



Top Stories

Riots in Nigeria kill nearly 400

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Tourists struggle to escape as Bangkok airport blockades enter sixth day



Image Credit: Mark Micallef CC-BY-SA 3.0

With dire warnings that the number of stranded tourists in Thailand could rise as high as 300,000, thousands are attempting to leave the country via U-tapao airport in Rayong, around 150km southeast of the capital Bangkok. The blockade of the two main international airports by People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) supporters is now in its sixth day. Tensions continue to rise with a pro-government rally planned for today and police surrounding the main international airport, Suvarnabhumi.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Terrorist attacks at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, the Nariman House and several other locations in Mumbai, India, kill 183 people and injure hundreds.
- The people of Greenland pass a referendum regarding greater autonomy from Denmark.
- The Thai political crisis deepens as protesters seize two Bangkok airports.
- Brazilian officials declare a state of emergency as flooding in the Southern state of Santa Catarina causes at least 109 deaths and forces the evacuation of over 78,000 people.
- The PAIGC wins a majority of seats in the National People's Assembly after legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau.
- The eruption of Nevado del Huila, a volcano in southern Colombia, causes at least 10 deaths and the evacuation of 12,000 people.

Jørn Utzon, Sydney Opera House architect, dies at the age of 90

Jørn Utzon, the Danish architect who designed the Sydney Opera House, has died at the age of 90. Mr Utzon died from a heart attack in his sleep at his home in Copenhagen.

"He had not been doing well these past few days, since Thursday. He had been undergoing a series of operations recently," Mr Utzon's son, Kim, told the Associated Press.

The first design for the Sydney Opera House was created by Utzon in 1957. Mr Utzon left Australia and returned to Denmark in 1966 due to disputes with the NSW government over cost blowouts and design differences. The building was finished 1973. Utzon never returned to Australia to see his building completed.

Relations between New South Wales and Utzon improved in the late 1990s and in 1999 the Sydney Opera House Trust asked for Mr Utzon to advise on changing the building's interior to match his original design.

Mr Utzon was awarded the Pritzker prize for architecture in 2003. The selectors said the Opera House was one of the most iconic buildings of the 20th century saying that Utzon's design "proves that the marvellous and seemingly impossible in architecture can be achieved".

Kim Williams, chairman of the Opera House Trust, said the building would dim the lights on its sails on Sunday as a sign of respect. Mr Williams said he had met Mr Utzon at his home in Denmark recently, where they shared emotions and tears.

"We spoke for 40 minutes and when we left, he embraced me and he whispered in my ear 'no tears'," he said.

"He hasn't been able to come back himself, but through his son he has been keeping up with all the

Wikipedia Current Events

Rioting after a contested election in Jos, Nigeria, kills over 381 people and injures hundreds.

developments here at the Opera House, really on a daily basis."

Premier of NSW Nathan Rees said NSW was "deeply saddened" by the death of Mr Utzon, who gave Australia a "masterpiece" which was now UNESCO World-Heritage listed.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said Mr Utzon had left an impressive legacy.

"Joern Utzon was a visionary architect whose legacy includes one of the world's most spectacular and inspiring buildings, the Sydney Opera House," said the Prime Minister in a statement.

"Standing proudly on the edge of Sydney Harbour, the Opera House is one of the most internationally recognised symbols of our nation."

Tourists struggle to escape as Bangkok airport blockades enter sixth day

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With the old international airport, Don Mueang, still in PAD hands, the red-shirted pro-government United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) has supporters massing at the Bangkok city hall. A "Truth Today" talk show is planned for later on, although it is

unclear if the fugitive ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra will feature. Organisers have indicated there are no plans to confront the PAD, but non-specific threats to act where the government has not done so have been made in the past.

Thailand's Prime Minister remains in Chiang Mai in the north of the country, having declared a state of emergency around the two besieged airports on Friday. The announcement prompted the PAD to move protesters inside terminal buildings and post volunteer guards. Moves by police yesterday to evict the protesters failed, and their vehicles were seized as they retreated. The police presence around the airport has been stepped up as today has gone on and Navy and Air Force personnel may be made available to assist in clearing the protesters.

Adding to calls from the army for the beleaguered People's Power Party (PPP) government to resign, the Thai Chamber of Commerce labelled the administration as incompetent and called for them to step down; some Chamber of Commerce members made the suggestion that businesses should cease paying taxes if the request is ignored.

The deepening three-month old political crisis continues to have significant economic impact on Thailand. Agriculture is hard hit because the export of fresh produce via air is usually routed through the Suvarnabhumi airport. No new tourists are entering the country; many nations have advised their citizens not to travel to Bangkok, and the repercussions in the tourist industry are expected to last well into 2009. A report in The Bangkok Post suggests that as many as one

million in the industry could lose their jobs. In a press conference at the Foreign Ministry, Deputy Prime Minister Olarn Chaipravat highlighted the plight of the hotel, tour, and restaurant trades - expected to be hardest hit in the wake of the crisis.

Police appear reluctant to make forceful moves to remove the protesters from the two airports, likely a consequence of their last clash with the anti-government PAD in October that saw two protesters killed and around 500 injured. Suggestions have been made that action is being deferred pending a decision by the country's constitutional court on the future of Prime Minister Somchai's PPP. The party may be outlawed this coming week in light of allegations of vote buying in the last general election. The court may face pressure from the pro-government UDD, their city hall rally is only minutes away from the court buildings. This means that they could surround the premises to protest the court moving to closing statements and a verdict on the fate of the parties in the ruling coalition.

The PAD demonstrators encamped at Government House saw another grenade attack on Saturday night. Fifty are reported injured in the attack, and separate explosions are reported at Sondhi Limthongkul's ASTV satellite TV station and the occupied Don Mueang airport.

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Nigerian city of Jos, which is located between the Christian and Muslim areas of Nigeria.

The elections which sparked the violence, did, according to a rumor spread around the city, result in the Christian People's Democratic Party beating the All Nigerian Peoples Party, a predominantly Muslim party.

Khaled Abubakar, the imam of the city's central mosque made an estimate of the death toll. "So far about 400 bodies have been brought to the mosque following the outbreak of violence," he stated. "Families are coming to identify and claim the bodies, while those that cannot be identified or are not claimed by anybody will be interred by the mosque."

A French journalist confirmed the reports of Abubakar, despite the fact that early reports showed only twenty deaths.

Authorities have not yet confirmed the death toll.

Yakumu Pam, a Christian Clergyman in Jos also commented on the chaos. "Hundreds of people have been killed in the last two days since the riots started," he stated. "Remains of burned bodies litter some parts of the town. It is so terrible."

In an effort to stop the fighting, the army has been ordered to open fire on people, and to create a buffer zone between the Christians and the Muslims.

Umaru Yar'Adua, the President of Nigeria, has stated that he is "very sad" about the ongoing violence.

46 injured in grenade attack in Thailand

A grenade attack on protesters who have been occupying the government house in the Thai capital of Bangkok has injured 46 people, according to emergency services.

The explosion occurred as the Thai authorities were trying to put an end to blockades of the two Bangkok airports by People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) demonstrators. The protesters are demanding that the Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat resign, and have occupied the government house since August.

"Protesters have returned to their positions, they are not scared," said Suriyasai Katasila, a PAD spokesman, to local Channel Three television.

Cameroon gives world's rarest gorilla protection boost

The Cameroon government has created a new national park in an effort to protect the world's rarest subspecies of gorilla, the critically endangered Cross River.

The park is to be named as Takamanda National Park. Approximately 115 of the Cross River gorillas live there, about a third of worldwide population of the species, which is thought to be at about 300.

The Wildlife Conservation Society, or WCS, helped establish the park, and says that it will help slow the hunting and deforestation that have led the Cross River species to the verge of extinction.

Steven E. Sanderson, president and CEO of WCS, said that "the government of Cameroon is to be commended for taking this step in saving the Cross River gorilla for

future generations."

Today in History

800 - Charlemagne judges the accusations against Pope Leo III in the Vatican.

1420 - Henry V of England enters Paris.

1864 - In his State of the Union Address President Abraham Lincoln reaffirms the necessity of ending slavery as ordered ten weeks earlier in the Emancipation Proclamation.

1925 - World War I aftermath: The final Locarno Treaty is signed in London, establishing post-war territorial settlements.

1981 - The AIDS virus is officially recognized.

Quote of the Day

There's an old joke... two elderly women are at a Catskill mountain resort, and one of 'em says, "Boy, the food at this place is really terrible." The other one says, "Yeah, I know; and such small portions." Well, that's essentially how I feel about life — full of loneliness, and misery, and suffering, and unhappiness — and it's all over much too quickly. ~ Woody Allen

Word of the Day

melange n

1. A collection containing a variety of miscellaneous things.
2. A Viennese coffee speciality, half steamed milk and half coffee.

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