

Pumpkin politics

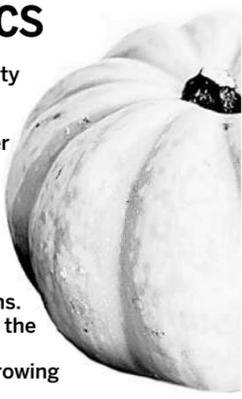
BRISBANE: The Liberal National Party deputy leader and his family have nurtured the biggest pumpkin recorded in Queensland — a monster weighing 304kg.

That's enough to make over 1200 batches of pumpkin scones.

Lawrence Springborg took first prize in the Giant Pumpkin Competition at his local Inglewood Show on Queensland's Darling Downs.

He told AAP the monster bettered the former state record of 300.5kg.

"This one just kept growing and growing and growing," Mr Springborg said.



Going for gold

BRISBANE: Queensland will reap vast economic gains if the Gold Coast wins the right to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games, the premier says.

Anna Bligh (pictured) yesterday said the government would spend up to \$11 million on a formal bid to host the Games.

She said up to 30,000 jobs would be created in the lead up to and during the event, with tourism and construction the big winners.

The Gold Coast will be competing against Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.



\$632m pledge for health

CANBERRA: The Federal Government will inject \$632 million into the "lifeline" of the health and hospital system by boosting training for GPs and specialists.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd wants to tackle the severe shortage in GPs and specialists, particularly in rural and regional Australia, to complement his program to reform the nation's hospitals.

The initiative is the latest instalment from the Government as it tries to get the states and territories to support its plan.



Death probe

PERTH: A Perth man has died in police custody after twice being taken to hospital for medical check-ups.

Sergeant Greg Lambert said internal affairs would investigate the death of the 33-year-old in the city watch-house on Sunday night.

Suspect critical

SYDNEY: A suspect linked to a possible drug lab explosion at a Sydney house has been taken to hospital in a critical condition with multiple burns, police say.

The 39-year-old suspect, accompanied by a solicitor, had attended Balmain police station yesterday with a number of burns to his arms, legs and face.

Drug-drive shock

BRISBANE: The number of people caught drug-driving on Queensland's roads is rising as police roll out more random tests to crack down on dangerous drivers.

Police conducted 11,926 roadside tests for cannabis, methylamphetamine and MDMA between June 1, 2009, and February 16, 2010.

Of those, 228 people tested positive — 27 a month.

Big blow eases

BRISBANE: A cyclone over the Coral Sea poses no immediate threat to the Queensland coast, the weather bureau says.

Cyclone Ului has weakened from a category five to a four and is about 1470km northeast of Mackay.

STI spike

SYDNEY: Health authorities have warned of an alarming spike in gonorrhoea cases in the port city of Newcastle.

More than 40 people have been newly diagnosed with the sexually transmitted infection (STI) this year, more than four times the rate in the same period in 2009.

Slow justice

SYDNEY: Some 14 years after a warrant was issued for his arrest on drug supply allegations, a NSW man has been arrested at a suburban Sydney home, police say.

The arrest in Auburn on Friday was one of 903 made during the three days to midnight (AEDT) on Sunday as part of Operation Avert Five, run by NSW Police.

It targeted people subject to bail conditions and warrants on DNA evidence.

.02 'inevitable'

SYDNEY: Reducing Australia's blood alcohol limit for drivers to 0.02 is inevitable, a public health expert says as prominent academics also voice their support for the move.

Professor Mike Daube of Curtin University, said it would send an important signal to motorists.

Best friend stabbed

Drama and confusion as lovers' tiffs end in death

By KELLE NOLAN in Melbourne

A DAY of drinking and a series of lovers' tiffs turned to tragedy for two Melbourne best friends, leaving one dead and the other charged with his murder.

Quinton Alexander, 24, died after being stabbed allegedly by 28-year-old Tao Va, in Footscray, Melbourne's west in March last year.

Va, of West Footscray, appeared for a contested committal hearing at the Melbourne Magistrates Court yesterday.

The court heard Va had been

staying with Mr Alexander, his best friend, after the accused's relationship with Newhara Walton, the mother of his one-year-old daughter, had ended two weeks earlier.

Watching Ms Walton enter the witness box yesterday, Va began to cry.

The court heard that Va and Mr Alexander had been drinking bourbon and light beer with several others since before 9am on the day of the alleged stabbing.

The day ended when Va knocked on Ms Walton's door and she ran out to find Mr Alexander lying on the footpath.

"He had blood all over his abdomen, there was a hole in his stomach," she said in a statement tendered in court.

She said she asked Va, "Why did you do it, to your best friend?" and he replied that Alexander had been "holding me upside down and strangling me to death ... the only thing I could do was stab him".

Ms Walton said she had gone to the men's home in the afternoon with Mr Alexander's fiancée, Camelia Muriwai, and could see that Va was upset with her.

He later became angry and kicked in the bathroom door after someone

shaved a strip of his hair while he slept.

Mr Alexander had tried to calm Va, who later left with a sword to go back to Ms Walton's apartment "to get my stuff".

Ms Walton also went back to her place with Mr Alexander, who became angry with Va and grabbed him by the throat after he mentioned Ms Muriwai.

Ms Walton said Va's hands were by his side "and his face was changing colour".

The pre-trial hearing before magistrate Julian Fitz-Gerald continues.

Hardy Icebergers shrug off shark sighting

MELBOURNE: For Brighton Iceberger John Locco a shark lurking in the deep as he goes about his daily ocean swim is not a big issue.

So yesterday morning when he and five other icebergers were having their daily swim, they did not miss a beat when, on their return to shore, they were told a three-metre shark had been spotted close to them.

"We see them all the time and we give them the same recognition as we would for a report of a car accident — we're over the phobia," the 60-year-old swim veteran said.

He said local shark spotters have described the shark as a white-tipped "grazing shark" and not a territorial shark.

"It sounds as if it's come in for a feed of fish and then took off again," Mr Locco said.

"Free-range swimmers are aware of what they are doing and we swim on regardless."

Mr Locco said the shark was seen in the deep water off the dog beach at Brighton.

The deputy curator at Melbourne Aquarium, Allison Edmunds, said sharks in Port Philip Bay are not uncommon.

"It sounds like sharks are coming in following their prey, such as snapper or salmon," she said.



Picture: Nine News

FEARLESS: President of Brighton Icebergers John Locco and his members jump back into the sea 30 minutes after a shark (inset) was sighted between Brighton and Elwood

Gender gap not cheap

SYDNEY: The gender wage gap costs Australia \$93 billion a year in productivity, and 60 per cent of the disparity comes down simply to "being a woman", a report shows.

The gap between men and women's pay remains at 17 per cent, and the total dollar figure is the equivalent of 8.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), the National Centre of Social Economic Modelling (NATSEM) reveals.

'Torched' cat outcry

PERTH: Animal welfare officers say they are appalled at the horrific death of a cat drenched with fuel and set alight in Perth.

The RSPCA has appealed for public information to track down the culprits.

A ranger investigated following a call from a resident in the eastern suburb of Bassendean on Friday evening after the dead cat was found at the entrance to a local reserve. The animal had been set alight and burned to death, the RSPCA said yesterday.

Melbourne cops racist: report

MELBOURNE: African youths have been racially targeted, taunted and bashed by police across Melbourne, according to an explosive report.

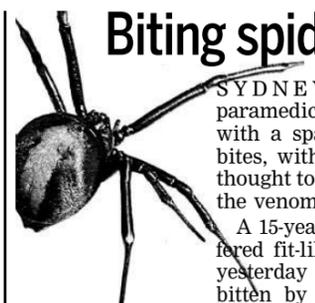
Victoria Police officers are accused of labelling young African men "monkey" and "black c...", taking photographs of them gathered on the streets for intelligence purposes and, in one case, taking

off their uniforms to bash black men in a public park, the report says.

Police routinely target young Africans by repeatedly arresting and questioning them about crimes, the report by the Springvale Monash Legal Service says.

When young Africans complain, front-line officers increase random searches and questioning, it claims.

Biting spiders enjoy weather



SYDNEY: NSW paramedics have dealt with a spate of spider bites, with four people thought to be victims of the venomous redback.

A 15-year-old girl suffered fit-like symptoms yesterday after being bitten by an unidentified spider at Tamworth, in NSW.

Four other people, including an eight-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl, were bitten by what were believed to be redback spiders yesterday, the Ambulance Service of NSW says.