



Top Stories

United Nations General Assembly votes to establish UN Human Rights Council



Yesterday, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to establish a United Nations Human Rights Council "to promote and protect fundamental rights, and deal with major human rights offenders," according to a press release.

2006 Commonwealth Games open in Melbourne

The XVIII Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia were opened officially by Queen Elizabeth II in a two-and-a-half hour spectacular Opening Ceremony. About 80,000 spectators were in attendance, with millions more watching on TV.

Featured story

Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal threatened by possible lawsuit



Pano Georgiadis, owner of Pano's Resturant on Elmwood, has threatened to sue Savarino Construction Services Corp. if they attempt to obtain a variance on his property at 605 Forest Avenue. He also said he would sue the company if they "do the most rooms with a minimal amount of parking."

Wikipedia Current Events

- Near the third anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war, U.S. and Iraqi forces on Thursday launched an air assault into Salahuddin province in what was termed the largest air assault since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.
- The Iraqi National Assembly met for the first time since it was elected in December 2005.
- Drugs are discovered in a weightlifters' training room at the Australian Institute of Sport.
- A international child pornography network is discovered, and its members arrested, after information from an internet chat room was used.

Condoleezza Rice labelled "war criminal" by Australian demonstrators

Anti-war demonstrators in Sydney, Australia have dubbed US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a "war criminal" and "murderer." Two protesters were evicted and five people arrested during protests against the US invasion of Iraq.

Dr Rice, on a three-day trip to Australia, said she understood why people found it hard to be positive about Iraq when all they saw on their television screens was violence.

Soon after Dr Rice began her speech at the University of Sydney's Conservatorium of Music, two protesters shouted from the

rear of the auditorium, "Condoleezza Rice, you are a war criminal," and "Iraqi blood is on your hands and you cannot wash that blood away." Standing with their palms towards Dr Rice, the young man and woman repeated their accusation until security intervened to remove them from the hall.

About 15 minutes into her address, a second protester appeared at a balcony door, interrupting her speech as she referred to freedom. "What kind of freedom are you talking about, you are a murderer," said the demonstrator before he was quietly escorted from the hall. "I'm very glad to see that democracy is well and alive here at the university," said Dr Rice.

In her speech, she sought to justify the U.S. occupation of Iraq, describing Iraqis as now more free. One student asked about abuses committed by U.S. forces at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Rice said the abuses had made her "sick to her stomach." However, Dr Rice defended Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where human rights groups say detainees are held in inhumane conditions and detention flouting international laws.

Before Rice began her speech, about 50 protesters were gathered at the front gates of the Conservatorium. The group were confronted by police on horseback and by police dogs. Police used the horses to charge into the group of activists and push them back, as a

police helicopter hovered.

A police spokeswoman said the group was blocking pedestrian access into the building and that police had spent more than 20 minutes on warning them to move. The police then moved in and pushed the crowd back 20 metres. Police say five people have been charged with "hindering police in the execution of their duties."

The "Stop the War Coalition" says Dr Rice is a "war criminal" and is not welcome in Australia. The group's spokeswoman Anna Samson says the protest is one of many planned in the lead-up to the third anniversary of the invasion and occupation of Iraq on March 20.

Paddy Gibson, from the University of Sydney's Student's Council, says the protest is in opposition to the Iraq war, and that the University of Sydney's campus is now being used to host "the most powerful woman in the world," Dr Rice, who they say is a war criminal. "They're saying ... 'you've got Sydney Uni's support to stand up and peddle your murderous hate speeches,' which is what we see it," he said.

"You've got 180,000 people killed, as we said, for no other reason than strategic control of the region's oil resources. And the anti-Muslim racism that's been whipped up to justify this war is being felt by Sydney University students," said Mr Gibson.

United Nations General Assembly votes to establish UN Human Rights Council

Yesterday, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to establish a United Nations Human Rights

Council "to promote and protect fundamental rights, and deal with major human rights offenders," according to a press release.

170 countries voted for the proposed resolution and four voted against (Israel, the Marshall Islands, Palau and the United States), with three abstentions (Belarus, Iran and Venezuela). The Council will replace the Commission on Human Rights, which has lost credibility in the past years due to politicization.

The United States objected that the resolution did not go far enough to exclude from membership in the new Council those nations which it alleges are the worst human rights abusers.

Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, the Cuban Ambassador, declared that a "huge discredit" had befallen the previous Commission due to the "political manipulation, hypocrisy and double standards imposed on its work by the United States and the European Union."

The 191-member General Assembly approved the resolution, which stated "members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, fully cooperate with the Council, and be reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism, during their term of membership."

The resolution calls for elections for the new body on May 9, 2006 and an inaugural meeting on June 19, while the Commission will be abolished on June 16.

The Council will consist of 47 members, each elected individually by a majority (96 members or more) of the General

Assembly. If the Council members fail to uphold high standards of human rights, they can be suspended from the Council by a two-thirds majority of Assembly members present at the meeting.

Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal threatened by possible lawsuit

Buffalo, New York – The property at 605 Forest in Buffalo was the center of attention at last night's public meeting held at the offices of Forever Elmwood on Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo. Eva Hassett, Vice President of Savarino Construction Services Corporation, confirmed last night that the company will be seeking a variance for the 605 Forest property. Originally, both the 605 and 607 Forest Avenue properties were going to have variances placed on them. As it stands, 607 Forest will not be directly affected by the proposal, should it go forward. Both 605 and 607 are currently occupied by residents.

During Monday night's meeting, Pano Georgiadis, owner of 605 Forest and owner of Pano's Resuraunt at 1081 Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, threatened to "sue" Savarino Construction if they tried to obtain a variance on his property to build the Elmwood Village Hotel.

The Elmwood Village Hotel is a proposal by Savarino Construction that would be placed on the corner of Forest and Elmwood in Buffalo. In order for the project to move forward, at least five buildings (1119-1121 Elmwood) which include both residences and businesses will have to be demolished. The hotel was designed by architect Karl Frizlen of the Frizlen Group. Although the properties are "under contract," according to Hassett, it is unclear whether Savarino Construction

owns the properties. Hans Mobius, a resident of Clarence, New York and former Buffalo Mayoral candidate, is still believed to own them.

A freelance journalist writing for Wikinews asked Hassett what kind of zoning permit they [Savarino] would be applying for and, if 605 Forest is included, what zone that would be.

"There is a 'special development plan' in front of the council, which changes only one thing about the zoning. It allows one permitted use for just a hotel. The rest of the zoning remains as it is under the current Elmwood Business District zoning. 605 and 607 Forest are not required for the project. They are not part of the footprint for the project. Let me answer this question again. This is on the record, in council: 605 needs to be rezoned in order to facilitate the project because of the sideyard requirement. Anything in C-2 is excluded besides the hotel. So we've taken the C-2 and included the hotel as a permitted use, and excluded everything else and everything else remains the same."

However, during the February 28 Common Council meeting, Hassett was quoted as saying that the two properties were "off the agenda."

"Now Karl said, at the last meeting, that they will build this hotel right on the borderline [property line]. If a wall forty-five to fifty feet high goes next to this house, of course it's not right. You really have to go with whatever the city code says, so you have to get back as many feet as the city code says," said Georgiadis.

"If you try to get a variance to change the code, I will sue you.

This is my home, number one," added Georgiadis. "First of all I think we are all wasting our time here, you [Savarino], have already made up your mind, but if you go against city code, and you try to do the most rooms with a minimal amount of parking, again, I will sue you. If you build a hotel, in my idea its going to fail. It's doomed, ok. [If] it's going to be a home for the disabled, for the homeless, for recovery people, but that's another story. Then how is it going to be when we say, well I told you so? You will be over and done with. Its very hard to take a four story building [hotel] down."

Georgiadis stated last night that he was against the proposal and signed a petition to stop it, jokingly saying, "this isn't a paper to sign to build the hotel, is it? Don't make me sign the wrong thing."

Joseph Golombeck, district councilman in Buffalo, New York, speaking at the meeting.

Joseph Golombeck, district councilman, was at Monday's public meeting and said, "we also did request this and the reason we are doing this as a special business district is so that it has to be this specific plan. They [Savarino] can't go halfway through it and in six months decide that [the hotel] it's going to be three floors. They can't decide it's going to be five floors. It has to be, per law, exactly what it is that they brought to us [the public] so far, and then ultimately to the City of Buffalo Common Council when it's approved. So if it gets approved, it has to be this specific, exact project. They couldn't make it fifty parking spots, they couldn't make it thirty. It has to be specifically what they

have right here."

A man who lives on Granger Street in Buffalo attended the meeting, speaking in favor of the hotel development. He claimed, "There are a lot of low property values. Hopefully if we embrace development, our property values, for those of us who have property, will go up. There are a lot of people unfortunately, who are working hard, that do not get a chance to come to these meetings. I myself was at work and wasn't able to go to the last two meetings. I express that we appreciate that you [Savarino] invest in the City of Buffalo and for what you hope, because I do not think Savarino is into losing money. These people are not in business to be losing money here. They are hoping for the success of this [the hotel] more than any one of us. They are hoping that the property values in this area will go up more than any one of us, because it will benefit them [the residents and business owners], more than any one of us. I want this city to develop. I don't think anybody else is here understanding that we're looking for development in this city, we are looking for the city to get better. The councilman here is not interested in Buffalo failing."

Area residents and business owners concerned about property damage

Evelyn Bencinich, resident of Granger Street, would have the hotel directly behind her home, if it were to be built.

"What about construction [time]? Is that just for the exterior, the nine months? Or does that include the interior? Is there going to be blasting through bedrock? Is there property protection for damage? Are you [Savarino and the Frizlen

Group] responsible?", asked Bencinich.

According to Frizlen, there is a layer of solid bedrock at least 30 feet from the surface of the land saying, "we anticipate that the bedrock is at least thirty feet down,." He also admitted that "we haven't done any soil sporrings," but did say "the bedrock is somewhere in between twenty-five and thirty feet [down], we don't need to go that deep. So blasting is most likely out of it [the question]."

"Personally, I can only speak from the city side, but a few years ago we rebuilt Vulcan Street, in the northwest corner of Buffalo, and there were a couple of properties that were damaged and they [the owners] were able to file a claim against the company that did the work and they won in each case. It was the same thing with a school that was built on Military Road. There were a couple of problems with foundations on a couple of properties, and they weren't sure if caused by the school or not, but the insurance company ended up paying them," answered Golombeck.

"I would assume that Savarino is insured with someone. So if there is a problem with anything that happens to your properties, what I would reccomend is that anybody that lives on Granger Place, if this does go through, that you get pictures taken of your basement and of your foundations, because God forbid if there is a problem, you want to have an before and after [picture]. You don't want to come afterwards and there's a crack in in there [foundation] and you have no way of proving that it happened," added Golombeck.

Mobius in housing court

According to Golombeck, the properties that Mobius owns have been "in housing court on several occassions, but has a date of April 11, 2006 that he is going back [to court] for these properties. So it is in housing court and I wouldn't know Mr. Mobius if he walked in this room right now," stated Golombeck.

"I've gone after him on numerous occassions and everytime he gets out of housing court with a slap on the wrist. If I am a conspiracy theorist and say that there is a lot more going on than meets the eye. I can only get him into housing court. Once he's in housing court, the judge rules on it. Now I don't mean to take any shots at previous administrations, but I am hoping with the new administration, being in here, that the inspections department is going to be a much better department than it has been for the previous several years."

City Planning Board sends proposal back to Common Council
The city's Planning Board on March 14, 2006, agreed to send the Elmwood Village Hotel proposal back to the Common Council so that it may "be opened back up to discussion from the public."

On March 2, 2006 the Common Council sent the proposal "to committee" for further discussion and also requesting that the public be "engaged further."

During that meeting, Justin Azzeralla, Executive Director for Forwever Elmwood, said that the organization "supports the hotel project."

Also on March 2, the planning board agreed to table, or postpone, any decision on the hotel proposal for at least thirty

days, also citing the need for the public to be "more engaged."

The Common Council is expected to meet on March 21, 2006 at 2:00pm local time where they may approve or deny the proposal.

Majority of Common Council allegedly supports hotel proposal
According to The Buffalo News, at least six Common Council members support the hotel project and are pledging to vote to approve it at the meeting on Tuesday, March 21.

However, the city's Planning Board will get the final say on the project.

Australians may choose to change head of state beyond Queen Elizabeth II: Howard
Australian Prime Minister John Howard has given his strongest indication yet that Australians may choose to change their head of state beyond Queen Elizabeth II's reign. The comments are the first from Mr Howard, a proud monarchist, casting doubt over the future of the monarchy in Australia.

In an interview with the BBC, Mr Howard said that he did not believe Australia would become a republic while Queen Elizabeth II is on the throne, but he conceded that he did not know what would happen after Elizabeth II's reign ends.

"I do not believe this country would become a republic while the Queen is on the throne; beyond that I don't know," Mr Howard told the BBC.

In a separate interview with British broadcaster ITV, Mr Howard refused to predict whether he thought Prince Charles would become King of Australia and

indicated that it would be for the Australian people to decide.

"Well, that is a matter for the Australian people, and I believe in democracy," he said.

"If the Australian people want to change the system, they will. But if they don't, they won't. The only prediction that I make is that I do not believe that this country will become a republic while the Queen is on the throne."

Republicans have seen significance in Mr Howard's comments. Ted O'Brien, Chair of the Australian Republican Movement said Mr Howard has provided some recognition for a possible Australian head of state.

"Mr Howard's recognition that it is very unlikely that the country will become a republic while the present Queen is on the throne indicates quite clearly that this may not be the case when Prince Charles takes over," he said.

"Mr Howard is an astute reader of the mood of the Australian people, and this change in language, if not in sentiment, is clearly some recognition of the likelihood of a future Australian head of state," added Allison Henry, ARM national director.

Monarchists are urging people not to make too much from Mr Howard's comments. Professor David Flint from Australians for Constitutional Monarchy said that to think Australia will become a republic based on Mr Howard's comments would be grasping at straws.

"He's just saying that he doesn't know the future, he can't tell the future, none of us can," he said.

"It would be grasping at straws for the republicans to say that this means Australia will become a republic or that the Prime Minister says that."

Tony Abbott, Australia's health minister and staunch monarchist said he did not believe Australia would become a republic after Queen Elizabeth II's reign. Mr Abbott told ABC that he believes the person on the throne is irrelevant: it is the institution that Australians admire.

"It's the institution, not the individual which really counts," he said.

"I am quite confident that were the Queen to pass on and her successor to occupy the throne that there would be the same magic and same personal affection between even Australians and our monarch."

Today in History

45 BC - Julius Caesar scored his final military victory in the Battle of Munda, defeating the Optimiate forces of Titus Labienus and Pompey the Younger.

1950 - The discovery of Californium, a radioactive transuranium element, was announced.

1958 - Vanguard 1, the first solar-powered satellite, was launched. It is the oldest human-launched object still in space today.

1959 - Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th and current Dalai Lama, fled Tibet for India.

1969 - Golda Meir of the Labour Party became the fourth Prime Minister of Israel.

March 17 is St. Patrick's Day

Quote of the Day

"Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. There is an idea, Mr. Creedy, and ideas are bulletproof."
~ "V" in V for Vendetta

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