



Top Stories

French unions march in support of public services



Today, a number of French unions and left-wing parties marched in Paris in order

to support public services, which they feel are threatened by the current government.

French parliament extends state of emergency to three months



The French Parliament passed a law extending the state of

emergency decreed on November 8 by president Jacques Chirac for a duration of 3 months, the executive being authorized to terminate this period earlier if necessary.

Wikipedia Current Events

- In a speech to US troops in South Korea, US President George W. Bush rejects critics calling for a timetable for withdrawing US troops from Iraq, laying out why he believes the Iraq war is worth the sacrifice.
- Tropical Storm Gamma forms from a regeneration of Tropical Depression 27, becoming the 24th named storm of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season.
- Suicide bombers kill 74 worshippers at two mosques in eastern Iraq while in Baghdad two car bombs destroy the blast wall protecting a hotel housing foreign journalists and kill eight Iraqis

demonstrated (unionists, politicians and simple employees) are opposed to the privatization of public companies such as the electrical and gas utility EDF, or to the scaling down of public services such as the national public postal service in rural areas.



Les Alternatifs

Organizers claim 30,000 protested, as opposed to the 10,000 figure cited by the police. The march was peaceful and uneventful, with a light police escort to open the streets, and City of Paris sanitation vehicles coming just behind to clean the streets of leaflets and other litter. Many of the protesters were under the banners the Communist-influenced CGT union, most others under those of major confederations or parties such as the French Communist Party. A small minority were from radical groups such as the anarcho-syndicalist CNT or Les Alternatifs. A group of French scientific researchers and graduate student protested the government's policies with respect to research funding.

French unions march in support of public services



SUD Solidaires

Today, a number of French unions and left-wing parties marched in Paris in order to support public services, which they feel are threatened by the current government. Those who

Featured story

U.S. government proposes removing Yellowstone grizzlies from endangered species list



The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that "The greater

Yellowstone area population of grizzly bears ... is now recovered."

Communist League), and unionists Bernard Thibault (CGT), Annick Coupé (Solidaires) and Gérard Aschiéri (FSU).

U.S. House vote forced on immediate pullout of troops in Iraq



Duncan Hunter

Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) on Friday called a vote in the House on a nonbinding resolution to immediately withdraw troops from Iraq. The one-sentence resolution read: "It is the sense of the House of Representatives that the deployment of United States forces in Iraq be terminated immediately."

Democrats in the House called the resolution a political stunt, saying that it misrepresented the comments of Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), who a day before said "Our troops have become the enemy. We need to change direction in Iraq." Murtha, a decorated Vietnam War veteran and a retired Marine, had called for a six-month withdrawal of US forces in Iraq during a news conference on Thursday.

The House chamber debate was highly partisan and emotionally charged. At one point in the debate, Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH) said a Marine colonel in her state of Ohio telephoned and asked her to "send Congress a message: Stay the course." Schmidt said,

"He also asked me to send Congressman Murtha a message: Towards cut and run. Marines never do."

At this, Rep. Harold Ford, Jr. (D-TN) and other Democrats surged toward the Republican side of the chamber in anger. "You guys are pathetic! Pathetic!" yelled Rep. Martin T. Meehan (D-MA).

Many Democrats angrily and repeatedly shouted for Jean Schmidt to "take her words down!" She did, when order was restored to the chamber, rise and say, "My words were not directed at any member of the House," and asked that her comments be retracted from the record. House rules forbid members to impugn the integrity of other members.

The vote failed, 403-3. The three House members who voted for the resolution's passage were Jose E. Serrano (D-NY), Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) and Robert Wexler (D-FL).

Australian science organisation discontinues genetically modified pea research



The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) has discontinued research into a type of Genetically Modified (GM) field pea that had been shown to be 100% protected against attack by pea weevils, a

type of insect. The genetically modified field pea's protein was found to have a slightly altered structure which caused an allergic-style reaction in the lungs of mice and led scientists to believe it could have similar effects on human lungs. "That was enough to alert me to say this research should come to an end," CSIRO Plant Industry Deputy Director TJ Higgins said.

An earlier example of a problem with a GM food was a protein-enhanced soy product that was abandoned because the brazil nut gene transferred to the soy produced a protein that could cause allergic reactions in some people. That 1996 study was conducted and funded by the University of Nebraska and Pioneer Hi-Bred International.

Environmental activism organizations like Greenpeace were spawned by the the negative effects of the Petrochemical era. They are are now campaigning against GM research. Greenpeace members have observed that not all reports of possible complications from GM foods found during product development have resulted in a quick end to further research. Rootworm-resistant GM corn caused "serious organ damage" to rats in Germany, but the corn developed by Monsanto was approved for consumption in Australia by Food Standards Australia New Zealand said Greenpeace GM spokesman Jeremy Tager. A scientific review panel of the European Food Safety Authority reviewed the results of a 13-week rat feeding study on rootworm-resistant corn that had been submitted by German authorities. Although the study found some differences in the kidneys of rats fed the GM corn, the scientists concluded that these

results were "not considered to pose concerns over the safety of MON 863 maize". Many published studies performed with rats and other test animals have found no danger from the Monsanto rootworm-resistant corn. Within science, it is desirable that all research reports be reproduced and confirmed.

Australia has a \$100 million field pea industry, so substantial amounts of chemicals are used to protect the industry's crops against the pea weevil *Bruchus pisorum*, though some crops use organic control options. The pea weevil can cause yield losses of up to 30 per cent a year if left uncontrolled. So the CSIRO is in search of an alternative to using genetic modification. The CSIRO are not alone in the GM industry. Bayer and Monsanto are both privately owned corporations who also operate outside Australia's strict regulatory system. A spokeswoman for Bayer Crop Sciences said the CSIRO's decision had no impact on the firm's GM work. Monsanto has not responded to media inquiries. Dr Higgins said the findings proved the safety of Australia's strict research regulatory framework.

"I think that this shows that the regulatory system works," he said.

"The regulations are stringent, they are difficult, but on balance I'm very pleased as a consumer of food myself that these regulations are in place."

The genetically modified pea plants were produced by transfer of the amylase inhibitor-1 gene from a species of bean. The structure of the alpha-amylase inhibitor-1 protein produced by the pea plants is slightly different from the structure of the same protein

when made by bean plants. This structural modification may be due to differences in posttranslational modification of the protein. The altered protein from peas was found to predispose mice to a form of food antigen-stimulated inflammation response that is mediated by CD4-positive T helper cells.

Australian man to be executed in Singapore

Supporters of convicted Australian drug trafficker, Van Nguyen, gathered outside the State Library in Melbourne yesterday to display thousands of messages of opposition to his death sentence.

Callers to talkback radio in Melbourne were overwhelmingly against the death penalty of Nguyen, who immediately admitted his guilt and has cooperated with authorities since being caught smuggling heroin into Singapore. Many called for a boycott of Singaporean products.

25-year-old Nguyen was arrested at Changi Airport in 2002 for carrying heroin and sentenced to death in March. Nguyen claims he carried the 396 grams of heroin strapped to his body in an attempt to pay off his brother Khoa's \$30,000 legal debts.

The Singapore government have announced they will execute Nguyen at dawn on December 2nd. Singapore President S. R. Nathan rejected Nguyen's clemency four weeks ago. The Melbourne salesman was sentenced to death under Singapore law which determines a mandatory death sentence for anyone found guilty of possessing 15 grams of heroin or more.

Nguyen's mother was informed on

Thursday by registered mail from the Singapore prisons service of the execution date. The letter stated that she should start making funeral arrangements. She will get to see her son in the three days leading up to the execution.

Despite repeated pleas for clemency from many thousands of supporters; religious groups; human rights organisations; the Pope; and the Australian Government - including Prime Minister, John Howard - Singapore officials have said Nguyen's execution is irreversible.

Mr Howard had argued that Nguyen should be spared, citing mitigating circumstances in his case which pointed to the fact that he was not a serial drug trafficker but had merely been trying to pay off his brother's debts.

The Victorian Attorney-General, Rob Hulls, says the Singaporean Government has shown no compassion whatsoever in its treatment of Van Nguyen and his family.

"What's happening is brutal, is inappropriate. I, and the Victorian Government, vehemently oppose the death penalty in any circumstances, he told ABC Radio. "This is a young kid who has assisted the police all the way... In any other country, he would get a discount in relation to the penalty. But because there is a mandatory death penalty for drug offences in Singapore, this young man may well be executed. It is just grossly inappropriate."

"Singapore maintains that capital punishment is a criminal justice issue; it is the sovereign right of every country to decide whether or not to include capital punishment within its criminal

justice system," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong affirmed Singapore's position by saying that it has to "stand firm on drugs to protect its citizens from the scourge and to ensure the country does not become a conduit for the trafficking of illicit drugs."

In reply to a letter appealing for clemency from his Australian counterpart Alexander Downer, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said: "Mr Nguyen imported almost 400gm of pure heroin which would have supplied more than 26,000 doses to drug addicts."

No one will be permitted to see Nguyen on the morning of his execution. His body will be released to his mother.

On Thursday, a letter informing Nguyen's mother of the Dec 2 date was accidentally sent earlier than intended by the Singapore authorities. As a result, Australian Prime Minister John Howard was caught offguard when asked by reporters on Thursday if he knew that Nguyen would be executed on Dec 2.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer yesterday admitted he had been told several days ago that a letter would be sent this week to Nguyen's mother. Mr Downer said his Singapore counterpart, George Yeo, had told him on Monday night, when they were both in Busan, that the family would be sent a letter which they would receive yesterday.

"So the Singapore Prime Minister had assumed that the letter would arrive on Friday," Mr Downer said.

"The letter arrived a day earlier than they had anticipated."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said yesterday the differences between Australia and Singapore over the planned execution of convicted drug smuggler Nguyen Tuong Van would not damage relations between the two countries.

"It is not an issue where we agree but our disagreement on the treatment of Mr Nguyen is not going to contaminate the very good relationship between Australia and Singapore," Mr Howard was quoted as saying in an AAP report.

Mr Lex Lasry, QC, who heads Nguyen's Melbourne legal team, recently told Singapore's high commissioner in Canberra that the "regime" of the mandatory death penalty would have to change.

"At some point, the Singapore Government must realise as a First World country it can no longer continue to impose mandatory death sentences. They simply can't keep doing this to people," he said. He described as an "outrageous injustice" the Singapore law that denies lawyers the chance to argue to a judge why a client should not be hanged.

"Let the rest of the world know we are not prepared to tolerate it and ultimately they will have to change their minds," he said.

"Even if our client is executed as he probably will be, the campaign against Singapore's mandatory death sentence will continue," Mr Lasry said.

Mr Lasry said the fight to save Nguyen would continue over the next few weeks.

Nguyen Tuong Van may be the last person to face the hangman in Singapore after a review of execution methods in Singapore. The nation's chief hangman, Darshan Singh, has told prison officials he wants to retire, but finding a replacement has been unsuccessful. One of two candidates picked to replace Mr Singh was unable to complete his first execution. A second left the prison service.

Mr Singh, a veteran of over 850 hangings, is reportedly unhappy with the new machinery, which is prone to malfunction. The Australian newspaper reports that Singapore officials have been studying other methods of execution and are considering the lethal injection technique used in the United States.

The lethal injection method being considered by Singapore officials as an alternative is modelled on the procedure introduced in 1977 in Oklahoma. The prisoner is strapped to a gurney and an intravenous tube is inserted into each arm with a flow of harmless saline solution. At the warden's signal, 5g of sodium pentothal is administered, which renders the prisoner unconscious.

It is followed by pancuronium bromide, a muscle relaxant that paralyses the diaphragm and lungs, and finally potassium chloride, which causes cardiac arrest.

Today in History

284 - Diocletian became Roman Emperor.

1700 - Great Northern War: Forces led by King Charles XII of Sweden defeated the Russian army of Tsar Peter the Great in the Battle of Narva.

1910 - Mexican Revolution: Francisco I. Madero (pictured) promulgated the San Luis Plan, starting a revolt against President Porfirio Díaz.

1945 - The Nuremberg Trials against 24 leading Nazi war criminals involved in World War II and the Holocaust began in Nuremberg, Germany.

1998 - Zarya, the first module of the International Space Station, was launched on a Proton rocket from Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan.

November 20 is Zumbi Day in Brazil, Revolution Day in Mexico, Teacher's Day in Vietnam.

Quote of the Day

"In a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced."
 ~ Abraham Lincoln

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