



Top Stories

Arroyo declares state of emergency due to coup attempt in Philippines

President Arroyo has declared a state of emergency in the Philippines following reports of a coup attempt by elements of the military.



Al Askari Mosque bombed in Samarra, Iraq

Bombs set off in the Shi'a holy site lead to nation-wide violence, deaths, and fears the sectarian violence will lead to civil war. The government appeals for calm, religious leaders for peaceful demonstration.



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.



SPECIAL REPORT

Wikipedia Current Events

- It is revealed that MI5 (British Intelligence) withheld vital anti-terrorism intelligence just months before the Omagh Bombing in 1998.
- Venezuela orders US airlines to reduce the number of flights into the country by up to 70% in a dispute over safety regulations.
- NASA announces a gamma ray burst that is not yet explained and may be a predecessor to a supernova. It was located 440 million light-years away and lasted for 33 minutes, closer and longer than any previous gamma ray burst.
- Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, is suspended from his position for one month by a three member panel of the Adjudication Panel for England for being "unnecessarily insensitive" in comparing an Evening Standard reporter to a concentration camp guard. Nicky Gavron, his deputy, will take over his responsibilities whilst Livingstone is suspended.
- An explosion and gunshots are reported at Abqaiq refinery, home of largest Saudi Arabian oil facilities. (BBC) (CNN)
- After months of an increasing political power struggle, the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra dissolves the House of Representatives and calls for new election to be held on April 2. (The Nation)
- A fire in a textile mill in

Wikipedia Current Events

- Chittagong, Bangladesh, kills 51 people and injures over 100.
- Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declares a state of emergency in attempt to subdue a possible military coup.
- Peter Costello challenges Muslim leaders to pledge their allegiance to Australia.

Thai snap-election set for April 2, 2006

In the face of mounting pressure and a hostile political climate in urban areas, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has announced the dissolution of the Lower House of the country's parliament.

The move follows an audience earlier today with the King at the Dusit Palace and is despite defiant statements yesterday that the PM would neither step down nor dissolve parliament. An increasing number of voices have questioned Thaksin's suitability to hold the office of Prime Minister, with a petition to the Constitutional Court and a student-led petition for his impeachment contributing to the political uncertainty.

The Prime Minister announced the decision in a live TV broadcast, offering to "accept and respect the public's decision" in the forthcoming election. Following discussions with the Election Commission of Thailand, he stated that the election – required to be held within 60 days – would be on April 2. This should lead to the



Lower House reconvening on May 2. Election of a Prime Minister and appointment of Cabinet ministers would be the first item of business.

Protestors who are planning a mass demonstration at Sanam Luang in Bangkok this Sunday are undeterred by the move. According to Suriyasai Takasila they will protest anyway, aiming for resignation "because Prime Minister Thaksin is the centre of the problem".

Public smoking ban in Virginia snuffed out.

The Virginia legislature's House of Delegates voted unanimously in a sub-committee to kill a bill that would ban public smoking in the U.S.A. state. The vote was reached during a six-member sub-committee meeting on Thursday.

The Virginia Senate, the upper house of the General Assembly, passed on Monday a week ago a bill that would ban the indoor smoking of tobacco in restaurants, bowling alleys and other public places, including workplaces. The bill was not expected to pass the House, but the thumbs up signal by the Senate signalled a shift in tolerance towards the product in a state known for its 400-year economic history steeped in the cultivation of the cash crop.

The General Laws sub-committee based its vote on the rights of property owners, rights that would be violated by a state-wide ban. The debate was largely centered on

the issue of restaurant smoking. The committee noted there was no law that said a restaurant must allow smoking.

"They have a right not to go where people are smoking," said delegate John Cosgrove (R-Chesapeake). He noted the consumer and the restaurant businesses can decide whether to allow smoking. "They have a right and responsibility to take care of themselves," he said.

A Virginia Beach restaurant owner, Matt Falvey, said "The plain truth is that the majority of our citizens do not smoke, and do not want to be around smoke," according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Falvey, who owns three restaurants, said "In addition, restaurant workers should not be subjected to the harm caused by secondhand smoke."

Falvey said he has smoking sections in his restaurants because not to would put him at a competitive disadvantage with other restaurants who have smoking sections. An across the board state-wide ban would level the playing field by settling the issue.

Senate Bill 649, known as the Virginia Indoor Clean Air Act, to become law in the nation's 4th largest tobacco growing state would require passage by the House. Last year, the Senate killed a similar bill to ban indoor smoking in public places. New procedural rules introduced in Virginia this year allow a bill's

passage to be blocked by sub-committee, but there remains a slim chance it could be revived.

The original version of the bill, which allowed cities and counties to decide locally on the issue, was voted down by the Senate. The bill was brought back by Brandon Bell of Roanoke County, and passed in a revised version that would make than ban state-wide, with no local authority on the issue. The measure was passed by the Senate in a 21 - 18 vote, after it received the support from the Virginia Restaurant Association.

In Maryland, a similar ban was voted down this week by a House committee. New Jersey is the latest state to join the ranks of a total of 11 states that ban smoking in restaurants, bars and workplaces.

Soybean over-took tobacco as Virginia's top cash crop in 2005

Arroyo declares state of emergency due to coup attempt in Philippines

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared a state of emergency Friday following reports from security forces on a foiled coup attempt. Arroyo's emergency powers allow arrests without warrants and the extended detention of prisoners without charges.

Brigadier General Danilo Lim, the commander of the 1st Scout Ranger Regiment, an elite military unit, is being held following



accusations that he intended to join his troops with anti-Arroyo protestors. The troops were reportedly planning to inform protesters that the soldiers were no longer supporting Arroyo hoping that this news would foment an uprising against the president.

Arroyo has forbidden protest rallies, but more than a thousand Filipinos attended rallies anyway (Bloomberg.com says "thousands of Filipinos"), and cops broke up a couple of rallies on EDSA, the main street of Manila, as they were heading downtown (to Makati), with shields and nightsticks. The Filipino peso dropped 1.1% vs. the US dollar, its biggest decline since 2002. [1]

The crisis comes during the weekend when the country is recognizing the 20th anniversary of the "People Power" revolution that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who fled and stayed in exile in the United States.

This is not the first time Ms. Arroyo's regime has survived attempts at deletion. At the beginning of her presidency, supporters of the ousted President Estrada stormed Malacanang and demanded Arroyo's resignation. Later, in 2003, 300 soldiers took over a hotel in Manila in another bid to topple Arroyo. People have alleged that the Arroyo administration engaged in corruption and failed to keep the economy stable. Arroyo won the 2004 election, but some people accused her of doing so by

cheating. Those allegations led to an attempt to impeach Arroyo in September 2005, which failed.

President remains most popular politician in Romania

The president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, continues to be the most popular politician in the country, according to a survey by the Romanian Centre for Urban Resources (CURS). The survey shows that 63% of those interviewed have a good or very good opinion of the president. Even though this result is better than the 60% approval rating he received in October 2005, it is lower than the 71% approval he obtained in June 2005.



The second-most popular major politician is the opposition leader and head of the Social Democratic Party, Mircea Geoană, who has an approval rating of 47%. He is trailed by the Prime Minister, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, with 44%. Gigi Becali, the leader of the New Generation Party, recorded the largest increase in popularity, with an approval rating of 30%, in comparison to the 20% he achieved in October 2005.

The survey also looked at Romanians' opinions towards the major political parties. 42% of the respondents stated that they would vote for the governing Justice and Truth Alliance, made

up of the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Party. 25% stated that they would vote for the Social Democratic Party, while the right-wing Greater Romania Party would receive 14% of the vote. Both of these parties recorded decreases in popularity. On the other hand, the New Generation Party and the National Initiative Party gained in popularity, with the New Generation Party attracting 4% of potential votes.

44% of the people interviewed believe that Romania will join the European Union in January 2007, as scheduled, while 18% think that the safeguard clause will be activated, postponing accession until 2008.

Al Askari Mosque bombed in Samarra, Iraq

Explosions at the Al Askari Mosque in the Iraqi city of Samarra at 6:55am local time (0355 UTC) February 22 ripped through the mosque, destroying the northern wall which shattered the golden dome.

No injuries were reported from the blast, but sectarian violence has broken out in the region after the attack on the Shi'a holy site.

The attack
The Interior Ministry reported that 4 bombers entered the mosque, 1 in the uniform of Iraqi Security Forces. Two bombs were planted, which went off in the morning. The blasts damaged the northern wall and caused the dome to collapse.



Police originally feared there may be victims buried in the rubble.

The mosque is one of the most holy sites of Shi'a Islam as it holds the remains of Ali al-Hadi and his son Hassan al-Askar, the 10th and 11th Shi'a imams. The grandson of al-Hadi was the 12th imam, the "hidden imam" Muhammad al-Mahdi whose shrine stood adjacent to the Mosque.

Violence after

Within hours of the blasts, Sunni mosques had been attacked or set afire. An association of Sunni clerics reported that 10 imams had been killed, and that 15 were kidnapped by Shi'a protesters.



Overnight gunmen in police uniforms seized 11 Sunni men from a prison in Basra and killed them.

Thursday's violence escalated after the protests on Wednesday. In the single deadliest incident, 47 people were killed at a roadblock in Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, as they were returning from a protest. In Baquba, at least 16 were killed in a suicide bomb attack in a crowded market.

Atwar Bahjat, correspondent for the al-Arabiya network, and two local journalists were kidnapped and killed leaving Samarra.

CBC reports as many as 168 mosques have been targeted, both Sunni and counter-counter attacks on Shi'a.

Response of the Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani called on Shiites to take to the streets, but peacefully. "We invite the faithful to protest and express their condemnations, on the violation of their sanctities, by peaceful means," says the online message from his office. "We stress upon everyone going through the shock of this atrocious crime not to be drawn into what the enemies want them to be drawn into, which is sectarian discord"

"If its security institutions are unable to provide the necessary security, the faithful are able to do that by the will and blessings of God," the Grand Ayatollah said in a separate, written, statement, suggesting the armed Shi'a militias may be deployed to protect other holy sites if the government and the U.S. troops are deemed incapable of doing so.

Response from the Iraq government Iraqi President Jalal Talabani appeals for calm to avoid a "devastating civil war". Reports in televised news conferences indicate that initial investigations point to "infiltration" of the Iraqi Security Forces.

Thursday declared a day of national mourning.

"The main aim of these terrorist groups is to drag Iraq into a civil war," Iraq's national security adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie told al-Arabiye television.

"Anti-democratic forces have tried everything to push the country into a civil war and sectarian violence," Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said today in a phone interview with Bloomberg. "This is the biggest challenge we as Iraqis face, and efforts are under way to prevent it."

World wide response

Ashraf Qazi, the United Nation's top envoy to the region, has said he will ask the country's political and religious leaders to hold a dialogue moderated by the U.N.

MPAA launches seven lawsuits against torrent, ed2k and usenet sites

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has launched seven separate lawsuits against internet sites in its latest anti-piracy crackdown. The MPAA claims the targeted sites had been "facilitating the distribution of copyright works".

The MPAA has commenced legal action against the following BitTorrent tracking sites—isohunt.com, bthub.com, and torrentbox.com who are all owned by the same person; torrentspy.com; niteshadow.com as well as ed2k site ed2k-it.com and Usenet search engines—nzb-zone.com, binnews.com, and



dvdrs.net.

The lawsuits mark the first time that the MPAA has targeted usenet related sites; in the past the MPAA has only brought action against sites who actually hosted copyrighted material or who assisted in the running of the networks used to distribute it.

Generally, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) limits the liability of search engines for providing links to pirated material, so long as the site operators do not know the content is infringing, are not making profit from the distribution of copyright works, and remove links when requested by copyright owners.

It is thought that the DMCA limitations will not apply to the sites targeted as they are allegedly filled with almost nothing but copyrighted movies, software, and music.

Isohunt.com, one of the search engines targeted, provides a copyright statement claiming that "We respect copyright, and will filter such P2P links at your request".

2006 Winter Olympic Games					
<i>Day 14 of Competition</i>					
<i>Most Olympic Medals</i>					
Pos.	 Country	G	S	B	Total
1	 Germany	9	10	5	24
2	 United States	8	9	6	23
3	 Russia	8	4	8	20
4	 Austria	8	6	5	19
5	 Canada	6	8	6	20
6	 Switzerland	5	4	4	13
7	 Sweden	5	2	5	12
8	 South Korea	4	3	1	8
9	 Italy	4	0	6	10
10	 France	3	2	4	9
10	 Netherlands	3	2	4	9

Today in History

February 28 is National Day in Kuwait (1950)

1570 - Pope Pius V issued the papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* to excommunicate Queen Elizabeth I and her followers in the Church of England.

1836 - Samuel Colt (pictured) received a patent for a "revolving gun."

1921 - The Democratic Republic of Georgia was occupied by the Soviet Red Army.

1951 - The first Pan American Games opened in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

1986 - EDSA Revolution: Corazón Aquino was inaugurated as President of the Philippines, as Ferdinand Marcos fled the nation after 20 years of rule.

Quote of the Day

That so many writers have been prepared to accept a kind of martyrdom is the best tribute that flesh can pay to the living spirit of man as expressed in his literature.

One cannot doubt that the martyrdom will continue to be gladly embraced. To some of us, the wresting of beauty out of language is the only thing in the world that matters." ~ Anthony Burgess

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