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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Cameras to be installed at city intersections

Police want to cut down on red light violations

BY CHRIS YOUNG
Special to the Daily Press

If you run a red light in Santa Monica you can expect a photo of yourself and a ticket in the mail.

Santa Monica will join 23 communities in California that have installed cameras at intersections to catch motorists in the act.

The automated systems are gaining popularity because they decrease accidents at intersections, officials say. They also have drawn the attention of critics — not only because the companies that install them get a cut on the citation payments, but because they are an invasion of privacy, some argue.

In one instance, a red light camera company had taken a 25 percent cut on each citation, motivating it to set up the system so it would issue more tickets. Some people in Los Angeles have protested their tickets, arguing the cameras cannot determine whether or not the driver was in the middle of the intersection before the light turned red.

But city officials say they plan to avoid problems that other cities have faced, said Captain Jacqueline Seabrooks of the Santa Monica Police Department.

"A lot of research still has to be done — the city council has to approve the vendor; the SMPD needs to set up internal protocols to monitor the program, interface with city departments, and get public input, as well," Seabrooks said.

Complaints about red light camera systems have come from groups like the ACLU, who say the cameras could be used for surveillance, an invasion of citizens' privacy.

"We are concerned that these cameras will be used for other purposes, and it's classically true that surveillance techniques created for one purpose are rarely restricted to that purpose," said ACLU associate director Barry Steinhardt in an Associated Press article this year.

Seabrooks acknowledged the privacy concerns.

"We tend to disagree with (the surveillance implications,)" Seabrooks said. "Surveillance has an ongoing future-oriented implication.

See CAMERAS, page 3



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

The stairs off of Fourth Street have had a steady stream of people who are trying to keep those holiday calories off.

What to do with that Christmas fruitcake

BY CAMILLE HAYES
Reno Gazette-Journal

RENO, Nev. — Behold, the fruitcake.

In centuries past it was a staple of the European diet, prized for its nutritional value and famous (some would say infamous) longevity. In England in the late 18th century, the fruitcake or "plumb cake" as it was called was held in such esteem that laws forbade its consumption on all but the most festive occasions: holidays, weddings, christenings.

What a difference a few hundred years can make. These days, fruitcake is little more than a seasonal joke; the holiday gift nearly everyone receives and few want. The holiday question on some of our minds is what to do with the thing?

We knew that coming up with creative ways to rid our readers' homes of fruitcakes would not be easy. Doorstop jokes aside, the humble fruitcake really can take a lot of punishment. If properly stored, fruitcakes can last up to three years. It takes more than a kitchen knife to do these suckers in.

See FRUITCAKE, page 3

Campaign ads to start pouring into homes for election season

BY ALEXA HAUSSLER
Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — Just as Californians make their New Year's resolutions, they will start seeing a barrage of television advertisements featuring candidates making pledges of their own.

More money was spent on political ads last year in California than any other state, and analysts predict a record-shattering blitz in the coming statewide election year.

Two wealthy Republican gubernatorial primary contenders are prepared to pour tens of millions of dollars into beaming their message into voters' homes. And incumbent Gov. Gray Davis will roll out ads in January, though he won't face a challenger at the polls for 11 months.

"The average Californian will have an easier time avoiding Regis Philbin than any of the candidates for governor next year," said Republican campaign consultant Dan Schnur.

Television spots form the backbone of America's political campaign. In California, ads are seen as critical to reach voters in its diverse and sprawling communities.

Candidates, political parties and interest groups spent an estimated $1 billion on ads in the United States in 2000 — more than quadruple that spent in 1980, said Paul Taylor, founder of the Washington, D.C.-based Alliance for Better Campaigns.

Some 1.2 million political commercials ran on 484 local television stations nationwide in 2000, according to the Virginia-based Campaign Media Analysis Group.

In California in 2000, an estimated $127 million was spent on 119,492 political ads — by far the most of any other state, according to the group. New York ranked second — with about $91 million spent on 74,698 ads.

"There's no other state like California, it is far and away the most expensive media state in the country," Taylor said.

Critics say the proliferation of television-based campaigns favors the wealthy or those backed by special interests. Others argue ads are an efficient way to deliver a candidate's message because it is difficult to compete for space in newspapers and on news broadcasts.

The nation's most populous state —

See CAMPAIGN, page 4

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ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Check in with someone who often is in the position to know what he or she wants. Though you might want to take the day off, you find you must respond to a request. Communication accelerates now that Christmas is over. Don't push a friend. Tonight: Your treat.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★★ Your personality allows someone to recuperate from recent excess and events. You understand, yet you see the problems that occur. A child or loved one warms the cockles of your heart, saying "thank you" in a most caring way. Start with your own thank-you notes! Tonight: Get what YOU desire!

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★★ Step back some. Let others jump to their own conclusions. You need to be less present for now. A loved one has a nice way of expressing his or her caring. You can share and talk easily with this person. Explain a dilemma and how you feel. Tonight: Early to bed.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★★ Realize how much your friends mean to you. If single, a friendship could take an interesting and flirtatious curve. Make sure ultimately that this change conforms to your wants. A friendship can be a wonderful base to a relationship. Tonight: Follow your pals.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★★★ Others take the lead, and you might be relieved, considering what's going down. Your sixth sense helps you with people who need extra attention. If you can, avoid responsibilities that involve going to work. Dote on those around you. A partner might be off-kilter. Tonight: Where you love it — in the limelight!

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★★ Someone cannot find the right words to let you know how very much he or she cares. Give this person several weeks, and you might be delighted by the words that spill out. Detach from problems. Allow your spirituality to speak. Don't make anything too difficult. Tonight: Off to the movies.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★★ Reach out for a partner. One-on-one relating fits the bill. Review a matter that involves your home more closely, especially if it involves an investment. Establish limits, letting someone know that you cannot do the impossible. Let someone else figure it out. Tonight: A quiet time for two.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★★ Your words melt any resistance in the next few weeks. Allow others to make the first move. Be less direct and more passive. Given the needed space and time, someone will reveal much more to you. Demonstrate your caring through a specially nurturing action. Tonight: Go along with plans.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★★★ Use your talents to gain financially. You might become more aware of an artistic leaning in the next few weeks. Your sense of humor makes a big difference in how you handle a slew of last-minute chores and errands. You might even decide to return a gift or two. Tonight: Exhaustion hits.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★★ Venus moves into your sign, adding to your desirability. Someone has much to share with you, if you relax. If single, you will respond to someone's interest in you. You might be surprised by what the two of you have in common. If attached, you will reconnect with your partner. Tonight: Naughty and nice.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★ Your basic attitude takes you a long way. Carefully review a situation that involves security and home. Don't take someone's comments personally. Be open about feelings, but understand where you could be going overboard with your reaction. Tonight: Happy at home.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★★ Reach out for others; catch up on news. You also might want to clear out any necessary thank-you notes. Your ability to tell people how you feel adds much warmth to your letters and conversations. Over the next few weeks, zero in on what you want. Tonight: Out and about.

WEATHER

Today ... Partly cloudy with a high 64°F. Winds from the Northwest at 6mph.

Tonight ... Partly cloudy with a low of 42°F. Winds from the North at 2mph.

Tomorrow ... Partly cloudy High—64°F Low—44°F

QUOTE of the DAY

"The cost of living is going up and the chance of living is going down."

— Flip Wilson

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LOCAL

Officials say cameras reduce collisions at intersections

CAMERAS, from page 1

This RLC system captures violations that have already occurred. There isn't ongoing monitoring."

Seabrooks said photos taken will stay on police file the same duration as a normal traffic citation — seven years — but can only be viewed by the offender or law enforcement on a need-to-know basis.

Santa Monica police officers will review the pictures and confirm the driver has run a red light. A citation and photographs of the violation will be mailed to the motorist. The person can then pay the fine, go to traffic school, or contest the citation.

The camera systems detect when a car enters an intersection after the light has turned red and takes pictures of the car, license plate, and driver. Some systems take a picture of the intersection showing the red light.

The police department will select the camera manufacturer from three bids — Affiliated Computer Services, Redflex, and Nestor Systems.

Affiliated Computer Services was involved in a lawsuit earlier this year in San Diego over its camera system. The company received $70 for every $271 citation, undermining the company's neutrality, according to a San Diego Superior Court judge.



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Benjamin Bright, of Venice, swings around the beach this past weekend.

"As part of a broader problem, if we're going to automate law-making functions, how do we do it in a fair way?"

— JAY STANLEY
American Civil Liberties Union

"We look at what the San Diego court found problematic, mostly police administrative issues, and we'll reduce the potential for problems by working with the city attorney's office, transportation management, and other city departments," Seabrooks said.

The camera system won't be autonomously run by the vendor, but operational aspects will be shared between the police department, the transportation management department and the vendor, added Seabrooks.

Jay Stanley, privacy coordinator with the American Civil Liberties Union, said there should be no conflicts of interest with red light camera systems. Revenue generated by the system should not go to the company that installs or maintains the cameras, as in the San Diego case, nor specific divisions of the city government, he said. An independent auditing body should be able to evaluate the system, Stanley added.

"As part of a broader problem, if we're going to automate law-making functions, how do we do it in a fair way?" said Stanley.

Seabrooks said the police department will choose the camera vendor within 90 days, and then decide which intersections will have the cameras by evaluating collision data on the city's intersections, traffic density, and other factors. The vendor will be chosen by the SMPD, the Santa Monica transportation management office, and the city attorney's office.

Tentatively, three or four Santa Monica intersections will have cameras installed within the next year and a half. Lincoln Boulevard, Cloverfield Boulevard and Colorado Avenue are likely corridors for the cameras, Seabrooks said.

Who will pay for the system has not yet been determined, but the funding source may come from the city budget, a grant, or a loan from the camera company. It's is too early to know the system's cost, Seabrooks added.

Red light camera systems decrease red light violations and associated accidents, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, who conducted a study of the cameras in Oxnard, Calif.

The SMPD has looked at camera systems in Oxnard, Ventura, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Irvine, to see how they run their systems.

The insurance institute study on the Oxnard camera system said the number of crashes at intersections citywide had a "significant" decrease after the cameras were installed at 11 of Oxnard's 125 intersections. Injury accidents at intersections with traffic signals dropped 29 percent after installing the cameras. The insurance institute said 79 percent of Oxnard residents approved of the cameras. A Santa Monica resident satisfaction survey in November 2000 found that 60 percent of residents were in favor of a camera program and 37 percent were opposed to the idea.

Seabrooks said there will be an educational campaign about the cameras, with a 30-day "grace" period after the cameras are installed to increase awareness of the dangers of running a red light.

'Free fall' and 'the kick' are all part of fruitcake fun

FRUITCAKE, from page 1

So we assembled a team of volunteers to kick, drop and otherwise mutilate several specimens of the Yuletide confection some of us love to hate.

Test No. 1: Free-fall: We started with a ring-shaped dark fruitcake, light on the candied fruit toppings but heavy, judging from the smell of it, on the bourbon and brandy. The cake was impressively dense for its size, but we suspected that the ring shape might render it structurally unsound.

For this reason we decided to go easy on it and submit it to the simplest of our trials: the drop test.

The location was the roof of a two-story house; the landing pad a concrete basketball court. Our first victim plummeted to the concrete and landed with a resounding thud. From a distance it looked as if it had survived the fall unscathed.

However, closer inspection revealed that three narrow cracks, like fissures in the Earth, divided the fruitcake into pieces that still clung stubbornly to their original ring shape.

Test No. 2: Heavy Metal

The next test required two things: a really big truck and someone to drive it. The vehicle in question was a 3,000-pound Ford Explorer; the driver was one Joel Schmidt. Joel embraced the opportunity to have his way with the small, rectangular cake produced for the occasion, saying that he had no pleasant memories of fruitcake, save one.

"When I was young I had this friend whose family got a big round fruitcake every year," he said. "By June it would still be sitting on top of the refrigerator. So we would take it and roll it down this steep hill. That was pretty fun. It was a summer holiday tradition. It rolled quite well, actually."

Smirking slightly as he took his place behind the wheel of the Explorer, Schmidt shifted into first gear and ran slowly over the fruitcake positioned in front of the left front tire. Then he backed over the cake for good measure.

"Well, that pretty much did it," he said happily, gazing down at the tire-marked, raisin-flecked smear on the asphalt. "I doubt anyone will be eating it now."

Test No. 3: The Kick

Damon Fine is no slouch on the football field. The Wolf Pack place kicker distinguished himself this past season by tying one University of Nevada, Reno record (for longest field goal) and breaking another (for highest number of field goals in a single game). Ever the sportsman, he accepted the fruitcake challenge.

The cake that Fine faced down on the field was a particularly colorful specimen, the top encrusted with a thick layer of candied cherries, pineapples and some unidentifiable bright green nuggets. He hefted the brick-sized cake in his hand and said that, to his surprise it was about the same weight as a football, only "way more dense."

Before taking aim, Fine warned the photographer to stand back, speculating that when he kicked the cake it would "totally explode." And explode it did, sending sticky pieces of fruit flying through the air like candied confetti.

Test No.4: Target Practice

Tired of childish games, we decided on a real test. It was time to bring out the big guns. Kelly and Neil Connolly, both licensed firearms instructors, met us at an outdoor shooting area.

"Target practice with a fruitcake, this is the greatest idea," Kelly enthused. "I don't like them, but we always end up with a few of them around Christmas time. They just sit there in the freezer. I wonder why I never thought of this before."

Husband Neil was less enthusiastic — but still a realist.

"I love them," he said. "I eat them every year. It seems like a terrible waste of a good fruitcake. We could have brought the ones from our freezer, but the bullets probably would have bounced right off them."

Kelly started out with a Glock, her favorite handgun, and took aim at the smaller of two fruitcakes. After a few near misses, she blew a chunk off one side, but to our surprise the rest of the cake remained intact and in place on the box.

A larger cake joined the first one on the box, and the couple pulled out the serious weapons: two M-11 fully automatic submachine guns.

They were sure this double whammy would pulverize the cakes, but no such luck. The larger cake proved especially resilient, and the volley of bullets merely nibbled at its edges. And as for the dark center of the beast, it proved too dense to lose its shape. The bullets passed right through it.

"That's a really tough fruitcake," an impressed Kelly said.

As we packed up our equipment, the photographer suggested that we contact the Army Reserve and see if they'd drop one out of a helicopter. It was an intriguing idea, but our deadline was fast approaching and it was time to lay the fruitcakes to rest.

Oh well. Maybe next year.

STATE

NASA to launch probes to orbit asteroids

By the Associated Press

PASADENA — NASA's newest space missions will take a page from the world of science fiction in quests that will launch one robotic probe to explore the two largest known asteroids and another to hunt for Earthlike planets orbiting distant suns.

The two missions, Dawn and Kepler, are both scheduled for launch in 2006. Each should cost no more than $299 million under the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Discovery program of comparatively low-cost science missions.

"Kepler and Dawn are exactly the kind of missions NASA should be launching, missions than tackle some of the most important questions in science yet do it for a very modest cost," said Edward Weiler, the agency's associate administrator for space science.

The Dawn mission will visit, over nine years, the asteroids Vesta and Ceres and study the giant space rocks from orbit, determining their exact size, shape, composition and other properties. Scientists estimate the two asteroids are, respectively, about 325 and 580 miles across.

The Kepler mission will continue the search for planets orbiting stars other than our own sun. Other searches for extrasolar planets have turned up about 80 other worlds, most the size of Jupiter or larger.

Kepler will stare continuously at a portion of space containing about 100,000 stars, watching for any dimming caused when an Earth-sized planet passes in front of any one of those stars, blocking a portion of its light as seen by the probe's telescope.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena will manage the Dawn mission. Its Ames Research Center in Mountain View will manage Kepler.

Past Discovery projects include 1997's Pathfinder mission, which sent the Sojourner rover to Mars.

Million dollar campaigns come through the television

CAMPAIGN, from page 1

stretching hundreds of miles from Oregon to Mexico — poses a unique challenge for political candidates. From its coastal enclaves, college towns and ski villages to its farms, technology centers and Hollywood — the voters are as diverse as the geography.

But television touches the entire state, and "there's no way to meet 32 million people one-at-a-time, so the only way to reach them is over the airwaves," said Schnur, the consultant who worked on former Los Angeles mayor Richard Riordan's campaign earlier this year.

To do that, however, a campaign must spend millions of dollars to cover the state's five major media markets. They include pricey Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area and Sacramento, San Diego and Fresno. Also, there are dozens of smaller-but-critical markets, including key pockets of voters in the inland valleys.

Airing a commercial to reach all of the major markets for a week can cost between $1 million and $2 million.

For two of the Republicans seeking the party's nomination for governor, ads will start in January, campaign advisers said. Riordan and investor Bill Simon are both multimillionaire businessman with campaign treasuries plump with political contributions.

The third, Secretary of State Bill Jones, has struggled to raise money and will be unable to match his opponents in a televised ad war.

And then there is Davis.

The Democrat spent $25 million on television, radio and cable advertising to win in 1998, including $4.5 million in the 10 days before the general election. Of his 2002 campaign, strategist Garry South said, "I assume we'll spend more, this will be a more expensive campaign."

Davis will have "a full media campaign," including television ads, starting in January, although he has no primary opponent, South said.

Davis anticipates the three Republicans will spend much of their time attacking Davis, South said. Already, Jones, Riordan and Simon have criticized Davis on a number of fronts.

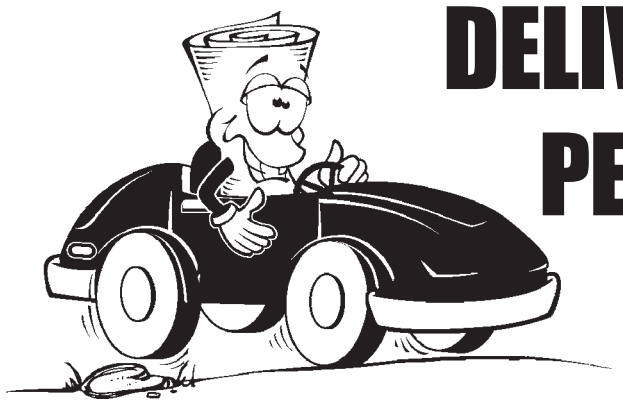
They "apparently want to make their mark in the primary by using the governor as a punching bag," South said.

Davis' early response doesn't surprise many political strategists. The governor has weathered a tough 2001 dominated by a statewide energy crisis and a looming $12 billion shortfall.

His popularity dipped to an all-time low in the summer and has yet to recover, even when lawmakers across the country are enjoying boosts since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

For California voters, the summer volley of ads was only the beginning. Bruce Newman, a professor at Chicago's DePaul University who has written several books on political marketing, said voters need to wade through the spots for substance.

"They are targeted toward people's emotions and the personality of the candidate and tend to gloss over the issues," he said. "Scrutinize the source and be careful to listen to all sides."



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NATIONAL ▫ INTERNATIONAL

Alcatraz is a powerful reminder of prison life

BY LISA SINGHANIA
Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — With its fat seagulls, blinding sunshine and spectacular views, it's hard to imagine that Alcatraz Island was once home to one of the world's most infamous prisons.

Located in San Francisco Bay about a mile from Fisherman's Wharf, the picturesque setting seems better suited to a vacation spot than the maximum-security penitentiary known as The Rock that once housed hardened criminals such as Al Capone.

Today the National Park Service operates Alcatraz as a tourist attraction that draws about 1.4 million visitors a year, a fourth of them from foreign countries. Visitors can take a short ferry ride across the bay and walk through the old prison cells, the lunchroom, other prison facilities and the military installations that predated the prison.

An excellent audiotape guide, as well as lectures by park rangers, helps bring to life what Alcatraz must have been like. Former inmates and guards discuss their typical routines, as well as their own specific memories.

There are also descriptions of some of the escape attempts, complete with sirens and other sound effects.

Some popular misconceptions are dispelled, including the accuracy of the "Bird Man of Alcatraz" character played by Burt Lancaster in the movie of the same name. And fear not: Contrary to popular belief, man-eating sharks do not circle the island.

Once outside the barracks, though, visitors are on their own — and must rely on a few placards and other signs along well-marked paths to identify buildings and sites, rather than any formal guide. Although some parts of the island are off limits, primarily for safety reasons, there is still a good deal of exploring to do. (Those with physical limitations may not be able to do everything, although some accommodations are made for the disabled.)

Visitors can walk along the water around the tip of the island near the remains of where guards' families — including their children — once lived, past the warden's now-burned-out house, the prison factory and by the old lighthouse. The prison yard, where inmates used to exercise and watch ships coming into the harbor, is open, too. There's also a protected bird sanctuary, which causes parts of the island to be closed seasonally.

Even today, the isolation that inmates at Alcatraz must have felt is palpable. Although San Francisco's landmarks are easily visible from the island's shores, a boat was really the only way to leave when the prison was operating.

A look outside also provides a powerful reminder of Alcatraz' role in American history after the prison closed in 1963. Painted on one of the building's exteriors are the words "INDIANS WELCOME" — a reminder of the island's 19-month occupation by American Indians.

In 1969, a group of Indian activists sailed to the island and set up camp in hopes of increasing awareness of their causes. Federal authorities eventually removed the activists from the island, but Alcatraz is considered a seminal event in the development of the Indian pride movement.

There is a small exhibit in a building near the dock where the ferry disembarks, as well as a documentary to watch. Visitors can also learn more about Alcatraz' previous incarnations as a military reservation and military prison. Although Alcatraz is best known for its role as a federal penitentiary, visitors would be remiss to pass on the chance to learn more about these parts of its history.

Tickets are available online and by phone through the Blue & Gold Fleet, the ferry contracted by the National Park Service to provide Alcatraz service.

The cost, as of November 2001, was $13.25 for an adult with an audiotape tour, $9.25 without the tour, with discounts for children and seniors.

Blue & Gold also offers a pricier "Alcatraz After Dark" tour that is fully escorted and allows a nighttime glance of the island.

FBI warns consumers and corporations against hackers

BY TED BRIDIS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The FBI's top cyber-security unit warned consumers and corporations last week to take new steps beyond those recommended by Microsoft Corp. to protect against hackers who might try to attack major flaws discovered in the newest version of Windows software.

The FBI's National Infrastructure Protection Center said that, in addition to installing a free software fix offered by Microsoft on the company's Web site, consumers and corporations using Windows XP should disable the product's "universal plug and play" features affected by the glitches.

The FBI did not provide detailed instructions how to do this. Microsoft considers disabling the "plug and play" features unnecessary.

The company acknowledged last week that Windows XP suffers from serious problems that allow hackers to steal or destroy a victim's data files across the Internet or implant rogue computer software. The glitches were unusually serious because they allow hackers to seize control of all Windows XP operating system software without requiring a computer user to do anything except connect to the Internet.

Outside experts cautioned that disabling the affected Windows XP features threatens to render unusable an entire category of high-tech devices about to go on the market, such as a new class of computer printers that are easier to set up. But they also acknowledged that disabling it could afford some protection against similar flaws discovered in the future.

The FBI also warned professional computer administrators to actively monitor for specific types of Internet traffic that might indicate an attack was underway.

A top Microsoft security official, Steve Lipner, sought to reassure consumers and companies that installing the free fix was the best course of action to protect their systems.

Friday's warning from the FBI's cyber-protection unit came after FBI and Defense Department officials and some top industry experts sought reassurance from Microsoft that the free software fix it offered effectively stops hackers from attacking the Windows XP flaws.

The government's rare interest in the problems with Windows XP software, which is expected to be widely adopted by consumers, illustrates U.S. concerns about risks to the Internet. Friday's discussions came during a private conference call organized by the National Infrastructure Protection Center.

During the call, Microsoft's experts acknowledged the threats posed by the Windows XP problems, but they assured federal officials and industry experts that its fix — if installed by consumers — resolves the issues.

Microsoft declined to tell U.S. officials how many consumers downloaded and installed its fix during the first 24 hours it was available. Experts from Internet providers, including AT&T Corp., argued that information was vital to determine the scope of the threat.

Microsoft also indicated it would not send e-mail reminders to Windows XP customers to remind them of the importance of installing the patch.

Microsoft explained that a new feature of Windows XP can automatically download the free fix, which takes several minutes, and prompt consumers to install it.

"The patch is effective," said Lipner, Microsoft's director of security assurance, in an interview afterward with The Associated Press.

Officials expressed fears to Microsoft about electronic attacks launched against Web sites and federal agencies during next week's Christmas holidays from computers running still-vulnerable versions of Windows, participants said.

Several experts said they had already managed to duplicate within their research labs so-called "denial of service" attacks made possible by the Windows XP flaws. Such attacks can overwhelm Web sites and prevent their use by legitimate visitors.

Addicts seek Buddhist temples to break 'crazy drug' habit

BY MATTHEW PENNINGTON
Associated Press Writer

LAD LUM KEO, Thailand — Dejected drug addicts in leg irons sit in rows under the shade of a tree by a Buddhist temple, waiting for a dose of herbal medicine prepared by an elderly monk to help them kick their habit.

At an army base in a neighboring province, a drill sergeant barks orders at convicted drug users and dealers. Dressed like over-aged boy scouts, the prisoners scurry straight-backed around the parade ground in a rush to form a line.

Thailand is using a wide range of means in an attempt to cope with its worst social scourge: addiction to methamphetamine, known to Thais as "yaa baa" — "crazy drug" — because of the severe mood swings it causes.

The Health Ministry estimates 2.4 million of Thailand's 62 million people use the drug. Of those, 820,000 are considered addicts.

Tavee Ayuwattako, a 76-year-old monk and herbal medicine practitioner, treats some of the toughest cases at a leafy retreat set up in 1998 by the Bor Ngeun Temple, in Pratum Thani province northwest of Bangkok.

Nearly a dozen of its 55 inmates have their feet chained to stop them from escaping.

Mongkol Aruwatakoh, 35, keeps his leg chains on voluntarily, having escaped seven times.

"I've upset so many people," says Mongkol, his eyes bloodshot, his hands jittery after nine years of addiction to heroin and yaa baa. "Buddhism is helping me separate the good from the bad."

There are more than 700 registered drug treatment centers in Thailand, including regular hospitals, but few offer the long-term rehabilitation needed to shake dependency on yaa baa, which experts say is as much mental as physical.

As one way to provide such care, the Thai anti-drugs agency is training monks at 300 Buddhist temples on rehabilitating addicts.

At Tavee's retreat, inmates, mostly in their 20s and 30s, sleep in the open and rise at 5 a.m. to chant mantras. They are forbidden to smoke or carry money in case they use it to buy drugs.

Tavee counsels them for an hour each day before they swallow his concoction of 61 herbs to ease withdrawal symptoms, such as muscle and joint pains.

One violent new arrival — a tranquilizer addict who beat his mother — sits in a small cage. A sign pinned on the bars reads: "Don't Stay Close."

"We'll let him out in three days time," says Tavee, who has been assaulted by patients several times. "We have to lock them up sometimes if they don't want to be here. Their families bring them here."

Yaa baa took hold in Thailand in the mid-1990s after opium and heroin producers in neighboring Myanmar, at the center of Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle, branched into cheaper, but still highly profitable stimulants.

According to the Corrections Department, 60 percent of convicts in Thailand are drug offenders. Increased arrests have led to overcrowded prisons, now filled to three times capacity.

To ease the pressure and try to reform offenders, 25 army camps are putting 2,500 drug convicts through the rigors of boot camp before they are released back into society.

At the 11th Infantry Division's base in Chachoengsao, northeast of Bangkok, 100 former dealers and addicts who have all tested negative for drugs are spending three months of drilling, vocational training and counseling.

"We can live our new life with courage ... We live our life for others and not just ourselves!" they shout in unison after a morning of exercise and drills.

Maj. Gen. Boonserb Khocharatana, the division commander, says military discipline teaches the convicts to "live with each other and come out as good people."

COMICS

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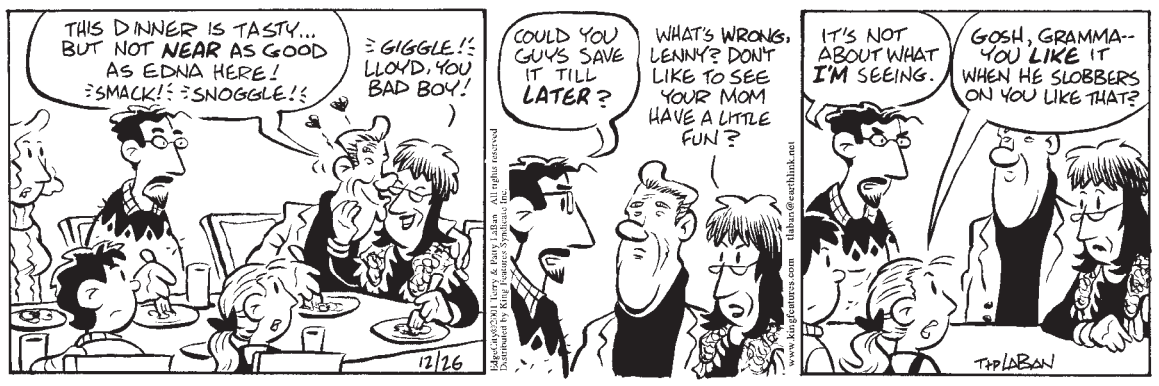
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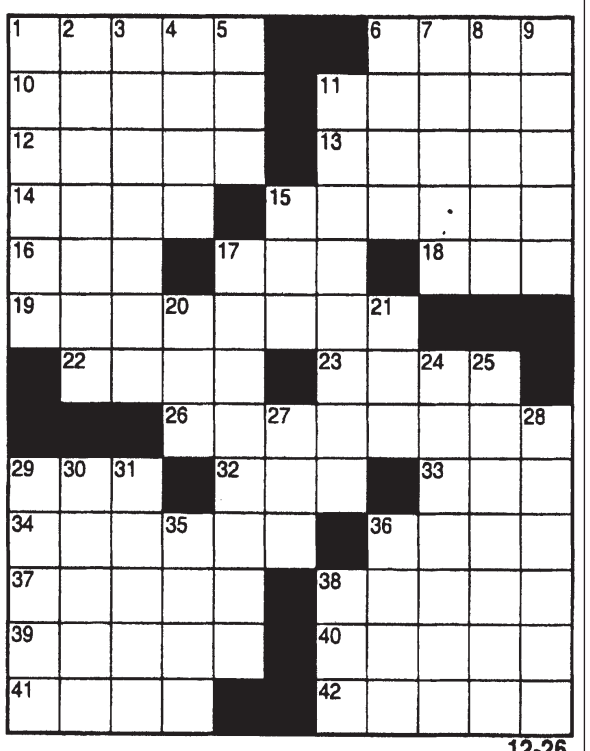
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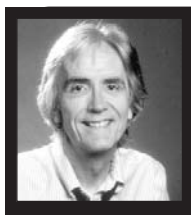
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12-26

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Let's give this guy a hand

In Singapore in September, Shahul Hameed Kuthubudeen, 17, had agreed to a favorable sentence on his conviction for obsessive hand-kissing of girls: He had been enrolled by his family into a religious school in India to break him of his habit, which in the latest case involved seven counts of extending his hand to girls, receiving her hand innocently in his, and then kissing the back of her hand repeatedly while refusing to let her go. Two weeks after the schooling was arranged but before he had left town, Kuthubudeen was arrested again for a similar attack on a 16-year-old girl in an elevator.

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BACK PAGE

Peruvians find Andean root boosts energy and sex drive

BY CRAIG MAURO
Associated Press Writer

LIMA, Peru — It's small and smelly, and it looks like a radish. But many Peruvians consider it the combined answer to ginseng and Viagra.

Maca, a frost-resistant root that grows in the frigid Andean highlands, has been used in this South American country for centuries to boost stamina and sex drive.

Archaeologists have discovered traces of maca cultivation at sites dating back 2,000 years in the central Andes mountains, where the plant thrives naturally at 13,000 feet above sea level.

Spanish conquistadors are said to have accepted bushels of the protein-rich root from local communities during the 16th century as tax payments.

Chroniclers also reported that Peru's various pre-Hispanic groups bartered with maca, used it for peace offerings and offered it to their mountain and sun gods.

Today, Peruvians eat maca fresh, dried, boiled into porridge or ground into powder and mixed with water or milk in a drink that tastes somewhat like butterscotch with an earthy aftertaste.

Just as the Incas did centuries ago, many Peruvians swear by maca's energizing and aphrodisiacal powers. It is also touted as a tonic for a host of other health problems, including post-menopause syndrome and stress.

For scientists, the verdict is still out.

Nutritionists say the root packs a powerful dose of amino acids, vitamins and minerals, particularly magnesium and phosphorous. But no major independent studies have been published about its effects.

"What we do know is that it is energizing, that it increases sexual stimulus, that it improves the disposition toward sexual activity and improves mood."

— DR. ALBERTO TEJADA
Urologist

"It's still what you call an alternative medicine. There is still no scientific basis," says Dr. Alberto Tejada, a urologist at the Fertility Institute in Lima.

But Tejada and many Peruvian doctors recommend maca to patients anyway.

"What we do know is that it is energizing, that it increases sexual stimulus, that it improves the disposition toward sexual activity and improves mood," he says.

Hersil, a Peruvian pharmaceutical company that plans to market maca-based tablets internationally, says small-scale research it financed at Peru's Cayetano Heredia University found maca increased men's sex drive and sperm counts.

Dr. Fernando Cabieses, a neurologist who for two decades has studied Peru's treasure trove of medicinal plants, supervised the study, which involved 60 volunteers who were divided into two groups. One group took maca tablets for 12 weeks, the other placebos.

"It's a very interesting study, with interesting results, which need to be corroborated by other scientific groups to see if this repeats," Cabieses says.

Jose Luis Silva, Hersil's assistant general manager, sees opportunities for maca to compete for some of the $2 billion now spent around the world each year on ginseng, a root highly prized in Asia for its energy-giving and curative properties.

Overseas sales would be a boon for this impoverished nation's rural farmers, many of whom eke out livings in rugged countryside.

Maca could be just the beginning, Peruvians hope. Dozens of native plants are used as natural medicines by indigenous communities.

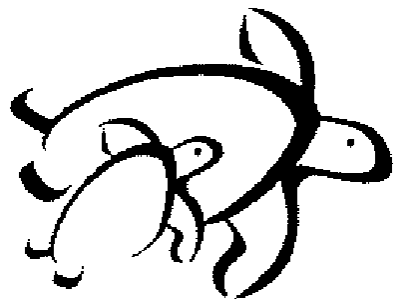
Among those herbal medicines is mashua, a root that is said to inhibit sex drive. It was reputedly given to Inca warriors to help keep them focused on battle. Today, Peruvian women are said to slip mashua into their husbands' meals before extended business trips so their minds focus solely on business.

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