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LIVE FROM...

Health Experts Warn of Avian Flu; Bonds Gets Feisty; Martha's Homecoming

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KYRA PHILLIPS, CNN ANCHOR: And this just into CNN. The 12-panel jury has just been selected in the Michael Jackson child molestation case. Our Miguel Marquez outside the courtroom, getting the information, just as we toss it to him. Miguel, what do you know?

MIGUEL MARQUEZ, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, I know that that jury has, in fact, been impaneled, five men and seven women. The youngest is a 20-year-old male, the oldest is a 79-year-old female that went through.

This is the third round of jurors that they've selected and picked to be in this smaller pool of jurors. And now they have the 12 jurors who will hear the case against Michael Jackson.

There are still eight alternate jurors to be picked. That process will begin now and is probably under way right now. And now that this thing -- that these jurors are picked, it will certainly move toward opening arguments very soon. I can tell you of those jurors, just doing some quick checking of who they are, there are at least three Hispanics on the jury, a Hispanic -- two Hispanic males and one Hispanic female.

There are no African-Americans on the jury, although there may be an African-American on one of the alternate lists. There was one in the row of jurors that was being questioned today. She was quite outspoken about the media's effect on the process and about her concerns with the sheriff's department. But it looks at this point that the 12 are set, and now we're just looking for eight alternates so this case can move forward -- Kyra?

PHILLIPS: All right. Miguel Marquez. We're outside the courthouse there in Santa Maria. We'll continue to check in with you. Thank you so much.

And more now on the bird flu and the concern it's raising among global health experts. Right now scientists and health authorities from 20 countries are in Vietnam for a conference on how to prevent avian influenza from becoming the world's next flu pandemic.

CNN's Mike Chinoy reports from Ho Chi Minh City, where emergency measures are already being taken to stop the threat of the lethal poultry disease.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE) MIKE CHINOY, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): They look like they're preparing to tour a bioweapons facility. But in Vietnam these days, this is the only truly safe way to visit a poultry farm, so great is the danger from avian flu. We joined dozens of international experts on the disease as they inspected safety measure at this state-run chicken farm near Ho Chi Minh City. Avian flu has caused the deaths of tens of millions of birds here and killed dozens of people in recent weeks. That's fueled fears it could mutate into a form that spreads easily among

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humans and spark a global pandemic.

(on camera): However effective the measures at this farm, experts say the avian flu virus is now so well entrenched throughout Asia it's no longer possible to talk about eradicating it, and that makes the disease a time bomb.

DR. HANS TROESDSSON, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: We would see millions of people dying. We would have a pandemic that would shut down societies and communities and conservative estimation says -- it's saying maybe five to seven million deaths. That's conservative. We could be up to 50 or 100 million deaths.

CHINOY (voice-over) Dr. Hans Troesdsson is the WHO's man in Vietnam. At an international conference here, he and his colleagues are trying to develop strategies to reduce the risk of avian flu, but also to prepare for the worst.

SR. SHIGERU OMI, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: Hospitals, in particular, will come in a great strain and normal functions of society will be disrupted because so many people will be outright sick or too afraid to go to work and obviously the economy cost would be enormous.

CHINOY: Controlling avian flu, though, means changing age-old patterns of behavior. Just down the road from that big chicken farm, we found families raising chickens with no precautions at all.

"I don't keep my chickens in cages," says Nuwinto Twee (ph). "I take good care of them, and if they get sick, I just bring them to the vet."

No one wears protective clothing here. Kids play next to the chickens. It's a typical scene in rural Vietnam and it's precisely the kind of setting where the virus could again jump the species barrier and set the stage for a potential global public health disaster.

Mike Chinoy, CNN, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

PHILLIPS: Well, given the bird flu conference in Vietnam and having the word pandemic mentioned by experts at the World Health Organization, we're left wondering how big is the threat? Dr. Arnold Monto is a epidemiology professor at the University of Michigan. He joins us to assess the risk posed by bird flu and what to do about them. Good to see you, doctor. DR. ARNOLD MONTO, EPIDEMIOLOGIST: Good to see you.

PHILLIPS: So, I guess I want your first reaction. Is this something we should be concerned about, particularly here in the United States?

MONTO: I think we need to be concerned about this globally. I think it could be very bad. But the problem is, we don't know how big the risk is immediately. We know there's going to be a pandemic, but we don't know exactly when it's going to happen.

PHILLIPS: And we saw from Mike Chinoy's piece and we see from the video the issue of these poultry farms and these animal markets that we see overseas, particularly in Asian countries. Does it need to start there? Do you need to wipe out these open markets and the way that poultry is dealt with?

MONTO: What's bothered us in terms of future developments is that the avian flu has jumped to man and has spread occasionally from person to person in this part of the world. And we're worried that if this happens, the virus could change and mutate so it could transmit from person to person. The avian situation is only bad except for local reasons, because of the human-to-human transmission, which could happen.

PHILLIPS: So you're more concerned about the human-to-human versus the animal-to-animal or animal-to-human? Is that right?

MONTO: Well, it's all of concern. But if -- and if we control the animal-to-animal spread, we'll probably control the animal-to-human spread. But we have to be prepared for both. And that's why the U.S. is developing vaccines and is stockpiling anti-virals which will work against these potential avian viruses that might spread from person-to-person.

PHILLIPS: All right, I want to get back to a viable vaccine in a minute. But let me just backtrack once again. So if we talk about animal-to-animal then animal-to-human, then wouldn't it make sense to wipe out these open markets and a lot of these poultry farms where many are saying this problem is coming from?

MONTO: Well, I think Mike Chinoy characterized the problem very specifically. And that is, you're trying to change age-old practices, and you might be able to change them in one country, but in the less-developed countries, you're not going to be able to change it completely. So what we have to do is create a barrier so that we do not get the bird-

to-human transmission taking off and really creating a pandemic.

PHILLIPS: Got it. So what is happening now? Talk to me about a viable vaccine, how close that could be and other precautions that the United States is taking to prevent this from becoming such a disaster.

MONTO: Right. We have actually two approaches. One is vaccination. And because vaccine has to be specific to the virus it's trying to prevent, a new vaccine has to be developed for this kind of avian influenza. These vaccines are going into tests at the National Institutes of Health very soon and it's going to take a little while to figure out what the dose should be and things of this sort. But sooner or later, we're going to have vaccines for this kind of virus.

We also know that one of our anti-virals, asletamaveratamaflu (ph), actually works in preventing and treating this kind of influenza. The problem there is supply. And that's why we're going to have to stockpile because there's a fairly slow trickle of this drug into the marketplace. And that's why we're going to have to get enough of the anti-viral ready so that if we need it, we can use it.

PHILLIPS: Dr. Monto, I won't even attempt to pronounce that drug again. I'm going to let you say it. And we will follow the progress being made when it goes into a trickle effect to a much more prominent drug. Dr. Arnold Monto, thank you so much for your time today.

MONTO: Oh, you're very welcome. Bye bye.

PHILLIPS: Straight ahead, Martha Stewart making plans for her comeback next week. We're check her spring calendar just ahead on LIVE FROM.

SIBILA VARGAS, CNN ENTERTAINMENT CORRESPONDENT: And I'm Sibila Vargas in Hollywood. Last night a big movie star set a Guinness record for the most public appearances. I'll tell you who when CNN's LIVE FROM continues. (COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VERONICA DE LA CRUZ, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Wondering if the proposed changes in Social Security are a gamble or a fair bet for your retirement? You can crunch the numbers and cut through the jargon at cnnmoney.com/socialsecurity.

Social Security is a hot topic in Washington. But what do proposed changes mean for you? Myths, half-truths and exaggerations aside, it's important to get your facts straight. For instance, is Social Security going bankrupt? In a recent "USA Today"/CNN/Gallup poll, 50 percent of workers polled said they didn't think Social Security would be able to pay them a benefit when they retire. According to the government, that's not true.

Now, the ultimate guide to retiring. If you've got a decade to go until your golden years, there are three words that can help: save, diversify and clarify. But even if you are living in retirement, there's no need to worry. Learn to monitor your finances and make the most of what you've got.

Ever considered becoming a millionaire? Punch in your numbers online and figure out what you need to live the good life. Guiding you on the road to retirement from the dot-com news desk in Atlanta, I'm Veronica de la Cruz.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

PHILLIPS: Big Will Smith charms the Brits. A religious awakening for a piece of corn. And a couple of Oscar heavyweights get ready to duke it out for the Golden Boy. Just some of the entertainment nuggets making headlines today.

Sibila Vargas, keeping her eyes on all of them, of course. What you got, Sibila?

VARGAS: You want the nuggets? I'll give you the nuggets. You know Will Smith's romantic comedy "Hitch" is already a proven success at the U.S. box office. Well, now the superstar's on a quest to take England by storm. Big Willy made not one, not two, but three premieres in Manchester, Birmingham and London yesterday, setting a Guinness world record for the most public appearances by a film star in a single day. No kidding. He called the whirlwind tour a beautiful day.

And in music news, it's a beautiful day for one member of the metal band Korn. Brian Head Welch (ph) is leaving the group to seek a higher calling. In a statement, the guitarist said, quote, he "has chosen the Lord Jesus Christ as his savior and will be dedicating his musical pursuits to that end."

Well, you know it's Oscar time, and you can bet that all eyes will be on the leading ladies this weekend. That's because two contenders will be going head-to-head for the second time in a row in what some are calling Oscar's biggest showdown.

(BEGIN VIDEO TAPE)

VARGAS (voice-over): In this corner, weighing in with almost 20 feature films, three Oscar nominations, and one very famous husband, Annette "Being Julia" Bening.

ANNETTE BENING, ACTRESS: How dare you speak to me like that!

VARGAS: And in this corner, weighing in with more than a dozen films, one Academy Award, and one slightly less famous husband, Hilary "Million Dollar Baby" Swank.

HILARY SWANK, ACTRESS: Is that enough truth to suit you?

VARGAS: The Oscar heavyweights face off for Best Actress gold, a rematch of their original bout five years ago.

SWANK: Heavy?

VARGAS: Back then the statue made its way to Swank's mantle for her work in "Boys Don't Cry," beating out Bening's performance in "American Beauty."

BENING: Excuse me. Excuse me. I must be psychotic then!

VARGAS: This time around, Bening plays a prima donna theater actress in "Being Julia," while Swank plays a boxer.

SWANK: It's so rare, I think, to be nominated with someone and then be nominated again only, you know, a few years later.

BENING: It's a funny coincidence, I think. VARGAS: As far as Annette and Hilary are concerned, the battle exists only in the media. The only jabs they're taking at each other are compliments.

SWANK: Annette is such an inspiration to me.

BENING: She's fantastic.

SWANK: She is -- you know, I've had the opportunity to meet her. And she's so generous and lovely.

BENING: I loved the movie "Million Dollar Baby," and I loved Hilary Swank.

VARGAS: The only gloves worn at this year's Oscars will likely be made of satin.

SWANK: I think in the end there's so many great performances this year and to just talk about us, it's just unfair to them.

BENING: Whatever happens.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VARGAS: And we'll see what happens at the 77th annual Academy Awards this weekend. And don't forget to tune into our pre-show Oscars special on Sunday on CNN -- Kyra.

PHILLIPS: All right, Sibila Vargas, aka Don King. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

VARGAS: Thanks, Kyra.

PHILLIPS: All right. Straight ahead, San Francisco Giants' star hitter Barry Bonds is starting spring training in a feisty mood. Upon arriving in Scottsdale, Arizona, Bonds lit into reporters for dwelling on whether steroids have helped him close in on Major League Baseball's home run record. CNN's Matt Morrison reports.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MATT MORRISON, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Still recovering from recent knee surgery, Barry Bonds may not be in peak physical condition, but verbally, he may be better than he's ever been. The seven-time National League MVP spoke passionately about a number of topics, including the news media, fans, his family, and accusations of steroids use by ex-Major Leaguer Jose Canseco, who recently published a tell-all book.

BARRY BONDS, BASEBALL PLAYER: I was better than Jose then and I've been better than Jose his whole career, so I don't have anything to talk about Jose. If he wants to make money, go make money.

MORRISON: Last December, the "San Francisco Chronicle" printed what it says is grand jury testimony in which Bonds admitted to unknowingly using steroids. Bonds wouldn't answer specific questions about that report, but he did discuss steroid use.

BONDS: I don't believe steroids can help you eye-hand coordination technically hit a baseball. I just don't believe it. And that's just my opinion.

MORRISON: Bonds also scolded the media for what he described as relentless coverage of the issues.

BONDS: You guys are, like, rerun stories. I mean, this is old stuff. I mean, it's like watching "Sanford and Son." You know, you just rerun after rerun after rerun after rerun.

MORRISON; With Bonds closing in on the career home run records of Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron, the San Francisco slugger is prepared for however fans may react.

BONDS: I probably have gotten the best relationship with fans through all of this than I ever have in my entire career. Dodgers Stadium is the best show I ever go to in all baseball. They say "Barry sucks" louder than anybody out there. You got to have some serious talent to have 53,000 people saying you suck.

MORRISON: Matt Morrison, CNN, Atlanta.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

PHILLIPS: Martha Stewart gets out of jail next week, and she's already making plans for the spring. Coming up, what's on the homemaking diva's to-do list? Plus a look at how she's been spending days and nights behind bars. You'll be surprised to hear what she's added to her diet.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

PHILLIPS: Right now want to take you live inside the Clearwater, Florida, courtroom right now where a judge has started the hearing this afternoon on whether the feeding tube that's keeping Terri Schiavo alive can be removed by her husband or if her nutrition will continue while her parents pursue their legal fight to keep the severely brain-damaged woman, their daughter, from dying.

Right now, if the judge refuses to extend that stay, then Terri Schiavo's parents plan to ask a state appeals court to intervene. And if that fails, now they've said they're going to appeal directly to the U.S. Supreme Court on the grounds that Schiavo's religious and due process rights are being violated. So we are following this hearing on whether Terri Schiavo's feeding tube can be removed. Of course, it's a story we've been following for a number of years now.

Well, call her the "comeback diva," Martha Stewart gets out of prison next week. And by most accounts her return will not be a quiet affair. She's got big plans and they extend well beyond the flower garden.

CNN's Allan Chernoff reports.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ALLAN CHERNOFF, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): When Martha Stewart decided to serve her time instead of wait for an appeal, she said she'd look forward to gardening upon her release.

MARTHA STEWART: I would like to be back as early in March as possible, in order to plant the new spring garden and to truly get things growing again.

CHERNOFF: From her West Virginia prison, Stewart has ordered her seeds and is ready to plant, according to the new issue of "Martha Stewart Living." Editor in chief Margaret Roach, who has been visiting and corresponding with Stewart, writes: "At the minimum security prison, Martha has taught a nightly yoga class to inmates. She also crocheted, but lamented, 'my crochet is still very basic.' And in the ceramic studio, she decided to cast, paint, and then glaze a nativity scene for her mother as a gift."

To supplement the prison diet, Stewart ate wild dandelions, says the magazine. And also decorated the prison chapel for a memorial service.

The magazine reports Stewart's reading list has included Bob Dylan's "Chronicles," a biography of John James

Audubon, and a novel, "The Clearing."

The article comes days after hair stylist Frederic Fekkai revealed he'd visited Stewart to discuss washing away her gray to restore her blonde tresses. Clearly, Martha is getting ready for her close-up, and there will be many.

She has already signed deals to host two TV shows, a daily lifestyle program and her own version of "The Apprentice," for which contestants have already been trying out. Even though Stewart will still have five months of home confinement to serve, she will be permitted to work outside the home. And producer Mark Burnett says that will include shooting the series.

MARK BURNETT, TELEVISION PRODUCER: Anything we decide to shoot on Martha Stewart around that time will be allowed. She's in the television business, so therefore she's actually working in the same business she's already worked in.

CHERNOFF (on camera): During her legal ordeal, Martha Stewart became a liability to her own company. And the products, including the magazine bearing her name, have been de-emphasizing Stewart. But America loves a comeback, and Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia is counting on it. Good reason for the company to publicly embrace its founder and plan a homecoming.

Allan Chernoff, CNN, New York.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

(STOCK MARKET REPORT) PHILLIPS: And still ahead in the next half hour of LIVE FROM, exotic animals for sale? More and more Americans are buying them and keeping them as pets. That's given rise to an illegal trade. Just ahead, an inside look at the growing market for those exotic animals.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

PHILLIPS: "Now in the News" the Michael Jackson trial, just the past half hour, a jury is in place. Eight women, four men, the panel was whittled down from hundreds of prospective jurors. We could see opening statements as early as next week. A live report is straight ahead.

Hello Bratislava. President Bush, the first lady in Slovakia. The first ever visit to that country by a U.S. president. It's late at night there now and Mr. Bush meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Bratislava tomorrow.

Rain, rain, when will it end? That's the big question in Southern California after seven straight days of nearly nonstop precipitation. It's causing rescue officials in L.A. County to cast a wary eye on coastal hill slides and evacuate homes they feel are in danger of mudslides. Forecasters predict another big storm for next week.

Hunter S. Thompson may go out much the same way he lived, curiously. Friends of the author and so-called Gonzo journalist are looking into the possibility of firing his cremated remains out of a cannon. It's been said he wanted it that way. Thompson committed suicide over the weekend, he was 67.

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