

Top Stories

Bush nominates Harriet Ellan Miers for U.S. Supreme Court



United States
President George Bush announced Monday his

nomination of Harriet Ellan Miers to replace Sandra Day O'Connor as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Fatal blasts rock Bangladesh

Dhaka: Two people were killed and 40 others injured in a series of bombings at courts in three districts of Bangladesh today (Oct 3, 2005), in an apparent repeat of the nationwide August 17 bombings, police said.

Featured story

Ulcer bacteria researchers awarded 2005 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine



Warren and Marshall were awarded their prize "for their discovery

of the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* and its role in gastritis and peptic ulcer disease." Before their discovery, peptic ulcer was often a chronic disease which was attributed to stress and lifestyle.

Wikipedia Current Events

• Roy J. Glauber, John L. Hall and Theodor W. Hänsch share in The 2005 Nobel Prize in Physics.

Wikipedia Current Events

• One million French transportation workers and teachers hold a nationwide strike in opposition to the Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's economic and labor policies, forcing the closure of schools and airports.

•Ohio Iraqi War veteran Paul Hackett is expected to run in the state Democratic primary to contest the seat of Republican Senator Mike DeWine. Hackett lost in a closely contested House race on August 2.

•Four Ugandan civilians are killed in a rare afternoon ambush on a pickup truck in north east Uganda by Lord's Resistance Army rebels. The insurgents are suspected of shooting the driver and two passengers and killing a fourth with an axe.

•Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A 37-year-old Palestinian mother of six, Hifa Hindiya, stabbed and lightly injured an Israel Defense Forces soldier at the Hawara roadblock south of Nablus. Hindiya was shot and killed. Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades took responsibility.

High tides sweep west Galveston Bay

Changing conditions have brought moderate east winds to the Houston Galveston area, raising tide levels across western shores of Galveston Bay. Wind-inflated tides combined with regular high tides are resulting in maximum waters as much as four and a half

feet above normal levels. Erosion due to Hurricane Rita has lowered some areas, especially sand dunes, giving an appearance of even higher tides.

The cold front expected to pass the area on Thursday will bring an end to the east winds and tide levels should return to normal.

Energy companies to raise consumer rates

Reliant Energy and CenterPoint Energy, two local utilities in Houston, Texas, plan to increase consumer rates in response to increased demand and recent disasters.

Reliant Energy is expected to raise rates to effect a 14% increase on a 1,000 kilowatt-hour bill. A typical customer may see an increase of as much as \$20 per month. Reliant has reached an agreement with the Texas Public Utilities Commission to raise rates in two steps, once at the end of October, and again on 1 January 2006.

CenterPoint Energy must increase charges for services such as meter-reading and customer service. The Texas Public Utilities Commission prohibits natural gas companies from buying wholesale product, raising rates, and reselling. Wholesale prices of natural gas also continue to rise due to increased demand and declining domestic supply. Natural gas cannot be easily shipped to other regions like oil.

Consumer energy prices are expected to rise across the state,

in some cases as much as 20%.

The Texas Public Utilities Commission must approve rate increases before they go into effect, but approval is expected.

European court upholds asset freeze in terrorist case

On September 21st, the Court of First Instance of the Court of Justice of the European Communities ruled that decisions of the United Nations Security Council take precedence over national constitutions, European law and even the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). Observers claim that this ruling undermines the rule of law and the principles of the constitutional state.

In their verdict in the case of Ahmed Ali Yusuf, a Swede of Arab origin whose funds had been frozen in November 2001 by the European authorities after a Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council had put him on a list of alleged terrorists, the five judges state that: "the right of access to the courts, a principle recognised by both Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966, is not absolute."

The Court holds that even organisations (like the European Union) that are not members of the United Nations are bound by decisions of the UN Security Council.

The lawyer of the convicted:

"[The verdict] is completely

unacceptable [and] raises questions about the EU's position as regards the rule of law.""

Ahmed Ali Yusuf says he will appeal to the European Court of Justice.

Iraqi insurgents guilty of war crimes, says Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch today released a detailed study of attacks on civilians by members of the Iraqi insurgency. The 140-page report, "A Face And A Name: Civilian Victims of Insurgent Groups in Iraq" claims to be the most comprehensive account yet produced of abuses by the Iraqi armed opposition. In the report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) also analyses and challenges a number of arguments put forward by insurgent leaders attempting to justify their attacks on civilians. HRW argues that all such attacks are illegal under international law, and violate the Geneva Convention.

"There are no justifications for targeting civilians, in Iraq or anywhere else", said an HRW spokesperson, calling on the insurgents to "respect the laws of war".

While Human Rights Watch has been vocal in condemning abuses by American and British forces in Iraq - they stress that these can never be used to excuse attacks on civilians by the insurgency.

According to Human Rights Watch, people in the Middle East are being increasingly "repulsed" by the abuses of the insurgents, whether or not they support the US-led occupation of Iraq. The organisation is now calling on figures of influence in Iraq -

particularly religious leaders, to condemn the abuses publicly.

Physics Nobel Prize awarded for insights into light

Roy J. Glauber (Harvard University) won half of this year's Physics Nobel Prize, and John L. Hall (University of Colorado and National Institute of Standards and Technology) and Theodor W. Hänsch (Max-Planck-Institut für Quantenoptik, Garching) each receive a quarter of the prize.

Glauber clarified the quantum nature of light. He showed how light composed of discrete quantum particles (photons) can be reconciled with the wave-like behavior of light. His theoretical work laid the foundations of quantum optics.

Hall and Hänsch developed methods to measure the frequency of light to extreme precisions. Their findings "have made it possible to measure frequencies with an accuracy of 15 digits", for use in highly accurate clocks and new technology for global positioning systems.

The recipients will share a 10,000,000 Kroner prize (1.5 Million USD), with Glauber receiving half and Hall and Hänsch each receiving a quarter of the total.

Microsoft Office 12 will support PDFs

Microsoft announced yesterday that the next version of Microsoft Office, currently code-named "Office 12", will support PDF format exportation. Microsoft Senior Vice President Steven Sinofsky said Microsoft receives 120,000 requests monthly to save documents created in Office as

PDF files.

PDF is a file format created by Adobe Systems that ensures files appear similarly on any computer operating system. PDF is an open standard, and programs can read and write PDFs royalty-free. Adobe distributes software at no cost to read PDF files on many platforms. Many open source readers are also available.

There are many ways to create PDFs from Office documents. Users can purchase Adobe Acrobat Standard (MSRP US \$299.00), and can already export any Microsoft Office document to PDFs using the free Office Suite OpenOffice.org software. They can also use one of the many free programs that acts as a print driver such as the open source PDFCreator. Adobe also offers a somewhat slower, but free online PDF converter on their website. While such options have long been available, the high cost, moderate difficulty and lack of awareness has discouraged PDF use in most daily exchanges of Office created documents.

Because Microsoft has no plans to create a PDF importer, it will be impossible for the Office PDF export functionality to fulfill Massachusetts' recent requirements Open Standards drive for official, state-created documents.

The first, or beta version, of Office 12 is expected in November.

"Junk" foods may affect aggressive behaviour and school performance

Dr. Stephen Schoenthaler, a Professor of Criminal Justice at the California State University in Stanislaus, has long argued that there is a link between a healthy

diet and decreased aggressive behaviour, as well as with increased IQ and school performance.

Dr. Schoenthaler is well-known for a youth detention center study where violations of house rules fell by 37% when vending machines were removed and the cafeteria replaced canned food by fresh alternatives. He summarizes his findings by saying that "Having a bad diet right now is a better predictor of future violence than past violent behaviour." In a very large test, Schoenthaler directed a study in meals at 803 New York City schools, in low-income neighbourhoods, finding that the number of students passing final exams increased by 16%.

Critics have questioned some of Dr. Schoenthaler findings, due to the lack of placebo control groups. However, more recent work by Dr. Bernard Gesch, a physiologist at the University of Oxford, has placed some of the work on a more scientific footing. Dr. Gesch found that nutrition supplements produced a 26% drop in violations of prison rules over a placebo, and a 37% decrease in violent offences. The Netherlands has embarked on a wider scale dietary research program in 14 prisons.

The short term behaviour consequences of ingesting sugar are well understood: an initial burst on energy, followed a sugar low in which your body produces adrenalin, which makes you irritable and explosive. However, Schoenthaler and Gesch suggest that there are long term impacts over and above the short term consequences of blood sugar variations.

Today in History

1877: After battling U.S. armed forces for more than three months, retreating over 1,000 miles across Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, and enduring a five-day siege, Chief Joseph (pictured) and his Nez Percé band finally surrendered.

1908: Prince Ferdinand became the first Tsar of Bulgaria since the Ottoman invasion in the 14th century.

1930: The British airship R101 crashed in France en-route to India on its maiden voyage, killing 48 passengers and crew.

1969: The first episode of Monty Python's Flying Circus was broadcast on BBC1.

1970: Members of the Front de Libération du Québec kidnapped a British diplomat, sparking the October Crisis in Montréal, Canada.

October 05 is Republic Day in Portugal (1910)

Quote of the Day

"If we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason — for then we would know the mind of God." ~ Stephen Hawking

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