





Top Stories

German Social and Christian Democrats agree on new government

 Nearly two months after the German parliamentary election, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) have reached a deal to form a grand coalition, paving the way for Angela Merkel to become Germany's first female chancellor.

France imposes emergency laws in response to riots

 Emergency laws have imposed across France in an effort to quell the rioting that has wracked the country for the last 12 days.

Featured story

Teaching Intelligent Design: Dover PA school board election results

Public school board administrators who mandated that creationism be taught in biology classes lose overwhelmingly in their local district re-election bid.

Wikipedia Current Events

• British hostages are freed in Iran after intense pressure from the British Foreign Office. The trio were seized at gun point by Iranian Navy patrol boats on 28 October, when they sailed their boat to the disputed island of Abu Musa, which is claimed by both Iran and the United Arab

Wikipedia Current Events

Emirates.

•Albania suffers its worst ever electric power shortage. Due to low water levels, hydroelectric power is reduced to the minimum and there are blackouts in all the country. Water supplies won't last for more than two weeks, so electricity is currently available just six hours a day. The government plans to import power from neighbouring Romania, Bulgaria and Italy.

•A Pakistani cargo plane carrying eight to ten people crashes near Kabul, capital of Afghanistan. There are no survivors. The cause of the crash is unknown.

•The deadly H5N1 bird flu is found in Kuwait. It's the first case of the virus in the Middle East.

•Saudi Arabia becomes a member of the World Trade Organization after twelve years of talks.

German Social and Christian Democrats agree on new government

Nearly two months after the German parliamentary election, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) have reached a deal to form a grand coalition, paving the way for Angela Merkel to become Germany's first female chancellor.

When the result of election on September 18 prevented both parties from forming a coalition with their respective preferred partners, the Greens and the Free Democrats, they were forced to

engage in coalition negotiations with each other.

The negotiations were long and difficult; in the process Gerhard Schröder (SPD) gave up his ambitions for chancellorship, SPD chair Franz Müntefering resigned over the refusal of the party leadership to approve his candidate for a high party office and Edmund Stoiber (CSU) withdrew from federal politics and abstained from becoming Minister of economics, like he announced earlier.

"After 39 years of being political opponents on the federal level CDU, CSU and SPD want to move our country forward in common responsibility as the federal government", chancellor-designate Merkel said at a joint press conference. Outgoing SPD chair Müntefering added that "cooperation is good for the country".

Under the new agreement the value added tax will increase by 3% to 19%, the legislative competence of the federal level and the states will be modified, and further reforms of the job market will be implemented. Married person with an income that exceed 500,000 € will have to pay an extra 3% on their income, the same applies to unmarried persons with over 250,000 € income. Dismissal protection only kicks in after two years of employment. The agreement also includes several amendments, some of them define by the letter how the wording of the constitution will be changed.

The coalition agreement was criticised by unions and industry organisations. A VAT increase would "stall the economy" said Klaus Wiesehügel, the head of a construction union. The CEO of Porsche, Wendelin Wiedeking, said that "we were only served lies. Everyone, whether low or high income, notices that".

Party conferences are expected to ratify the agreement in the next weeks; the election of Merkel as chancellor is scheduled for November 22nd.

The new cabinet

- Angela Merkel (CDU)
Chancellor
- Franz Müntefering (SPD)
Vice chancellor and minister of labor
- Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD)
Foreign minister
- Michael Glos (CSU)
Minister of economy
- Peer Steinbrück (SPD)
Minister of finance
- Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU)
Minister of the interior
- Brigitte Zypries (SPD)
Minister of justice
- Franz Josef Jung (CDU)
Minister of defence
- Ulla Schmidt (SPD)
Minister of health
- Sigmar Gabriel (SPD)
Minister of environment
- Ursula von der Leyen (CDU)
Minister of family and women
- Horst Seehofer (CSU)
Minister of consumer protection and agriculture
- Annette Schavan (CDU)
Minister of education
- Wolfgang Tiefensee (SPD)
Minister of construction and traffic
- Heide-Marie Wieceorek-Zeul (SPD)
Minister of international

development
Thomas de Maizière (CDU)
Head of the chancellor's office with cabinet rank

U.S. Senate passes amendment stripping Guantanamo detainees' access to courts

The U.S. Senate has adopted an amendment, proposed by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), to a defense bill limiting detainees' court privileges.

The amendment would make the Combat Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) statutory law, the Annual Review Board (ARB) statutory law, require civilian officers to be appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, not allow the preponderance of evidence against a detainee be derived from undue coercion, and remove Guantanamo prisoners' right to file habeas corpus petitions in federal courts.

In regards to the habeas corpus provision, the amendment specifically states, "No court, justice, or judge shall have jurisdiction to hear or consider an application for a writ of habeas corpus filed by or on behalf of an alien outside the United States (as that term is defined in section 101(a)(38) of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(38)) who is detained by the Department of Defense at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba." [1]

The amendment passed with a 49-42 vote. Five Democrats jumped party lines to vote for and four Republicans jumped party lines to vote against the amendment. Nine Senators, seven Republicans and two Democrats, did not vote on the amendment. Kent Conrad, Mary Landrieu, Joseph Lieberman,

Ben Nelson, and Ron Wyden were the Democrats who voted for the amendment. Arlen Specter, Lincoln Chafee, Gordon Smith, and John Sununu were the Republicans who voted against the measure.

Senator Graham is quoted as saying, "The president has established procedures to determine who is an enemy combatant and to annually review their status. It's now time for Congress to sign-off on these procedures and turn them into a statute, a move the courts will give great deference to."

It should be noted that under Graham's amendment, detainees would be able to challenge only the narrow question of whether the procedures established by the Secretary of Defense at the time the military determined their status as an enemy combatant were followed. The Court of Appeals for the DC circuit would still retain the ability to rule on that question.

Civil liberties groups as well as human rights groups issued statements opposing the amendment. "The Graham amendment will create a thousand points of darkness across the globe where the United States will be free to hold people indefinitely without a hearing and beyond the reach of U.S. law and the checks and balances of the courts enshrined in our Constitution," the Center for Constitutional Rights said in a statement.

"The Graham amendment would strip all courts, including the Supreme Court, of jurisdiction to consider habeas corpus petitions or any other action challenging any aspect of the detention of foreign detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, except for the

narrow question of whether status review boards follow their own rules," said a press release from the American Civil Liberties Union.

When Will the Next Earthquake Occur?

Two separate research findings this week. The first announced a method to provide a several second warning that an earthquake will hit and another one published in this week's edition of NATURE concludes that scientists might be able to distinguish small earthquakes from big ones from the very first second of information.

Researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, say the measurements of seismic waves soon after a trembler can signal whether it will be a minor or monster trembler. "Basically, a high-pitched squeal means that you'll get a smaller quake. A low-groan means something bigger," says the University of California's Richard Allen.

In the study, Allen and colleagues analyzed records of 71 major Pacific Rim quakes in the past decades including 24 events that were greater than a magnitude 6.

Using a mathematical model, they were able to estimate a quake's size to within one magnitude unit from as little as four seconds of data of the frequency of the energy in the primary wave. These low-energy waves typically cause a jolt, signaling the occurrence of a quake.

According to a traditional theory, called the cascade model, we cannot know anything about an earthquake's ultimate magnitude until it is finished. This is because spread along a fault line depends

on the stress in each individual part of the fault. Given that this information is not available to the initial rupture point, it should be impossible to tell from that first slip how far it will go or how long it will last.

But research from Japan flies in the face of this idea. During the 1980s, Yutaka Nakamura, an earthquake engineer at a Tokyo company called System and Data Research, found that the frequency of the P wave in the first few seconds allowed people to distinguish earthquakes of more than magnitude 6 from smaller tremors that did not require warnings.

They say the information could possibly be used in an alert system to give seconds to tens of seconds of advance notice of an impending quake -- enough time for schoolchildren to take cover, power generators to trip off and valves to shut on pipelines.

In another research paper, published in the scientific magazine Physical Review Letters, says that researchers from Israel and Germany found a way to predict when the next big earthquake will hit.

Do earthquakes have memory? Are they a random phenomenon that can occur at any time? What can be learned from the recent, devastating earthquakes which rocked Southeast Asia that can be used to forewarn of future earthquakes? According to new research to be published by Prof. Shlomo Havlin, of Bar-Ilan University's Department of Physics, earthquakes form patterns, the discovery of which can improve man's ability to predict the timing of their recurrence.

Prof. Havlin's research, in collaboration with Prof. Armin Bunde, of the Justus-Liebig University in Giessen, Germany, and Bar-Ilan University graduate student Valerie Livina, published an article reported by the American Physical Society.

Using the "scaling" approach from physics, Prof. Havlin and his team developed a mathematical function to characterize earthquakes of a wide range of magnitudes in order to learn from smaller magnitude earthquakes about larger magnitude earthquakes. Their findings reveal that the recurrence of earthquakes is strongly dependent on the recurrence times of previous earthquakes. Two earthquakes separated by a short recurrence time, for example, are likely to be followed by a third earthquake which recurs close in time, whereas two earthquakes separated by a large recurrence time are likely to be followed by a third earthquake recurring further apart in time. This memory effect not only provides a clue to understanding the observed clustering of earthquakes, but also suggests that apparent regular gaps in earthquake occurrences, as seen in Tokyo and in San Francisco, are statistically significant.

Marcinkiewicz's cabinet given vote of confidence

Marcinkiewicz's cabinet has been given a vote of confidence by Polish parliament. Marcinkiewicz, from Law and Justice Party (PiS), has won the voting with vote distribution 272 for and 187 against. His minority government have gained the support of minor, pro-social parties - Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona RP), Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and League of Polish

Families (LPR).

Civic Platform (PO) and The Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) voted against the cabinet.

Marcinkiewicz believes that his government will stop corruption and will help getting out of unemployment problem in Poland. His expose was praised by his party, LPR and PSL. Although Andrzej Lepper, the leader of Self-Defence Party, wasn't satisfied by the expose, he accepted it.

Leaders of both Civic Platform and The Alliance of the Democratic Left criticised the expose.

Conservative-national Peace and Justice Party won the September 25 voting, receiving 27% of votes (155 seats in 460 members Sejm), while their main opponent, conservative-liberal Civic Platform - 24.1% (133 seats). Winning parties were planning building up a strong, conservative-liberal coalition, but after the clinch between them, caused mainly by choosing Marek Jurek as a speaker of parliament, talks had been stopped.

Blair could face inquiry into terror vote

British Prime Minister Tony Blair could face a House of Commons inquiry into claims that chief police officers were pressured to support a political agenda during Wednesday's vote to extend detention without charge.

Chief police officers were asked to lobby MPs wavering over the introduction of a controversial new law allowing police to detain a terror suspect for 90 days without charge. Although the proposal was rejected by the House of Commons, the lobbying has

provoked criticism from senior members of the opposition Conservative Party, who are pushing for an inquiry into the behaviour of government ministers towards the police and for 'embroiling them in politics'.

Former Tory cabinet minister Peter Lilley said: "Every chief constable knows their job is up for re-selection in the next year or so. That puts great pressure on them."

Home Office minister Hazel Blears denied the claims: "It is entirely proper that the police were there to make their case and for Parliament to consider it."

"Certainly, as a Member of Parliament I would want to have the benefit of the best professional advice I could get before reaching my decision."

Sony faces class action lawsuits for DRM



California, Italy and New York are the first to bring litigation against Sony BMG's digital rights management (DRM) software found in at least 20 music discs released by Sony. The software automatically installs after the user agrees to a end user license agreement (EULA) before the music disc can be played, and includes a rootkit that can create vulnerabilities in the user's Windows computer. One trojan horse exploiting the hole has already been discovered in the wild.

The California suit claims that the software violates the Consumer

Legal Remedies Act, the Consumer Protection Against Computer Spyware Act, and the California Unfair Competition Law. The upcoming lawsuit in New York would seek restitution for consumers nationwide.

Mathew Gilliat-Smith, the CEO of First 4 Internet, the company that created the software, claims it is "benign content." Meanwhile, in an NPR interview, a spokesman for Sony said, "users don't know what a rootkit is, and therefore, don't care."

Sony and First 4 Internet have released "patches" and uninstall kits, after programmer Mark Russinovich discovered the hidden files from the rootkit. However, these uninstall kits are only installable online through an ActiveX script, which has been under high scrutiny by security advisers over the safety of using ActiveX.

In addition to questions of legality, the DRM software has come under fire from media rights activists and even artists who unwittingly found their albums more stringently protected than they approved of.

Thomas Hesse of Sony BMG recently told the San Francisco Chronicle that 60 percent of Sony BMG CD's released in the United States currently have copy protection measures, and that they aim to hit 100 percent by early 2006.

US trade deficit hits new record

The United States trade deficit hit a new record in September to \$66.1 billion, up \$5.7 billion from August. The trade deficit so far this year totals \$529.8 billion.

A large part of the deficit is attributed to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Some of the increase is attributed to energy imports that were needed after Hurricane Katrina slowed down domestic oil production. Crude oil imports dropped \$350 million due to shut down refineries, yet natural gas imports increased \$3.7 billion. Fuel oil and petroleum products increased by \$6.8 billion. There was also a 2.6 percent drop in exports.

Also affected by Katrina, food exports fell \$296 million from transportation delays caused by the shutdown of the port of New Orleans. The total decrease in all exports was \$2.8 billion.

The largest trade deficit is with China, up \$1.6 billion to a record \$20.1 billion after a flood of toys, clothes, and televisions were shipped to the United States.

New Australian industrial relations legislation passes House of Representatives

The new Australian industrial relations legislation, dubbed "WorkChoices" by the Government, passed the House of Representatives November 10. It is to be considered next by the Senate.

The House session became tumultuous, with the Leader of the House Tony Abbott moving a motion to permit an hour to the consideration in detail stage of the bill, comparing the amount of debate on other bills to this one, stating "we have had very, very extensive debate" and that "members opposite are not interested in debating this bill, they are not interested in trying to

improve this bill; they simply want to reject this bill". The Manager of Opposition Business in the House, Julia Gillard (Abbott's opposition counterpart), had noted that "more than 20 Labor members are going to be silenced by this motion which is gagging debate", and when Abbott moved to put the question, "and, here we go, we are going to have a gag on a gag. You're proud of that, are you? You're proud of that?"

As Annette Ellis amongst others was one of the aforementioned speakers who had not the time to speak in the debate, she asked whether she could incorporate her speech into Hansard -- the Government granted leave for all speakers who intended to speak but could not to incorporate their speeches into Hansard.

In the consideration in detail stage, the Federal Opposition had moved a number of amendments to the legislation, one which would effectively -- as Stephen Smith had put it -- "kill the bill", another which would rename the bill to the "Workplace Relations Amendment (Cut Wages, Cut Conditions and Entitlements, No Fairness, No Work Choices) Bill 2005", but this amendment was ruled out of order by the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, David Hawker.

These amendments failed due to the Government majority in the house, and subsequently the bill was successfully read a third time.

Australian government accused of hypocrisy over World Court statement

The Australian government was accused of hypocrisy today over a media release about the International Court of Justice

(ICJ). In the joint release the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General welcomed the election of a New Zealander, Sir Kenneth Keith, as a judge on the ICJ, and said that "Australia strongly supported Sir Kenneth's candidature to the Court". Advocacy groups made the accusation because Australia withdrew from the jurisdiction of the maritime division of the ICJ in 2002, because of a dispute with East Timor.

Jefferson Lee from the NSW Branch of the Australia-East Timor Association said that "it is hypocritical that they are celebrating the appointment of an ICJ judge given the fact that Australia withdrew from the jurisdiction of the ICJ maritime division in March 2002."

A spokesman for the Minister for Foreign Affairs rejected the suggestion that the minister had been hypocritical, and said that it had always been government policy to resolve such disputes via bilateral negotiation.

"Maritime boundaries should be resolved by negotiation. This is how we have done it with all other countries we have negotiated with. Maritime boundaries are an issue of sovereignty," he said.

Mr Lee was referring to Australia's redeclaration of its recognition of the court. On March 22, 2002, Australia deposited a new declaration with the ICJ, which stated that its recognition of the Court did not apply to "any dispute concerning or relating to the delimitation of maritime zones, including the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf, or arising out of, concerning, or relating to the exploitation of any disputed area

of or adjacent to any such maritime zone pending its delimitation." This was widely understood at the time to be the result of Australia's dispute with East Timor over the maritime border. The declaration was signed by Mr Downer, who co-sponsored today's media release. The issue is especially important to both countries as the Timor Sea holds significant oil reserves.

Mr Lee argued that Australia was unfairly using its stronger bargaining position in negotiations, and deliberately avoiding submitting to a decision by the court.

"They are constantly harping on about the necessity of resolving the Timor Sea issue by bilateral consultation between the Australian and East Timorese government rather than subjecting the dispute to the umpire, i.e. the international court of justice maritime division," he said.

Tom Clarke, Coordinator of the Timor Sea Justice Campaign, argues that the governments stance in relation to the ICJ is hypocritical.

"By picking and choosing specific parts of the ICJ's jurisdictions that it does and doesn't want to acknowledge, the Australian Government demonstrates that it does not take International Law seriously. Our Government has some shocking double standards," he said.

Mr Clarke also drew attention to the economic situation in East Timor. "When we're talking about the Australian Government taking millions of dollars while East Timorese children are dying of preventable diseases, it really is no laughing matter."

Associate Professor David Reeve of the Department of Chinese and Indonesian, University of New South Wales, was asked if he thought the minister was being hypocritical.

"Foreign policy is a tricky business, with lots of strands. And there are always tensions between any country's idealism and interests. It often happens that different bits of foreign policy thrust may seem to be contradictory, but it's a complex world, and any government is trying to play lots of notes simultaneously. In this case I think Downer can be quite genuine in his congratulations, while the advocacy groups have a good opportunity to highlight their perfectly logical views," he said.

There has not been an Australian or New Zealand judge on the court since 1967. Sir Kenneth's position with the court starts in 2006, and lasts for nine years.

Thirtieth anniversary of Australia's constitutional crisis

On 11 November 1975, Australia faced a constitutional crisis. By failing to obtain Supply, that is, with its financial Appropriation Bills repeatedly rejected by the upper house, the Australian national government had effectively run out of money. In response, the Australian Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. A caretaker government under the Opposition leader Malcolm Fraser was formed and held office until a new general election was called. Despite Whitlam's call for Australians to "maintain the rage", Malcolm Fraser became prime minister in a landslide win to his party.

Immediately following his sacking,

responding to the formal "God save the Queen" which ended the proclamation terminating his government, Gough Whitlam declared from the steps of Parliament House:

Well may we say "God save the Queen" because nothing will save the Governor General. . . . The proclamation you have just heard read was countersigned Malcolm Fraser, who will go down in Australian history from Remembrance Day 1975 as Kerr's Cur.

While the Labor Party faithful "maintained the rage" and Australia's current prime minister John Howard said Sir John Kerr was "savagely maligned by history", the anniversary was a non-event for most Australians. The day in Australia focused on the 87th anniversary of the end of World War I and the ongoing news events of the day.

Today in History

1927: Leon Trotsky (pictured) was expelled from the Communist Party, leaving Joseph Stalin in undisputed control of the Soviet Union.

1936: In California, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge opened to traffic.

1970: The Oregon Highway Division attempted to destroy a rotting beached Grey whale with explosives, leading to the exploding whale incident.

1991: Indonesian forces opened fire on student demonstrators in the Díli Massacre.

2001: Taliban forces abandoned Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, ahead of advancing Northern Alliance troops.

November 12 is Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (Bahá'í Faith)

Quote of the Day

"We are always living in the final days. What have you got? A hundred years or much, much less until the end of your world."

~ Neil Gaiman

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