



Top Stories

UK public sector workers strike over pension rights

Government workers in the UK withdrew their labour on March 29 as part of a dispute over pension entitlements. The members of 11 different trades unions were involved in the 24hr strike.

Airbus A380 safety test injures 33

Thirty-three people were injured during a test of the Airbus A380, a double decker superjumbo jet, in Hamburg, Germany. Injuries include friction burns from sliding down the escape ramps and one broken leg. 853 volunteer "passengers" and 20 crew members took about 80 seconds to evacuate the aircraft, beating the test's requirements by 10 seconds and over 200 people "rescued".

Featured story

Buffalo, N.Y. hotel proposal gets final approval by city Planning Board

In an unanimous vote, the City of Buffalo's Planning Board approved the Elmwood Village Hotel proposal. Although the meeting was not a "public hearing", citizens lashed out at the board members for not letting them speak.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Beatles' record label Apple Corps accuse Apple Computer in court of breaching a trademark

Wikipedia Current Events

agreement by operating their iTunes Music Store.

- Afghan Christian convert Abdul Rahman takes political asylum in Italy. Many Islamic clerics and members of Afghanistan's parliament protest his release.

- A total solar eclipse may be observed from 08:36 GMT (09:36 BST) to 11:48 GMT (12:48 BST) in Eastern Brazil, West and North Africa, Turkey, Central Asia and Mongolia.

- Former Liberian President Charles Taylor is captured after disappearing in Nigeria and is extradited to Sierra Leone.

- The chief prosecutor in Austria seeks an arrest warrant for former Refco chairman Phillip Bennett and former Refco client Wolfgang Floetl on suspicion they helped defraud Austria's Bawag Bank.

U.S.A. researchers claim Putin's dissertation contains plagiarism

Researchers at the Brookings Institution, a non-profit think tank located in Washington D.C., have recently accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of making improper use of almost 16 pages and six figures from a 1982 translation of a 1978 textbook in his economics dissertation. Strategic Planning and Policy, written by University of Pittsburgh professors William R. King and David I. Cleland, was published in 1979.

Brookings Institution researchers Clifford Gaddy and Igor Danchenko claim that Putin's dissertation, which earned him a candidate's degree in economics from the St. Petersburg Mining Institute, copies almost verbatim from the text. Putin's biography at the Kremlin web site describes a candidate's degree as equivalent to a Ph.D..

Gaddy states, "I'm convinced that Putin did read that textbook. This is exactly the style of governing the country that he has used in Russia. He's actually taking their ideas and treating Russia as if it's a corporation -- 'Russia Incorporated.'"

Many Russian government officials at the time would pay a ghostwriter for such publications, as gaining a degree could add legitimacy to one's governing policy. In that sense, it is possible Putin bought or paid for the dissertation and did not read over - in essence, passing plagiarised work off as his own, but not himself committing plagiarism. Gaddy states: "It's very clear he never wrote the thing in the first case, this is a clear diploma-mill-type operation. This is a dissertation, paid for, made-to-order."

Although Gaddy and Danchenko set out searching for Putin's views on economics and sustainable development, they noticed in reading his dissertation that certain sections seemed out of place. It was in the Russian translation of the only English-

language source cited that they discovered what they believe to be plagiarism.

King and Cleland have no plans to sue.

UN Security Council calls on Iran to suspend uranium enrichment

The U.N. Security Council has unanimously approved a non-binding statement earlier today calling for Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment.

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council agreed on the statement earlier today, setting the stage for the first action by the Security Council over fears that Iran wants to join the growing list of nations possessing nuclear weapons.

The Security Council will ask the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor Iran's compliance with its request. Russia and China, two members of the Security Council, have stated opposition to using force or imposing sanctions on Iran.

The IAEA will have thirty days to file a report.

Darfur declares Swedish Foreign Minister unwelcome

According to the governor of Darfur, Swedish Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Carin Jämtin is not welcome in the region due to Sweden's involvement in the Mohammed Cartoons controversy. Her planned visit has now been cancelled for security reasons. Jämtin's press secretary, John Zanchi, believes that the true motivation is that Darfur's governor wants as little foreign involvement as possible in the local conflict. Sweden has been actively working to send UN

peacekeepers to the region.

Jämtin had earlier stated a desire to visit Darfur after receiving worrying reports of the humanitarian situation there. Her visit had been cleared by the government in Khartoum. The Foreign Minister will continue her trip to other parts of Sudan, including a visit to the Vice President.

Jian Seng ghost ship affair brings criticism of Australian government

Criticism was targeted to Government efforts in the affair of the Jian Seng in the Australian Senate March 28 and 29 over the handling of the ghost ship, the tanker Jian Seng, which was found abandoned and unlit in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Senator Joe Ludwig (Labor, Queensland) asked of the Minister for Justice and Customs Senator Chris Ellison in Question Time whether he stood by his claim that he made yesterday that the discovery of the Jian Seng demonstrated that the Australian Government had in place "aerial and maritime surveillance to intercept a vessel in these circumstances, and that was done", and asked why it took the Government two weeks to intercept the vessel after it entered Australian waters. Senator Ellison responded that at the vessel's first sighting on March 8 "it was not doing anything illegal", and criticised the Opposition's claim that the ship was drifting for seventeen days, saying that "it was not stated as having drifted for the whole of the 17 days". Ludwig went on to note that it was not Customs that spotted the ship but a "passing Australian barge", but Ellison had defended this, stating that Ludwig "thinks that

commercial vessels have absolutely no role in looking out for Australia" and that Ellison will "rely on reports to our hotline and go out and inspect vessels".

Later, Senator Kerry O'Brien (Labor, Tasmania) criticised the Government's implementation of coastal defense, and highlighted the dangers of ignoring the ship for seventeen days, saying that "it posed and possibly still poses unknown environmental and quarantine risks" and that the Jian Seng "has been refused admission to Weipa harbour...It could have been carrying literally anything. It could have been carrying chemicals. It could have been carrying guns".

Senator David Johnston (Liberal, Western Australia) went on to debate that there are no shipping lanes in the area where the Jian Seng was found, and that devoting resources to a harmless ship would leave gaps in the coastal defenses elsewhere.

Search for body fails on New Zealand's Raoul island

According to a statement by a police officer sent to Raoul Island in order to find the body of Mark Kearny, 33, who worked on researches on volcanoes on Raoul Island, Kearny was checking the temperature of the crater lake on March 17 when it erupted, blowing trees over, throwing boulders into the air, and burying the surrounding area in mud up to 5m deep. A team of specialists has been sent to the island, but it is likely that the immense heat has destroyed the body of Mr Kearny.

Blair challenges New Zealand to fight against global warming

British Prime Minister Tony Blair sees New Zealand facing the challenge of playing a significant

role in the fight against global warming. He mentioned in a video conference between Auckland and a conference hosted by Victoria University of Wellington that the country could be a important factor in performing that change. It could persuade others to adopt reasonable policies for sustainability, he told a conference in Te Papa.

Tony Blair, who visited New Zealand for 24 hours, said that the pressure must be kept on governments to address climate change whether or not they are signatories to the Kyoto Protocol. He encouraged ordinary people as well to take part in solving this great task: "One of the things you and other people can do is keep up the pressure... there are going to be some difficult decisions for government".

UK public sector workers strike over pension rights

Local Government workers in the UK withdrew their labour yesterday as part of a dispute over pension entitlements. The members of 11 different trades unions were involved in the 24hr strike. As the day began they declared that support for the strike was solid. Although the strikers work for local councils, their pay and conditions are agreed nationally. The Local Government Association which represents the local councils in England and Wales declared predictions that 1.5 million people would stay away from work as "wildly optimistic".

The Unions' complaint is that local government workers are being treated unfavourably compared to other public sector employees. They say that agreements on pensions that have been reached with civil servants, teachers and health workers will allow those

staff to continue to retire at 60 while local government staff will be forced to work until they are 65. Civil servants work for national government, teachers work for local councils but have their own pension arrangements and most health workers are employed by the state-controlled National Health Service.

The Local Government Association claims that if council workers continue to be able to retire at 60, it will increase the levels of Council Tax (a tax on people living in properties which funds a proportion of local government expenditure) by 2%.

The striking workers provide a wide range of services from assisting teachers in the class room, through inspecting kitchens for hygiene to providing care to the vulnerable in society. In some places council workers collect tolls for road tunnels or manage ferries. Mainstream media have reported on the strike all day with heavy coverage of disruption to commuters where transport has been affected. The unions have emphasised the large number of their members who are women working in low paid jobs.

The Government which regulates the scheme claimed that the early retirement provisions (called the rule of 85) were age-discriminatory and had to be removed.

The strike ended at midnight. The Unions have not declared any further strike days.

The Unions involved were AEP, AMICUS, CYWU, GMB, NAPO, NIPSA, NUJ, NUT, TGWU, UCATT and UNISON.

Australian House of Representatives acknowledges Cyclone Larry efforts

The Australian House of Representatives today acknowledged the impact of the recent devastating Cyclone Larry and the efforts of the support given to the residents and communities of north Queensland in order to restore normal life.

Phillip Ruddock (Liberal, Berowra) moved a motion expressing this after Question Time today, which included a description of the devastation wrought on the area, the response by the Australian Government and the Australian Defence Force, and thanked the efforts of people for their "willingness to roll up their sleeves and get on with the job of cleaning up and rebuilding their towns and centres."

The Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley (Labor, Brand) supported the motion, and congratulated the move to put General Peter Cosgrove in charge of operations, stating that soldiers "know how to work through logistics issues...how to work around officialdom or blockages", praised both local federal and state members of Parliament, and especially the Labor Queensland state premier, Peter Beattie.

Bob Katter (Independent, Kennedy) was more critical in his speech. Katter thanked Beattie for his immediate response, but also described his confrontation with him and said how first responses were "simply not working", but also praised Beattie's decision on Cosgrove. Katter also described how the incident was "the worst natural disaster in Australian history" and how the banana industry in north Queensland was decimated. Katter went on to

describe the financial problems of the people in the region, the "huge gap" between the cost of rebuilding and insurance payouts, also asking "Are we going to pay people virtually nothing to sit on their backsides to do nothing or are we going to pay them a decent wage and have them rebuilding our communities for us?"

The debate is set to continue in the Main Committee, as an opportunity for many more members of the House of Representatives to speak to the motion, without taking up further time in the Chamber.

US Federal Reserve raises interest rates

The US Federal Reserve has raised the federal funds rate by 25 basis points (a quarter of a percent) to 4.75%. The Federal Open Market Committee said, "Economic growth has rebounded strongly in the current quarter but appears likely to moderate to a more sustainable pace." The committee also said that the recent rise in energy prices has had a small effect on inflation and increasing productivity has offset growing labor costs which has helped keep inflation modest. However, the rise indicates the advent for future wariness over the state of the economy, with huge budget deficits yet to offset it seems unlikely that the rates will decrease in forthcoming years, The federal chairman Ben Bernanke appeared at the senate board in the pursuit to implicitly state the statusquo worries.

Cyclone Glenda intensifies to category 5 storm

Tropical Cyclone Glenda has intensified overnight. According to the Australian Bureau of Meterology, Glenda was upgraded from a category 3 to a category 5

storm around 8 p.m WST Tuesday (1200 UTC).

The Bureau of Meteorology predicts Glenda will approach the coast later today. The bureau is also warning about the possibility of gale force winds along the Pilbara coast between Pardoo and Mardie. These winds are predicted to extend west to Exmouth tomorrow.

The bureau is also warning residents of the central and west Pilbara coast that there is a risk of 200 Kilometre per hour (124 miles per hour) winds tomorrow as Glenda nears land.

Today in History

1867 - U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward negotiated the purchase of Alaska for 7.2 million U.S. dollars from Russia.

1912 - Sultan Abdelhafid signed the Treaty of Fez, making Morocco a French protectorate.

1940 - World War II: Wang Jingwei was installed by Japan as head of the puppet government in China.

1954 - The Toronto Transit Commission launched the first subway system in Canada.

1964 - Merv Griffin's game show Jeopardy! made its debut on television.

March 30 is Spiritual Baptist Shouter Liberation Day in Trinidad and Tobago

Quote of the Day

"Nothing can be surprising any more or impossible or miraculous, now that Zeus, father of the Olympians has made night out of noonday, hiding the bright sunlight, and . . . fear has come upon mankind. After this, men can believe anything, expect anything." ~ Archilochus

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