

CLEARING UP
Slow clearing today, with highs in the 40s; turning colder tonight.
Forecast, F6
50¢
\$2.40 per week by carrier

The Providence Journal

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WEST BAY
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2006 New England Newspaper of the Year

'Twas the Day After Christmas



Carol Germani and her son, Erik Forand, of Warwick, return merchandise at the Target store on Bald Hill Road yesterday. Target might ask customers seeking to return an item to produce a license so they can check credit.

The return rush is on

BY PAUL GRIMALDI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — The clerk at the Target returns counter was keeping calm. The middle-age man standing on the other side was not. He was trying to return an electric coffeemaker he said he'd gotten for Christmas. She wouldn't let him. A check of his license showed he'd returned a number of items during the year to the store on Bald Hill Road. He insisted he hadn't lived in the state long enough to do that. She relented. He walked into the store to look for something to buy. Consumers may find it more difficult to return gifts this year because merchants are tightening their policies in response to an increase in return fraud. The National Retail Federation, a trade group based in Washington, D.C., estimates return fraud costs the industry \$9.6 billion a year — about a third



Rose Deluca moves a cart filled with returned merchandise at the Target store in Warwick. Some retailers have tightened their policies in response to return fraud.

SEE RETURNS, A9

Court upholds death penalty for Saddam

With no further appeals possible, the former president of Iraq is to be executed within 30 days.

BY JAMES GLANZ
THE NEW YORK TIMES

BAGHDAD, Iraq — An Iraqi appeals court upheld the death sentence against Saddam Hussein yesterday and ruled that the man whose brutal reign began in 1979 and ended with the American-led invasion in 2003 must go to the gallows within 30 days. It was the court of last resort for Saddam, who received his death sentence on Nov. 5 from the Iraqi High Tribunal, a court set up specifically to pass judgment on his years in power. No further appeals are possible, and his final legal recourse appears to be a clause in the Iraqi Constitution stating that the Iraqi president must approve all death sentences.

That constitutional provision offers Saddam only the slenderest of hopes. Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president, has said that he is formally against the death penalty, but he has permitted the hangings

SEE SADDAM, A6

December deadly month for U.S. troops

With five days remaining before the end of 2006, the number of those killed is the second highest for the year.

BY NANCY TREJOS
THE WASHINGTON POST

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Seven more American service members have been killed in Iraq, the U.S. military reported yesterday, making December the second deadliest month of the year for troops.

With just five days left before the end of the year, a total of 90 service members have died this month, according to a tally maintained by the Associated Press. The deadliest month this year was October, when attacks in Baghdad and the western Iraqi province of Anbar left 105 American troops dead.

SEE IRAQ, A6

Barrington Bridge project exceeds budget, schedule

It was supposed to take three years and cost \$10.4 million. The final cost could be more than \$20 million, and take six years.

BY BRUCE LANDIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — In its second multimillion-dollar settlement stemming from flawed engineering in as many years, the state has paid \$5.3 million to resolve a dispute about the design of the long-delayed Barrington Bridge project. The payment to Shire Corp. in September adds more than half to the \$10.4 million contract price of the bridge, and the Department of Transportation said the total cost

of building the new bridge could ultimately reach \$22 million.

The settlement also adds to the already long delays on the project. The bridge was supposed to be completed in September. The settlement puts off the completion date to June 15, 2009, unless the DOT pays Shire more to speed up the work.

In February 2005, the state made a settlement with Shire for \$3.1 million on another DOT project, the overpass carrying Point Street across Route 95 in Providence. The overpass opened on Dec. 5, nearly three years late.

In both cases, the state paid large sums to settle Shire's claims

SEE BRIDGE, A9

Pipeline explosion kills at least 260 in Nigeria

The blast comes after thieves tapped the pipe and poverty-stricken residents rushed to collect the spurting gasoline.

BY KATHARINE HOURELD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAGOS, Nigeria — A gasoline pipeline ruptured by thieves exploded into a blazing inferno yesterday as scavengers collected the fuel in a poor neighborhood, killing at least 260 people in the latest oil-industry disaster to strike Africa's biggest petroleum producer. Braving a towering pillar of fire and a cloud of acrid black smoke, thousands of people in Lagos' Abule Egba neighborhood surged around rescue workers carrying away charred bodies, hoping to catch a glimpse of missing relatives. "My brother, my brother," wailed 19-year-old Suboke Adebayo as an unidentified male corpse was loaded into an ambulance. Adebayo, a student, had spent hours trying unsuccessfully to contact her sibling. "I've been calling him since



People watch as firefighters attempt to extinguish the remains of burned vehicles and corpses after a pipeline explosion killed at least 260 people, in Lagos, Nigeria, yesterday morning.

SEE NIGERIA, A9

The next fitness craze: Exercise for the brain

Anxious to stave off signs of aging, boomers search for ways to keep their minds sharp.

BY PAM BELLUCK
THE NEW YORK TIMES

PROVIDENCE — Is there hope for your hippocampus, a new lease for your temporal lobe? Science is not sure yet, but across the country, brain-health programs are springing up, offering the possibility of a cognitive fountain of youth.

From "brain gyms" on the Internet to "brain-healthy" foods and activities at assisted living centers, the programs are aimed at baby boomers anxious about

entering their golden years and at their parents trying to stave off memory loss or dementia.

"This is going to be one of the hottest topics in the next five years — it's going to be huge," said Nancy Ceridwyn, codirector of special projects for the American Society on Aging. "The challenge we have is it's going to be a lot like the anti-aging industry: How much science is there behind this?"

SEE BRAIN, A8

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C M Y K

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HEARTBURN MEDICINE AT ISSUE
Taking such popular heartburn drugs as Nexium, Prevacid or Prilosec for a year or more can raise the risk of a broken hip markedly in people over 50, a large study in Britain finds. **A2**

TOURNEY'S GUIDING SPIRIT
For 20 years, Ralph Catuogno's dedication to youth sports has been the inspiration behind the largest girls' high school basketball tournament in the state. **C1**



NO KICK FROM CHAMPAGNE?
From sparkling wines and Italian liqueurs to hearty beers and hardy ciders, there are plenty of alternatives for New Year's Eve beverages for those who, as the song says, get no kick from champagne. **G1**