



Top Stories

European Union demands release of Belarussian opposition leader

The EU has demanded the release of Alexander Kozulin, a Belarussian opposition leader arrested during a protest rally in Minsk. Kozulin was one of the leaders in a series of rolling protests against the recent election victory of President Alexander Lukashenko.

Celebration of Greek Independence day

Greeks worldwide celebrate Greek Independence day, commemorating the March 25, 1821 start of the struggle against the Ottoman Empire. Many local Greek communities are holding events and parades for the national holiday.

Featured story

42 West Papuan asylum seekers get temporary Australian visas

The Australian government has granted temporary visas to 42 West Papuan asylum seekers who accuse the Indonesian military of genocide. The 36 adults and seven children spent five days at sea, arriving in January, and have been since been detained under Australia's Mandatory Detention policy.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Voters in Ukraine go to the polls to elect a new parliament.

Wikipedia Current Events

•Officials in Afghanistan say that Abdul Rahman may be released soon, although the case may have only been temporarily dropped to gather more evidence.

•The 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia draw to a close with the Closing ceremony. Samaresh Jung is adjudged the Best Athlete of the 18th Commonwealth Games. The 2010 games will be hosted by New Delhi, India.

•Scotland becomes the first part of the United Kingdom to introduce a full smoking ban in enclosed public places and workplaces.

George Mason University upsets UConn, advances to Final Four

The George Mason University Patriots of the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) defeated the University of Connecticut Huskies today in overtime, 86-84.

GMU becomes the first team from the CAA to reach the Final Four in a NCAA Division I basketball championship, and only the second 11th seed (LSU was the other in 1986). The Huskies were the number one seed in the Washington Region. GMU is also the first true mid-major to reach the Final Four since 1979 when both Penn State and Indiana State did.

The Patriots had never won a

NCAA Tournament game till this year, beating Michigan State (No. 6 seed) and the University of North Carolina (No. 3 seed) in the first two rounds. In the third round they beat Wichita State, setting up today's match up against UConn.

Although GMU lost to the University of North Carolina - Wilmington in the CAA Championship bid, the NCAA selection committee awarded the team an at-large bid. This drew criticism from sports commentators such as Billy Packer, who felt it was more appropriate to give at-large bids to schools from major conferences, like the Big East, Big 10, or ACC. His argument was that the tougher schedules during the regular season in those conferences gave more legitimacy to teams in those leagues.

XVIII Commonwealth Games competition ends

The following is how the medal table looks after the final day of competition for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, in Melbourne, Australia.

In the final event of the Games, New Zealand defeated the reigning Netball Commonwealth champion Australia, 60-55, for the first time in 12 years.

Australia received its largest medal haul in Commonwealth Games history, receiving more than a third of the gold medals available; a total of 221 medals.

South Africa was the best of the

African nation, winning 38 medals.

There were 247 events and 24 disciplines in the games. Events included:

- Aquatics: diving, swimming, synchronised swimming
- Athletics
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Boxing
- Cycling: track, road, mountain bike
- Gymnastics: artistic, rhythmic
- Hockey
- Lawn Bowls
- Netball
- Rugby Sevens
- Shooting: clay target, pistol, small bore and air rifle, full bore rifle
- Squash
- Table Tennis
- Triathlon
- Weightlifting

The games will be officially closed tonight, (0900 UTC) with the handing over of the Games to Delhi for 2010 Commonwealth Games.

European Union demands release of Belarusian opposition leader

The European Union (EU) has demanded the release of Alexander Kozulin, a Belarusian opposition leader arrested during a protest rally in Minsk. Kozulin was one of the leaders in a series of rolling protests against the recent election victory of President Alexander Lukashenko.

The EU president is "appalled by the violence used against demonstrators by the Belarusian authorities," it said in a statement. "It expresses serious concern about the arrest of demonstrators and members of the democratic

opposition, including presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin, and demands their immediate release," the statement said.

Reports indicate that the streets of Minsk have settled to a "peaceful standstill" on Sunday, after riot police moved in to break up a protest rally - a day after reports that police brutally dispersed large crowds in the capital. Police in riot gear stormed a rally on Friday, removing hundreds of protesters by truck. During a rally on Saturday, Alexander Kozulin was "pulled out of a car by police and taken away."

Kozulin's spokeswoman Nina Shedlovskaya said he had been beaten by police. On Sunday, Kozulin's wife, Irina, described his condition as "OK." "The rescue squad wasn't called for him," she told the Associated Press. Also Sunday, about 80 pro-Lukashenko youth activists picketed the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, shouting "Hands off Belarus." Russian news agencies report that the Polish Embassy was also picketed.

Kozulin was detained as protesters marched on a jail holding others detained during what is being called "the biggest protests in Belarus for ten years." Belarus Independent Media Centre reports that the "arrest of 460 people in the protest tent camp on Friday morning had provoked the population and strengthened the general protest mood in Belarus."

The Belarus IMC report says: "More than 5000 people gathered on Saturday in the centre of Minsk for the demonstration which had been announced. Authorities opposed the protest with all available police forces, special services and the army."

Demonstrators demand a repeat of last week's election poll. Mr Lukashenko, President of Belarus since 1994, has been widely accused of pursuing "Soviet-style policies, closing down the media and cracking down on rivals." President Lukashenko contends the United States and Western European countries are giving financial and moral support to the opposition group.

EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner also demanded that Belarus release members of the opposition. "I urge the Belarussian government to adhere to the rules of democracy," Ferrero-Waldner was quoted as saying. "If the Belarussian government does not show remorse, visa bans will probably be sharpened. In concrete terms, that means that those responsible will not be able to travel to EU member states. Foreign assets of Belarussian lawmakers could also be frozen. It's important that sanctions do not hurt the people."

Alexander Milinkevich, Belarus's main opposition leader, praised Belarussians who have been protesting since the election. However he acknowledged that their numbers were not enough to defeat Lukashenko's government.

Protesters rally for a second time against Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal

Buffalo, New York – For the second weekend in a row, demonstrators protested the Elmwood Village Hotel proposal on the proposed site.

The Elmwood Village Hotel is a proposed hotel by Savarino Construction Services Corporation and is designed by architect Karl Frizlen of the Frizlen Group. It is to be placed on the corner of

Elmwood and Forest Avenues in Buffalo and will require the demolition of at least five properties (1109-1121 Elmwood).

The proposal also required that all five properties, including 605 Forest, be rezoned to a "C-2" zone, or a "special development plan." The rezoning was passed by Buffalo's Common Council on March 21, 2006.

Russell Smith, owner of the Six Nation's Gift Shop at 1121 Elmwood, also participated in the protest.

"I am a Native American and we opened a Native American gift shop and we are just brand new [and just] opened. Having started out a business for the first time, and it the only Native American shop in the city, and I do not see the use of any hotel, especially at this district. The Elmwood Strip is pretty well established. Some of these people have been here a long while you know and they're [Savarino Construction] disrupting their livelihood," said Smith to Wikinews.

When Smith was asked if he was going to be in any of the shops in the new hotel he replied, "we don't have the option of getting into the hotel or any of the shops that are going to be there. We haven't [had] any idea that they [Savarino] were even planning to tear these buildings down to put a hotel here until we had moved in. I think thats a little unfair."

Former City of Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello was asked to sign the petition to stop the hotel when he walked by, but he declined saying, "I respect what you are doing, but I am for the hotel."

Despite the cold weather, at least 45 people showed up to walk the picket line.

For the moment, no further protests have been scheduled, pending the final decision on the hotel proposal by the city's Planning Board which meets Tuesday, March 28, 2006. The meeting begins at 8:00am and will be held in room 902 on the 9th floor of City Hall in downtown Buffalo.

Area residents and business owners receive legal advice

On Saturday morning several individuals attended a meeting with a lawyer to see what could be done, if anything, about the proposal and about Hans Mobius, former Buffalo mayoral candidate and owner of the properties to be demolished at 1109-1121 Elmwood.

Once of the attendees, Nancy Pollina, co-owner of Don Apparel with Patty Morris, stated that "there is a case" but that she is likely unable to afford the large attorney's fees. Pollina reports that she is looking into a "legal fund."

Some of the affected are considering going to the New York State Supreme Court pro se to seek an injunction.

Some tenants of Mobius's buildings have accused him of being a "slumlord" and claim that he "intentionally neglected" his properties with the intention of selling. Mobius, who has owned the properties for about 20 years, tried in 1995 to sell them to a developer who wanted to build a Walgreens Drugstore on the same site as the proposed hotel.

Mobius is expected to appear in housing Court on April 11, 2006. He has not returned any phone calls from Wikinews.

Australia's new controversial workplace regulations come into effect this week

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has urged the federal opposition Labor Party to focus on industrial relations (IR) as significant changes come into force from Monday 27th March. The legislation was passed in a row of controversy by parliament in December last year.

The contentious WorkChoices measures aim to move workers onto a federal industrial relations system and increase to the use of individual workplace contracts - under which conditions such as overtime and penalty rates can be set. The new WorkChoices arrangements include scrapping of unfair dismissal rights; the control by Federal government over state-based IR systems; more encouragement of individual contracts; award-cutting of award rates; secret ballots for industrial action and removal of the no-disadvantage test in new contracts.

The union movement has launched a fresh campaign to protest this week's changes. ACTU secretary Greg Combet warns that some employees will feel the effects as soon as they come into force, because they will no longer be protected by the previous unfair dismissal laws. He says with the changes becoming enforced this week, the Federal opposition party must now concentrate on industrial relations and not on "political infighting".

Australia's Prime Minister, John

Howard, says he's prepared for a union scare-mongering over the IR laws, but assumes the campaign will fail. "I predict the scare campaign will go on," he said. "I also predict that the scare campaign will fail." Mr Howard says workers should wait and experience the new system for themselves and that the changes will give workers greater flexibility. "Over time it will be beneficial," he said.

Combet feels different about the effects. "It's likely, somewhere around Australia tomorrow, someone is going to be sacked unfairly and they'll be the first victim of the new laws," he told the ABC. "The really significant thing is that the balance of power in the workplace is shifting sharply to the business community, to the employer."

Federal Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews told reporters last week that "the sky would not fall, because people would go to work next Monday and not detect any difference." He described union protests as "hysterical outbursts". "There is nothing in this legislation that people need to worry about in the ordinary course," he said.

Despite the Howard government's increased majority in the Senate, the passing of bill has not been smooth. In November last year, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators rallied across the nation to express dissent of the IR legislation. Ex-Finance Minister, Senator Nick Minchin, said most Australians "violently disagree" with the recent IR changes and there was a real prospect that the High Court could overturn the Work Choices laws.

The HR Nicholls Society, described

as one of Australia's most politically conservative organisations, has likened the new federal laws to the former Soviet system of "command and control." Society president Ray Evans says he does not like the centralised power being handed to the government under the changes, nor its encroachment on states' rights.

Evans says the myriad of complex new laws would create a system where "so-called IR professionals would stand to make a lot of money sorting through it... every economic decision has to go back to some central authority and get ticked off," he said . "There is a lot of that sort of attitude in this legislation and I think it is very unfortunate." Kemalex Plastics owner Richard Colebatch of the HR Nicholls Society said the changes are "very complicated for anybody to decipher... The professionals will spend a lot of money, the employers' money, working their way through the mire trying to create the new rules people are going to work towards."

But the Prime Minister says "more jobs will be generated in the small business sector as a result of the removal of the absurd job-destroying unfair dismissal laws, and the greater flexibility for people to make workplace agreements at the enterprise level will lift productivity," he told reporters in Melbourne. "Sure some people will complain, but a lot of people will benefit through getting job opportunities. Young people, who will get an opportunity to put their step on the bottom rung of the ladder for the first time, will benefit enormously."

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) said WorkChoices

regulations do not go far enough in clarifying who can legally issue medical certificates for sick leave. AMA vice-president Dr Choong-Siew Yong said WorkChoices regulations meant employers and employees faced uncertainty and confusion over sick leave.

"The regulations fail to acknowledge two very serious failings," Dr Yong said in a statement. "One, if people are seriously ill, they should be seeing their medical doctor. Two, opening up medical certification to a whole range of non-medical practitioners will make it difficult for employers to take sick leave seriously."

Pentagon: Russia provided information to Iraq

The Pentagon claims that Saddam Hussein received intelligence from a Russian ambassador about United States plans and movements during the opening days of the 2003 Iraq invasion. Russia's foreign intelligence service has denied the allegations in a statement issued Friday stating "Similar, baseless allegations concerning Russia's intelligence have been made more than once. We don't consider it necessary to comment on such fabrications."

A report released by the Pentagon on Friday states that Russia had a source inside the US Central Command base in Doha, Qatar, who passed information to Russia's ambassador to Iraq. It is alleged that the ambassador provided the information to Hussein. The intelligence passed to Hussein provided information on US military plans, troop numbers, units and locations.

The report does not comment on the value or accuracy of the information which was allegedly

leaked to Hussein. The Pentagon claims that the report is based on Iraqi documents and interviews with Iraqi officials. A Pentagon staffer who assisted in compiling the report, Brigadier General Anthony Cucolo, stated that there was no evidence that Russia has a spy inside Central Command. He further added that key details provided to Hussein were incorrect.

Norman Kember returns home safely

The freed hostage Norman Kember arrived home earlier Saturday. In a prepared statement delivered at Heathrow Airport, he responded to earlier accusations that he was "not grateful" for the multinational effort culminating in his release.

"I do not believe that a lasting peace is achieved by armed force, but I pay tribute to their courage and thank those who played a part in my release."

Riot police arrest Belarusian opposition leader Kozulin

Presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, leader of the Belarusian opposition against President Alexander Lukashenko, has been arrested by Belarusian police, according to witness reports at a march. The march was being held to protest the arrests of 200 fellow demonstrators who are being held at a detention center in the area. Witnesses stated that Kozulin was pulled out of a crowd of protestors and arrested by riot police at the scene.

Interfax news agency stated that Aleksandr Milinkevitch was also arrested. Sergei Voznyak, a press secretary for Milinkevitch, has since stated, "A few minutes ago I spoke to Milinkevich's aides. He has not been arrested and is in

safety." He also commented that the personal spokesman for Milinkevitch, Pavel Mazheiko, had been arrested.

Today in History

1513 - Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León first sighted Florida, purportedly while searching for the Fountain of Youth in the New World.

1794 - The United States Navy was established.

1958 - Nikita Khrushchev (pictured) became Premier of the Soviet Union.

1964 - The Good Friday Earthquake and subsequent tsunamis devastated Anchorage, Alaska.

1977 - Two Boeing 747 airliners collided in the Tenerife disaster on Tenerife of the Canary Islands, killing 583 people in one of the worst aircraft accidents in aviation history.

Quote of the Day

He acts without contact,
instructs without meeting,
guides without pointing.
Desires do not conflict with Him,
thoughts do not mingle with Him:
His essence is without
qualification,
His action without effort.
~ Mansur al-Hallaj ~

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