



Top Stories

Riots cease in Dublin against Unionist march



Dublin returned to calm after the worst riots that it had seen in a quarter of a century. A

Loyalist march, including members of the Orange Order who had traveled from Northern Ireland, had descended into violence when Republican protesters tried to disrupt the parade.

Opposition may boycott Thai election; demonstrators want Thaksin out



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for his resignation.

Featured story

Alternative to controversial hotel proposed to Buffalo, N.Y. business owners and residents

At the February 22. meeting about the proposed Elmwood Village Hotel, Rocco Termini unveiled a new proposal. Termini's proposal will use most of the existing structures, have at least seven retail outlets and no hotel.

Wikipedia Current Events

- 2006 Winter Olympics: The Olympic flag is passed to the mayor of Vancouver, home of the 2010 Winter Olympics, during the Closing Ceremony of the 2006 Winter Olympics.
- Al Askari Mosque bombing: The International Crisis Group releases a report cautioning the international community to plan for the contingency of a civil war in Iraq. At least 250 people have died in violence resulting from the Al Askari Mosque bombing.
- Jamaica will have its first female Prime Minister, as Portia Simpson-Miller is elected president of the People's National Party. She will automatically replace P. J. Patterson in a few week.
- The world's population hits 6.5 billion at 0016 UTC, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's World Population Clock.

Opposition may boycott Thai election; demonstrators want Thaksin out

Having outlined his manifesto in his last pre-election radio broadcast, beleaguered Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has failed to deflect calls for his resignation.

Offering an increased minimum wage, additional debt relief for farmers, and pay rises for civil servants the PM starts the election campaign with his Thai Loves Thais (Phak Thai Rak Thai) party in good shape for the snap election

announced last Friday.

Thaksin's dissolution of the lower house of parliament, and move to re-establish his authority through elections has met with criticism from leaders in the troubled southern provinces as well as from political opponents. Zafi-in Jae-loh, the deputy chairman of Narathiwat Islamic Committee said the move would do nothing to help the situation faced by ethnic Malay Muslims in the south. The three southernmost provinces, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala face near-daily bombings and shootings with a considerable armed forces presence contributing to tensions in the area.

Opposition parties concerned that the three years early election will not resolve the current political situation have announced that they may boycott the April 2 election. The Democrats (Phak Prachatipat) and the smaller Great People's Party (Phak Mahachon) took over 25% of the vote in the February 2005 elections. Third placed at the last election with 11.4% of the vote, the Thai Nation Party (Phak Chart Thai) have yet to announce their decision, leaving party leader Banharn Silapa-archa to decide.

Despite the upcoming election, and in the face of rumours of violence, a mass protest against the Prime Minister still went ahead. The People's Alliance for Democracy was reported to be monitoring a crowd they were suspicious of ahead of the rally in Sanam Luang,

Bangkok. However the main rally went off peacefully. Noon saw the arrival of former politician Chamlong Srimuang with the Santi Asoke Buddhist sect, including barefoot monks and nuns. Reports indicated that the total number in attendance and supporting the call for the now-caretaker Prime Minister to go were in the tens of thousands. Many protesters vowed to stay overnight. Alluding to past protests that had toppled Thai governments, Chamlong said "We can eat anything, sleep anywhere. Tonight we will sleep here". Anti-Thaksin banners displayed at the open-air rally stated that he had "No right to rule", while others read "Thaksin=Toxin" below an image aimed at comparing the PM with Adolf Hitler.

Calls for the PM to go have a long history, with his policy of pursuing his opponents through the courts drawing the attention of the King, thus leading to Thaksin dropping cases against media firebrand, Sondhi Limthongkul. A challenge through the country's Constitutional Court was brought by 28 of the country's senators following the PM's family selling their 49% share in Shin Corporation tax-free. The sale, to Temasek Holdings, was widely seen as allowing control of key telecoms infrastructure to pass into foreign hands. Wikipedia describes Temasek as, "the investment arm of the Singapore government."

Investigation wanted into the murders of Iraqi academics

Majid Majhoul Hawi al-Moussawi said his family "locked the door and left for Syria, the only country that would have us. We are grateful, but there is no work. There is nothing for us here." He took his family out of Baghdad after his daughter Hanan, 16, was

kidnapped.

Professionals in Iraq say they face a deteriorating situation. Young physicians are looking for other countries to train in and even the patients are leaving, no longer confident in the care they can get in Iraq.

Dr. Omar Kubasi supported the claims that a systematic campaign to destroy Iraqi academia is occurring, stating, "I think it's part of the plan for the country's destruction. The situation in the last six months has gotten so bad, we couldn't continue."

Amer Hassan Fayed, assistant dean of political science at Baghdad University said; "It's creating a brain drain, we could end up with a society without knowledge. How can such a society make progress?"

Hundreds of Iraqi academics have been assassinated since the U.S.-led coalition invasion in March 2003, and there have been no charges brought against any suspects in the murders.

Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MEP for Southeast England, is calling for a United Nations investigation into the killings which, she said, is forcing thousands of Iraqi educators to flee for their lives.

"Iraq is undergoing a major brain drain, and can ill afford to lose academics and teachers to a continuing wave of violence. Iraq's education system, once one of the best in the region, has been decimated: some 84 percent of the country's higher education institutions have been burned, looted or destroyed, according to the United Nations University. These assassinations, which

appear to be countrywide, non-partisan and non-sectarian, must be investigated by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on summary executions -- and those responsible brought to justice. Iraq needs security and stability, but it is clear that the continued U.S. and (British) occupation is contributing to the problem, not the solution," Lucas said.

Anglican Church offers landmark compensation deal

The Anglican Church in South Australia has agreed to pay up to \$AU4 million to 36 victims of alleged pedophile Robert Brandenburg.

Brandenberg, a priest and former Church of England Boys Society leader, committed suicide in 1999, on the same day he was to face court on child sex offence charges.

Peter Humphries, lawyer for the victims, said the deal was the result of three years of negotiations with the church. "Two thirds of the batch of claims have been assessed and we're satisfied that the church has made sensible offers - we'll be recommending settlement in next day or so," he said.

Humphries said he has recommended most of the victims settle with the church. "For those clients who accept offers that will be it," he said.

24 victims have agreed to accept the church's offer and have settled their claims. The remaining 12 are expected to be finalised soon.

First Australian convicted under new anti-terrorism laws

Former taxi driver Joseph Terrence Thomas has become the first Australian convicted under new anti-terrorism laws.

Thomas was convicted by a Supreme Court jury of receiving a plane ticket and \$AU4,740 (\$US3,500) from Al-Qaeda associate Khalid bin Attash. The 32-year-old was also convicted of having a Pakistan visa changed to appear that he had been in the area for two weeks, instead of two-and-a-half years.

The jury acquitted Thomas on further charges of intentionally providing himself as a resource at the Al Farooq terrorist training camp in Afghanistan and of agreeing to become a sleeper agent for Al-Qaeda in Australia.

During the trial, prosecutor Nicolas Robinson alleged that Thomas told Australian Federal Police officers that Al-Qaeda wanted him to conduct surveillance of Australian military installations.

Outside the court, Thomas's father, Ian Thomas, told reporters he was happy his son had been acquitted of the more serious charges. "The acquittal has been a great victory - I've always supported our son and family and will continue," he said.

Thomas's wife, Maryati Thomas, said she was relieved Thomas was not convicted of all charges. "It's a big victory for us, the fact that he's here and all the family have been standing right next to us," she said.

Federal Attorney General Philip Ruddock said the convictions show Australia's new anti-terrorism laws are working. "The importance of not engaging with terrorist organisations and in this case receiving money from such an organisation ought not be underestimated by the broader community," he said.

Defence barrister Lex Lasry applied for bail, telling the court that Thomas had no previous convictions and had already spent time in custody in Pakistan and three months in the maximum security Acacia Unit at Barwon Prison. Justice Philip Cummins remanded Thomas into custody for a pre-sentencing hearing on March 2, 2006.

Thomas faces a maximum of 25 years imprisonment for receiving funds from Al-Qaeda and a maximum of two years imprisonment for altering his visa.

U.S. appeals court to reconsider Hawaiians-only admission policy

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco on Wednesday voted to reconsider an earlier decision against Kamehameha Schools, an independent school in Honolulu, regarding the legality of its admission policy that favors Native Hawaiians.

A majority of the 23 eligible judges (one judge from Hawaii recused himself) on the 9th Circuit Court voted to reconsider the August 2, 2005 decision, in which the court ruled 2-1 that the school's admission policy violates federal civil rights law by absolutely barring non-Hawaiians from attending the school.

A date has not been set for the rehearing of the case before a so-called en banc panel of 15 of the 24 judges.

The case was filed in June 2003 on behalf of an anonymous non-Hawaiian student who applied for admission to Kamehameha and was rejected. U.S. District Judge Alan Kay ruled in November 2003

that Kamehameha's admission policy was not in violation of civil rights law, citing the school's unique historical circumstances and its mission in remediating the socioeconomic and educational disadvantages that Native Hawaiians face. Kay's ruling was overturned by the 9th Circuit in its August 2005 ruling.

The student is currently completing his final year at a public high school. The rehearing of the case means that the student will most likely not be able to attend Kamehameha before he graduates in June.

Kamehameha Schools was established in the 1884 will of Hawaiian princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the last direct descendant of King Kamehameha I. Her will directed that the schools give "preference to Hawaiians of pure or part aboriginal blood."

Kamehameha Schools' admission policy, according to its Web site, is to "give preference to applicants of Hawaiian ancestry to the extent permitted by law." In theory, qualified non-Hawaiians may be admitted after all qualified Hawaiian applicants are offered admission, but in practice there are usually fewer spaces than there are qualified Hawaiian applicants.

Today in History

1594 - The King of Navarre was crowned King Henry IV of France at the Cathedral of Chartres near Paris, beginning the Bourbon dynasty.

1617 - Rise of Sweden as a Great Power: Sweden signed the Treaty of Stolbovo to end the Ingrian War with Russia, making large territorial gains.

1801 - Washington, D.C. was placed under the jurisdiction of the

U.S. Congress.

1933 - The Reichstag building was set on fire, a pivotal event in the establishment of the Nazi regime in Germany.

1976 - The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was proclaimed in Western Sahara. February 27 is Independence Day in the Dominican Republic (1844)

Quote of the Day

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
"Life is but an empty dream!"
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they
seem.

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ~

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