

Whitlam now our longest living ex PM

Gough Whitlam has become Australia's longest living former Prime Minister. Today he surpassed our shortest-serving Prime Minister, Frank Forde, who lived until the age of 92 years, six months and 10 days. Forde served only eight days as Prime Minister in the period between John Curtin's death in office in 1945 and the election by the Labor caucus of Ben Chifley as leader. Whitlam was twice elected prime minister and held the office from from December 1972 until he was dismissed by the Governor General Sir John Kerr on November 11, 1975.



Greek help for Tirana visa ring

A gang in Tirana that over the last two years issued dozens of visas to Albanians who wanted to travel to Greece also worked with at least one Greek policeman who waved the travelers through at a border post in Florina, at Greece's northern border, it emerged yesterday.

Sources said that 14 people have been arrested in Albania for setting up what has been described as a "fake Greek consulate" that was selling visas to Greece for 3,000 euros to each applicant. It is estimated that at least 200 visas were issued by the gang. Albanian police also found at the building in Tirana a list of names of people who were on a waiting list to obtain visas. Albanian police believe that the visa holders were instructed to cross at the Kristalopigi border post in Florina when a specific officer, who colluded with the gang, was on duty. An investigation into whether the visas were forgeries or had been issued by any of the three genuine Greek consulates in Albania is still continuing.

Hippocratic ethics are shown to be skin deep

A group of 30 doctors from Athens's Georgios Gennimatas Hospital are to face a prosecutor, accused of turning the institution into a private clinic by carrying out plastic surgery for paying clients under the guise of urgent operations.

A report issued by public administration inspectors alleges that the doctors forged patients' test results and changed names on files in order to prioritize cosmetic operations. Meanwhile patients with serious ailments were discharged on the pretext of a temporary release. Instead of being readmitted they are alleged to have been added to a long waiting list while rhinoplasty and varicose vein operations were pushed through.

The scam came to light after hospital staff noticed a sudden increase in the number of cases described as emergencies while many hospital beds were emptying.

Saddam's luxury yacht heads home to Iraq

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A luxury yacht kitted out for Saddam Hussein with swimming pools, a mosque and a missile launcher will return to Iraq because the global economic crisis has thwarted attempts to sell it.



The 82-metre (270-foot) Ocean Breeze, which also sported a mini-submarine among its facilities, will be towed home from a Greek port, Iraq's government confirmed, saving it the cost of expensive berthing and maintenance fees.

The yacht was built for Saddam 28 years ago, but the Iran-Iraq war -- which saw it moved from the southern port of Basra to Saudi Arabia -- was among the factors that meant the dictator never savoured its ostentatious splendour.

The vessel became the subject of a legal wrangle when it appeared in the French Riviera city of Nice in 2007, where a British boat dealer tried to sell it for 23.5 million euros (30.38 million dollars).

The Iraqi government, which has a right to recover the late dictator's property, managed in January 2008 to have a French commercial court block the sale until its ownership was firmly established.

Cayman island-based Sudeley Limited, part-owned by King Abdullah of Jordan, claimed to own the floating palace, but later renounced its claim, paving the way for its return to Iraq.

"The Iraqi government has authorised the transportation ministry to bring the presidential yacht to Basra province's port," an official government statement said Wednesday, confirming the move from the Greek port of Piraeus.

Iraq will also pay costs to a Greek company as part of an agreement to maintain the yacht since July 2008, the statement added.

"The Iraqi government decision to bring the yacht home will spare Baghdad the possibility of facing other claims and saves it docking and crew costs, since the Iraqi government will not be able to sell the yacht in the current circumstances with the world dealing with the financial crisis," the government statement said.

The vessel, which was built in Denmark in 1981, started life as the Basra Breeze. It was moved to Saudi Arabia for fear that the Iran-Iraq conflict would see it damaged.

The Iraqi cabinet announced in November last year its plan to sell the yacht, with the ministries of finance and foreign affairs responsible for the transaction.

National Bank of Greece included in Dow Top 150 most influential global companies

National Bank of Greece recently won the honor to be included in the Global Dow - Top 150, an index that com-

piles the 150 most innovative, influential and vibrant corporations around the world. In a statement, National Bank

said this development was even more important given the very negative international situation in the credit sector. The index is a product of cooperation between Dow Jones and Wall Street Journal and aims at highlighting the current and future leaders in the global corporate world. National Bank said the development placed its shares among a list of top shares around the world and attracts the attention of a wider range of international investors.

