice age.

Quote of the Day

"The important thing, I think, is not to be bitter... if it turns about that there is a God, I don't think that he is evil. I think that the worst thing you could say is that he is, basically, an under-achiever." ~ Woody Allen

About Wikinews

We are a group of volunteer journalists whose mission is to create a diverse community where citizens from around the globe (including **you**) can collaborate to report the news on a wide variety of current events. By making our content perpetually available for free redistribution and use, we hope to contribute to a global digital commons.

**Got news and no computer?
Call the Wikinews Hotline**

+1-866-653-4265
(toll-free in the U.S.)
+1-202-742-5918
(outside the U.S.)

License

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License. Articles published in this Print edition were created by Wikinewsies.

To view a copy of this license, visit:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

or send a letter to

Creative Commons

543 Howard Street, 5th Floor

San Francisco, California, 94105, USA

Audio Wikinews

Audio Wikinews is a public domain, non point-of-view news radio program recorded daily.

<http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Audio>

About Wikinews Print Edition

For more information about Wikinews Print Edition visit:

<http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Print>