



Top Stories

100s of thousands take to the streets across France

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets across France this weekend to pressure the government over new laws, which they say will erode job security. The marches were mostly reported as festive and peaceful. Demonstrations were also reported in Marseille, Rennes and Lille, where police charged and teargassed crowds.

Second oil disaster in Estonia within two months

Estonian and Finnish oil spill response vessels are working on cleaning up the oil spill caused by the sinking of the Runner 4. The Dominican-registered ship sank on March 6 near the Estonian coast in the Gulf of Finland. This oil disaster may be even worse than the one of February, which was described by the BBC as the worst oil spill that Estonia has ever experienced. In the February spill, approximately 35 000 birds died.

Featured story

Cuba and Japan to play in WBC final

Cuba and Japan will face off in PETCO Park today for the Inagural 2006 World Baseball Classic Championship.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Belarusian presidential election, 2006: Alexander Lukashenko has been re-elected president of

Wikipedia Current Events

Belarus with 82.6 percent of all votes, in an election which is considered by many to have been rigged. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which monitored the election, is expected to comment on the election later today.

- The United States and EU condemn the elections. The White House, which has previously labelled Mr Lukashenko a dictator, says it does not accept the results. The EU says it is likely that it will impose sanctions.

- At 0730 AEST, Tropical Cyclone Larry makes landfall near Innisfail, Queensland, Australia, with wind gusts of 290km/h (180 mph) recorded, which would make it a Category 5 storm on the Australian scale for severity of cyclones.

French National assembly to approve copyright bill

he French National Assembly is to adopt a bill, known as DADVSI ("author's right and related rights in the information society"), tomorrow. This bill reforms the French code of intellectual property (CPI) and other laws, mostly in order to implement the 2001 European directive on copyright.

The directive mandates legal protections of Digital rights management (DRM) measures against circumvention. DRMs are "digital locks" that prevent users

from freely copying or playing contents, in order to enforce the copyright of the authors, artists, publishers and producers. The initial draft of the bill, proposed by Minister of Culture Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, made circumvention of DRMs, or even facilitation thereof, a felony (délit), with a maximal penalty of 3 years in prison and/or a €300,000 fine as with counterfeiting. Since DRMs, circumvention and facilitations were not legally defined, it was feared that the law would effectively prevent competitors from creating players, especially based on free software, compatible with major systems such as Apple's iPod or Microsoft's Windows Media Player — or even to prevent the creation of any free software capable of loading files with DRM capabilities, that is, potentially most future text, audio or video file formats.

The initial draft also conserved the threat of a counterfeiting felony conviction for those exchanging copyrighted files on the Internet. This was judged to be unfairly repressive and unrealistic. In France, it is commonplace for Internet users to have broadband up to 16 megabits per second in cheaply priced (€30 a month or lower) ADSL packages, often comprising VoIP phone and television ; millions of users, especially the young, are believed to use peer-to-peer file sharing software. Lawmakers, from both the majority UMP party and the opposition, found it unwise to turn millions of citizens into potential

felons. As a consequence, the Minister proposed a "gradual" scheme where mere downloading of one file would be punishable by a €38 fine, which was adopted as an amendment. It remains to be seen how the law will be enforced.

With respects to DRMs, lawmakers from both the majority UMP party, the centrist Union for French democracy and the opposition adopted amendments that make it compulsory for publishers of DRM-encumbered content to give the specifications to whomever would like to implement a compatible player. This proposal was decried by some US news sources as targetting Apple Computer's iTunes system, tied to the iPod players. It is yet unknown, though, if these amendments would apply to companies that choose not to claim the new special protection awarded to DRMs by the law, which enable them to sue those who implement software meant to circumvent their protections.

Lawmakers also expressed concerns that the proposed law would weaken existing legal exceptions to copyright, especially the right for users to make copies of copyrighted files for private use (CPI L122-5).

The lawmaking process was quite a bumpy one. In December, lawmakers adopted a surprise amendment that would legalize peer-to-peer sharing as "private copy", much to the dismay of the Minister of Culture. The amendment, proposed by a bipartisan coalition of majority UMP and opposition lawmakers, was the first in a series that would have established a system known as the "global license" through which Internet users would have paid a flat fee in exchange for an

authorization to use peer-to-peer services. The fees collected would be redistributed to authors and performers. In March, the Minister tried to withdraw article 1 of the law, which was the one that was amended to his dislike, but the next day he had to reintroduce it because withdrawing it may have been unconstitutional. The Assembly then voted the article down and adopted an Article 1 "bis", essentially an amended version of article 1 without the legalization of peer-to-peer sharing.

The law, initially presented as an uncontroversial, technical text, soon became a hot topic. Some lawmakers, both from the opposition and the majority, decried intense lobbying by the entertainment industry. Some amendments were nicknamed the "Vivendi Universal amendment", from the name of a major entertainment company that some lawmakers and commentators claim has inspired them. UMP lawmakers such as Bernard Carayon denounced pressures and even blackmail from some powerful lobbies.

The Assembly will very probably adopt the bill on March 21, despite the opposition of some UMP, UDF and opposition lawmakers. The bill will then be sent to the French Senate for further amendment and approval. Since the government declared the bill to be urgent, it is probably that after examination by the Senate, the bill will be sent to a mixed Assembly/Senate commission for harmonization, then finally voted. Given that some UMP and opposition lawmakers have voiced concerns about the constitutionality of some episodes of the lawmaking process, it is likely that the bill will get sent to the Constitutional

Council for constitutional review. Finally, president Jacques Chirac is likely to sign it into law.

Maria Menounos will present the 2006 Eurovision Song Contest

The American NBC journalist and Hollywood actress Maria Menounos gave her first official press conference in Greece, as a presenter of the semi-final and the final of the Eurovision Song Contest 2006, which will take place in Athens on the 18th and 20th of May, 2006.

Menounos, who is of Greek ancestry and speaks fluent Greek, arrived yesterday in Athens. Today, she talked about the presentation of the song contest and expressed her excitement about being in Greece. She will present the song contest along with the popular Greek pop star Sakis Rouvas.

Before official confirmation by Greek National Television (ERT) of Menounos as the co-host of the contest, Greek media had reported the names of the famous actresses Jennifer Aniston and Monica Bellucci as possible presenters.

The Eurovision Song Contest 2006 final and semi-final will take place in the Olympic Indoor Hall in Athens.

Federer wins Pacific Life Open in Indian Wells

Yesterday, in Indian Wells, California, Roger Federer, the top ranked tennis player in the world, defeated James Blake 7-5, 6-3, 6-0 to win his third consecutive Pacific Life Open, part of the ATP Masters Series. Blake held an early lead 4-1 in the first set, but Federer came back and dominated the last two sets. Federer is the first player to win three Pacific Life

Opens in a row since 1976. Federer remained at number 1, while Blake moved up from 14th to 9th in the world rankings.

Federer struggled to find his game at first, but he caught on to Blake's playing style during the start of the game. "He played aggressively, took the ball early, put away his forehands when he could, didn't miss on the backhand, made me run around," Federer said. "That's usually what I do. He gave me a little bit of my own medicine." Federer has now won three titles this year, one of them being the Australian Open. He has a 22-1 record, with his only loss going to Rafael Nadal at the Dubai Tennis Championship. His final statement was, "It was a hard-fought battle in the beginning. Really got the better of me in the beginning, so I had to react and not panic. I did a good job there. In the end, I played fantastic tennis with some great shots once again ... the form is excellent right now."

Blake took out 2nd seeded Rafael Nadal in the semifinals and nearly cruised through the first set. Unfortunately, he made just enough mistakes in the end of the set for Federer to pull through after a 5-4 lead. Blake is now 19-5 for the year, with wins at the Sydney International and the Tennis Channel Open. After the match, he said, "A couple of shots he was swinging at, you could tell, just he had that confidence where he feels like he's not going to miss. Everything was going in ... here are a lot of guys that can go through little runs like that, three or four games where they feel like they can't miss, you wait it out, wait it out, then you get your chance. I couldn't wait any longer. He's one of the guys that can keep it up. He kept it up for that whole

set, probably set and a half really. Actually, from early in the second set, he was playing like that. It's tough to combat that. It's been a great week. This stings right now. I think as long as I'm a competitor, as long as I'm on tour, it's always going to sting after a loss. But I'll just reflect on the fact that it's a good week, I moved up in the rankings played some great tennis, had some fun out here."

Utah father accused of using shock-collars to punish his children

Scott David Dover, 45, a father of two young boys in Cedar City, Utah was arrested on Thursday and is facing possible child abuse charges. Police say he used electric dog collars to discipline his children. Conviction could result in up to 15 years in prison. Dover is being held in Iron County Jail; bail was set at ten thousand dollars.

Police Sgt. Jerry Womack said that the boys, both about six years old, did not have any burns or marks on them and that it was not known whether the collars had ever been placed around their necks. He also said, however, that Dover admitted to using the collars on his sons.

"It sounds bad, but it actually administers a mild shock. He just felt that was an option for discipline. We disagree vehemently," said Womack.

Cedar City Police were contacted on Wednesday by the Department of Child and Family Services.

"The kids are ok. Try to always remember that this child needs guidance, protection and someone to show them the way. To us, discipline means guidance, working with children on their strengths or showing them that

some things could be done differently," said Carol Sisco, spokeswoman for the Utah Department of Human Services.

The "shock-collars" emit small electrical currents and are used for training dogs by placing a collar around a dog's neck.

So far, the mother has not been charged. Latest reports said the boys were still living with her. Police are still deciding whether to file charges against her.

Charges against the father could be filed today.

Looted, possibly contaminated body parts transplanted into USA, Canadian patients

Buffalo, New York – On Saturday March 18, citizens in Buffalo demonstrated to make their voices be heard. The protest mounted by people opposed to the Elmwood Village Hotel proposal took place on the proposed site at Forest and Elmwood Avenues.

The Elmwood Village Hotel is a 72-room, seven-million-dollar hotel proposed by Savarino Construction Services Corporation. The hotel would require the demolition of at least five buildings (1119-1121 Elmwood), which house several shops and residents. Karl Frizlen, an architect with Frizlen Group, designed the hotel. Although the properties are "under contract," it is still unknown if Savarino Construction actually owns the buildings. It is believed that Hans Mobius, a resident of Clarence, New York and former Buffalo Mayorial candidate, is still the owner. The hotel is expected to be a franchise of the Wyndham Hotels group.

Despite the cold weather, at least 40 people showed up to walk the

picket line for 2 two hours.

Clarence Carnahan, a Buffalo resident, supplied signs that citizens could use during the protest. Some of the signs said, 'No vacancy, No hotel,' 'No tell hotel,' 'Hans off' and 'Our neighborhood, our choice, no hotel.'

"The concern is they are going to tear down established businesses that have been here for years," said Charles Leist, a protester.

"We're fighting to the bitter end. We're hoping that we can squelch this. We don't think we can, but we're going down kicking and screaming," said Patty Morris, co-owner with Nancy Pollina of Don Apparel at 1119 Elmwood. Don Apparel is a vintage clothing and collectible shop and has been at the same location for nearly 14 years.

The city's Common Council is expected to vote on the proposal on Tuesday, March 21, 2006 at 2:00 PM in Council Chambers, on 13th floor in City Hall.

The Planning Board is expected to vote on the proposal on Tuesday, March 28, at 8:00 AM in room 902 on the 9th floor of City Hall.

Even if the Common Council approves the proposal, the Planning board will get the final say in the matter.

So far, no other protests are scheduled. Organizers say they will wait until the Common Council votes before organizing any more protests.

Citizens protest Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal

Keisha Castle-Hughes playing Virgin Mary

New Zealand actress and Whale Rider (2002) star Keisha Castle-Hughes will star as The Blessed Virgin Mary in the upcoming New Line Cinema film, Nativity.

Castle-Hughes, 15, who is of Australian and Maori descent, was the youngest actress to be nominated for a best-actress Academy Award when she was recognized for her role in Whale Rider.

Catherine Hardwicke, who is best known for Three Kings (1999), will direct.

Nativity looks at the life of the biblical couple Mary and Joseph prior to the birth of Jesus, showing how their faith, love and beliefs are tested. The script incorporates the couple's journey from Nazereth to Bethlehem, and includes figures such as King Herod and the three astrologers (a.k.a. the Three Kings or the Three Wise Men).

Filming is scheduled to begin in May and will include locations in Morroco and Italy. The studio aims for a December 2006 release.

Cuba and Japan to play in WBC final

Today, at 9:00 PM EST, Japan and Cuba will face off in the World Baseball Classic final. The matchup will take place in PETCO Park, San Diego California. Coaches Higinio Velez of Cuba and Sadaharu Oh of Japan highly praised both teams. "We know the Asians," Velez said. "We have played against the Asians, we know how the Asian teams play, and they're great players. They put everything into the field, great effort, very similar to Latin American players. They play hard,

they have their tactics, they have their technique, and all I can say is that you will have a wonderful game [Monday]." Cuba has a record of 5-1 against Japan at the Summer Olympics.

Cuba defeated a MLB player-filled team from the Dominican Republic 3-1 to earn this berth to the finals. Vicyohandri Odelin has been rumored to be the starter for Cuba tonight. Cuba has no MLB players, whereas the Japanese team has two—Ichiro Suzuki and Akinori Otsuka. Cuba has earned a medal at each Olympiad, taking the gold in 1992, 1996, 2004 and the silver in 2000. Before the World Baseball Classic even began, Cuba was at risk of not being able to attend, due to tension between the US and Cuba. However, Cuba has gone all the way with a 5-2 record, knocking out Panama, the Netherlands, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic in the semifinal.

Japan barely made it into the semifinals through a complicated tiebreaking process, and managed to defeat an undefeated South Korean team that had beaten them twice before with a shutout, 6-0. A two-run homer by young Kosuke Fukodome sealed the game. Led by their powerful coach, Sadaharu Oh, Japan was favored as the major Asian power, but instead struggled through qualification with a 3-3 record. They ravaged Taiwan, China and Mexico, but failed to overcome the United States or Korea. Ichiro Suzuki has led this team into the finals with a .345 average, one homer, and four stolen bases.

Lukashenko wins disputed Belarus elections

It appears that Alexander Lukashenko, 51, has won the 2006 Belarus presidential election, and

is heading for his third term in office. The official preliminary results are 82.6 percent for Lukashenko and six percent for the main opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, says the BBC. The turnout for the elections was 92.6 percent of Belarus' seven million eligible voters. The final results will be available Monday morning.

Before the elections, the opposition candidates accused Lukashenko of plans for rigging the elections. Several opposition newspapers were closed down and journalists were arrested some weeks before the elections. Many foreign observers, including the Polish, Finnish and Danish delegations, were refused entry into the country before the elections.

Approximately 10 000 supporters of Milinkevich gathered in Oktyabrskaya Square in Belarus' capital, Minsk. According to the BBC, they shouted anti-Lukashenko slogans and waved flags that are banned under Lukashenko's regime. The protests have not involved violence so far.

Lukashenko previously warned people against the start of uprisings similar to recent ones witnessed in the Ukraine and Georgia. He said that people attempting to stage a coup will be treated as terrorists and will be executed. The European Union and the United States have expressed their concerns over allegedly authoritarian rule in Belarus. The EU is planning to deny visas to Belarusian officials with alleged involvement in election rigging, as a response to the denial by Belarus of entry into the country to EU election observers.

Milinkevich demands new elections. According to the BBC, he said, "We demand new, honest elections. This was a complete farce.... We will demand that this election be recognized as invalid, including by international organisations," Milinkevich said, according to the AFP.

Milinkevich notes that the opposition candidates were restricted from the media, and opposition supporters were arrested. Lukashenko, in contrast, has control over Belarus' propaganda machine, including state television. According to the AFP, opposition candidate Milinkevich received in total one hour of TV air time for his campaign. Belarus officials reject his demands, and insist the elections were free and honest.

Lukashenko denied being a dictator, saying "... it's impossible to have a dictator in Europe. Only stupid people would think that." He said the U.S. president George W. Bush is more of a dictator than he himself is.

Scotland wins Gold, Silver in 400m IM

David Carry and Euan Dale yesterday pulled off a remarkable feat for Scotland — claiming both first and second place in the 400m Individual Medley swimming race in Melbourne.

For Carry, who swam a 4:15.98, the gold was his second of the games and Scotland's fourth gold medal in swimming until now. He becomes the first Scottish person to win two golds at the games in thirty-two years — David Wilkie being the last Scot to do so in 1974.

The games have presented several surprises thus far — most notably

Australia's failure to win more than one gold medal in the men's events up to this point. Matthew John Cowdrey won the sole gold medal for Australia in the 50m freestyle on Saturday. By contrast, the Australian women have had an excellent start so far, with a medal haul of 21 out of a possible 37.

South Africa once again demonstrated its strength in men's freestyle swimming by winning the 4 x 100m freestyle relay in 3:14.97, beating the Australian by slightly over half a second. Canada claimed third place.

Crowe, Holmes succeed in takeover of Rabbitohs

Australian actor Russell Crowe and businessman Peter Holmes a Court have succeeded in their bid to take over the South Sydney Rabbitohs, an Australian National Rugby League (NRL) Club. The men required that 75% of the club's members vote yes on the \$3 million takeover bid for it to pass; and it narrowly won, by just 32 votes (0.8%). Former Souths player and manager, George Piggins, has vowed never to attend another game of his former club.

Supporters of the bid have said it gives the Rabbitohs a chance to return to their glory days after last year's finish of 13th in the 15-team competition. The team has not won a Premiership in 35 years but still retains the record for most Premiership wins, with 20 on the record books. Those against the bid objected that the club is selling out 98 years of heritage.

Today in History

1556 - Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer was burnt at the stake in Oxford, England.

1804 - Code Napoléon was adopted as French civil law.

1933 - The construction of the first Nazi German concentration camp at Dachau was completed.

1935 - Shah Reza Pahlavi formally asked the international community to call Persia by its native name, Iran.

1990 - Formerly known as South-West Africa, Namibia gained independence from South Africa, with Sam Nujoma swearing in as the first President.

March 21 is 200th birthday of Benito Juárez, a Fiesta Patria in Mexico; World Poetry Day; New Year's Day in the Bahá'í calendar.

Quote of the Day

"The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth." ~ Jean Cocteau

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+1-202-742-5918
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