



Top Stories

Ship sinks off Djibouti, killing at least 109

A ship sank off the coast of Djibouti Thursday about 1 p.m. Eastern African Time (1000 UTC), killing 109 people. At least 20 more are reported missing. Reports say that 36 people are currently receiving medical care, and seven are in serious condition.

Thaksin departure doesn't signal end to Thai political crisis



Despite promising to step down before the new parliament convenes, caretaker Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is still embroiled in controversy. Opposition parties have stated they will not run in the by-elections on April 23.

Featured story

Photo Essay: Cherry Blossoms Bloom in DC



The Japanese Cherry Blossoms have again bloomed around the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C., marking the beginning of spring for city residents and thousands of visitors. The accompanying annual National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the March 27, 1912 gift of 3,000 Japanese cherry trees to the city from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Eight bodies are found by a resident in a cornfield in southwest Ontario, Canada. The Ontario Provincial Police launch a full-scale murder investigation.
- The United Front for Democratic Change has attacked and gained control of the cities of Haraze Manguaigne, Am Timan, and Abou-Deia, in Chad. Their initial attack came from northern Central African Republic with the help of the Military of Sudan. This is the largest and most successful attack since the start of the Chadian-Sudanese conflict despite taking only an hour, with only four men injured and none killed because the Chadian military has either fled or refused to fight the rebels.
- The death toll in the Djibouti ferry disaster reaches 109.
- The Aligarh Riots between Hindus and Muslims enter its fourth day. At least 5 people have been killed in the rioting in the North Indian town of Aligarh so far.
- 3 protesters are wounded and 6 buildings are burned down in the fourth day of pro-Democracy protests in Bharatpur, Nepal against King Gyanendra.
- The World Health Organization announces that the average life expectancy of Zimbabweans has declined to 37 years for men and 34 years for women.

Tennessee hit with second wave of tornadoes; 12 dead

At least twelve people are dead as severe thunderstorms in Tennessee destroyed homes and

other structures for the second time in a week.

Twenty-four people were killed in western Tennessee alone by tornadoes spawned by severe thunderstorms on Sunday, April 2.

Throughout the southeastern United States, 52 tornadoes, 515 hailstorms, and 160 reports of damaging winds were reported in an 24-hour period between Friday, April 7 and Saturday, April 8.

British FBI-style agency launched

Prime Minister Tony Blair launched a new crime-fighting agency to deal with "brutal and sophisticated" crimes by organized gangs. The agency's mandate and powers have been compared to that of the United States' FBI.



Tony Blair

The Serious Organised Crime Agency(SOCA), has approximately 4,200 "law enforcement officers", some of whom are ex-spies, and will use their £400m annual budget to fight counterfeiting, fraud, drug and people-trafficking.

The agency was created out of the National Crime Squad, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and investigative staff from the Immigration Service. SOCA is chaired by ex-MI5 chief Sir Stephen Lander.

New Powers

SOCA will take advantage of new powers which have been brought in by the Blair government to help tackle serious and organized crime. The main four are:

Queen's Evidence

Prosecutors are now able to offer formal statutory deals, such as immunity or a reduced sentence, to those who testify against other accused criminals.

Financial reporting orders

Courts can compel criminals to supply their bank statements of up to 20 years past, to demonstrate that they have had no crime related earnings.

Disclosure notices

Courts can limit the suspects' right to remain silent, by ordering prison terms or fines if the suspect refuses to testify or provide documents.

Law enforcement officers

SOCA officers are empowered to exercise multiple powers, that of the police, immigration and customs officials.

Blair's Comments

When Prime Minister Tony Blair announced SOCA yesterday, he made several comments regarding the nature of organised crime

today and the disorganised and underpowered police force expected to combat it. After announcing that SOCA would make life "hell" for what he dubs "criminal Mr. Bigs", he continued to outline what he believed to be the type of crime Britain was dealing with today.

"The level of sophistication, the level, frankly, of brutality with which many of these gangs operate today means that we have to do it differently. Organized crime is a chain, the bottom link of which is the consumer and the individual victim. Even an apparently invisible and victim less crime like defrauding a financial institution has ramifications for ordinary people. Organized crime, like most crimes, tends to make victims of the poor as least as much, if not more, than the wealthy. So there is an imperative to act."

After declaring that he would introduce any necessary new powers to help the new agency achieve its goals, he said, "There is absolutely nothing, in my view, that should come before the basic liberties of people in this country to be freed from the tyranny of this type of organized crime."

Today in History

1815: Mount Tambora in Indonesia began the most violent volcanic eruption in recorded history.

1919: Mexican Revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata was shot to his death near Ciudad Ayala, Morelos.

1941: World War II: The Independent State of Croatia was established, with Ustaše leader Ante Pavelić as head of the puppet government.

1959: Crown Prince Akihito, the future Emperor of Japan, wedded Michiko, the first commoner to marry into the Japanese imperial family.

1970: Paul McCartney announces that The Beatles have broken up.

1998: The Good Friday Agreement, a major step in the Northern Ireland peace process, was signed.

Quote of the Day

"I'm sure we all agree that we ought to love one another, and I know there are people in the world who do not love their fellow human beings — and I hate people like that!" ~ Tom Lehrer

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