

13,000 arrests in Dublin and Limerick as Gardai target gangs

Ruairi O'Corra

631 firearms have been seized from criminals in the Dublin area since May 2005, according to figures released today. 13,000 arrests were also made as part of Operation Anvil, which targets criminal gangs in Dublin and Limerick.

Dublin Fianna Fail TD Charlie O'Connor, who received the figures today, described Operation Anvil as 'very successful'. But a Labour spokesperson claimed the government TD was 'living in cloud-cuckoo land' and a Fine Gael councillor described O'Connor's claim as 'pre-election fantasy'.

Operation Anvil has cost €21.5 million and created 15,000 hours of overtime for Gardai. In the fourth quarter of 2006 there was a 34 per cent increase in the detection of possession of firearms.

Since May 2005, there have been 7,488 arrests for serious crimes, including 69 for murder, 879 for serious assaults, 1,916 for burglary, 880 for robbery, and 1,793 for theft.

Almost €74 million worth of drugs were seized in 2006, while property worth €16.2 million was repossessed by the Criminal Assets Bureau.

'I would like to congratulate the Gardai on their progress with Operation Anvil. It has proved to be very successful where I live in Tallaght in disrupting the criminal activities of a number of key criminal gangs,' O'Connor said.

'Deputy O'Connor is living in cloud-cuckoo land if he really thinks that Operation Anvil has been such a rousing success,' said Labour spokesperson Dermot O'Gara

'There were 27 gun murders in 2006 - an all time record. What's particularly disturbing is the fact that detection rates for homicide are appallingly low at just 16 per cent. Operation Anvil is a sort of ad hoc overtime operation which has now become semi-permanent and is no substitute for a properly resourced strategy with a professional team.'

Fine Gael Councillor for Finglas, Bill Tormey, also took issue with O'Connor's view, describing it as a 'pre-election fantasy'. 'If I was Charlie O'Connor, I'd take heed of McDowell's comment about the dying wasp [Minister McDowell likened a spate of gangland killings in 2004 to last sting of a dying wasp]. The detection rate is falling, and no amount of sophistry can hide that.'

Greens 'could win ten seats'

Steven Carroll

Green Party representatives were meeting today to assess the impact of their weekend conference and to plan the next stage of their election campaign. Opinion polls show continuing strong support for the Greens and leader Trevor Sargent insisted at the party conference that they were heading for government.

'This is the most important gathering that the Green Party has ever had. With just weeks to the election we are telling our members, candidates and the public that we are ready for Government,' Sargent told delegates at the Galway conference

Political analyst Dr Adrian Kavanagh, of NUI Maynooth, believes that the Greens have the potential to add at least three seats to their present six in the May election.

'The green tide is growing across the country and people are more concerned with environmental issues,' Kavanagh told *Newsday* today.

'Their popularity was centred in urban areas (five seats in Dublin, one in Cork), but the development of commuter towns has given the party a wider appeal. I

expect them to take seats in Galway West, Carlow/Kilkenny and Wicklow.'

The Greens have a good support base in Dublin and Kavanagh believes that they could add to their existing five seats. 'They could take more seats in Dublin. I expect them to put up a good challenge in Dublin Central, South Central and North Central and considering the popularity of Trevor Sargent, he could take Joe Corr along with him in Dublin

North.

'On a good day they should hold their six seats, pick up the commuter towns vote and maybe spring a few other surprises along the way. So a target of ten seats is not unrealistic,' Kavanagh said.

Sargent has refused to rule out forming a coalition with Fianna Fail or with Fine Gael. This strategy of keeping the party's options open could help the Greens pick up transfers widely on polling day.



Entertainment News Today

The Swedes invade Dublin

The Absolut Swedish Festival kicks off in Dublin tomorrow and runs until Sunday March 4.

The festival aims to bring the best in Swedish music, film, food, art and theatre to venues and restaurants across the city.

Some of the venues where events will take place include the Village which will host the hottest new Swedish music acts from Thursday to Saturday, the IFI will screen new Swedish cinema and Filmbase and the Lemonstreet Gallery will exhibit the work of top Swedish artists.

More information can be found at www.swedishfestival.ie.

Anna Nicole stays put

A Florida appeals court has ruled that the remains of Anna Nicole Smith cannot be moved until the court hears a challenge from her estranged mother.

Previously the court gave control of the body to the attorney of Smith's infant daughter, who had decided to bury her next to her son in the Bahamas.

Smith's mother, Virgie Arthur wants to bury her daughter in her home state, Texas.

Kerry's new hideaway

Kerry Katona has bought herself a new home.

The star, who got hitched to taxi driver Mark Croft on Valentines Day, reportedly paid Man. United striker Louis Saha €1.9 million for the luxury Cheshire pad.

A source close to the star said "The house she's bought is deceptively large and has about an acre of gardens and a double garage. It's very private so it's ideal for someone in the spotlight."

That's my foot you Blunt

James Blunt reportedly drove over a photographer's foot after a pre-Oscars bash.

US media reports claim that the singer ran over the snapper's toe while trying to flee a large group that had gathered around his car. His representative denies these claims.

Cameron's found Jesus

Makers of a documentary entitled *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* answered questions from sceptics in New York Public Library yesterday.

The documentary which has been produced by Oscar-winning director James Cameron claims that 10 coffins found in 1980 in a town in south Jerusalem are that of Jesus and his family.

One of the boxes has Judah son of Jesus on it while another has Mariamene, the name which is used for Mary Magdalene in early Christian texts.

Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the site, said the idea failed to hold up by archaeological standards, but made for profitable television. The documentary will be aired on The Discovery Channel

Business with Kevin Sheeky

Kerry Group performs ahead of expectations

The Kerry Group's sales rose last year even though pre-tax profits fell by 25 percent. The Irish-based food ingredient company blamed the fall in profits on restructuring costs and losses incurred after the sale of parts of the business. The company had warned of a fall in profits in May, blaming rising energy costs and a weak dollar.

Total sales for the year rose by five percent to €4.65 billion, but pre-tax profits fell from €297.9 million in 2005 to €221 million last year. This drop in profits includes exceptional losses of €73.4 million mainly due to the closure of ten factories in seven different countries.

Frank Hayes, Director of Corporate Affairs for the Kerry Group, told *Newsday* that the company's performance last year ended up being better than expected. 'Last year, as we signalled at our AGM, there were significant changes in the whole food industry, which we expected would affect our profit margins,' said Hayes.

'We absorbed €80 million in additional costs due to increased fuel costs and costs related to that; packing, transport etc...if anything today's results are better than we expected.'

The Group's European sales accounted for €3 billion of the total sales figure, with the American market accounting for €1.3 billion. The Asia Pacific region was the firm's fastest growing market

with a nine percent increase to €363 million.

As we went to press Kerry

Groups' shares were trading at €20.05, down 41 cent from their price at close of business yesterday.



Looking East Wal-mart, the world's biggest retailer, announced they are to buy a controlling 35 percent stake in the Chinese hyper-mart chain Trust-Mart. This move is seen as a significant step in Wal-mart's attempt to become the largest foreign retailer in the Chinese market.

Currently the French group Carrefour, the world's second largest retailer, is China's largest foreign retailer with 90 stores operated throughout the

country. Wal-mart currently has 75 stores in China but the acquisition of the 101 Trust-marts would mean the US firm would leap-frog Carrefour in the rankings.

The take-over is set to cost Wal-mart \$1 billion, with the company only gaining control of the hypermarket chain in 2010 if certain conditions are met. Wal-mart vice-chairman Michael Duke called the acquisition 'an important step in bringing additional scale to our China retail business'.



Low profits are predicted in next-gen gaming

The next-generation gaming console market will not be solely dominated by Sony as it was with the Playstation Two and most game developers will not see profits until at least 2008, according to a report compiled by Screen Digest, a media research and analysis company.

The report predicts that the future games console market will be led by Sony's Playstation Three followed closely by Microsoft's Xbox, with Nintendo's Wii a distant third. It also says that next generation game developers will face significant costs due to

longer game development times and larger production teams. As a result there will be fewer games released exclusively on one console because multi-format releases increase the games' potential market.

Ed Barton, the report's author, said that after looking at the potential of the next-gen games market 'unless you have a pretty serious hit which is selling serious numbers, there aren't going to be many titles that are going to be making that money back for the end of 2007, possibly going into 2008'.