




Top Stories

French parliament extends state of emergency to three months

 The French Parliament passed a law extending the state of emergency decreed on November 8 by president Jacques Chirac for a duration of 3 months, the executive being authorized to terminate this period earlier if necessary.

Hundreds of thousands rally in Australia against IR legislation

People rallied in 300 locations across Australia on Tuesday to protest the Federal Government's WorkChoices proposed changes to industrial relations laws.



Featured story

US use of white phosphorus in Iraq might constitute a war crime

Yesterday the United States admitted using incendiary weapons containing white phosphorus during a major offensive in Fallujah.

Wikipedia Current Events

•French Police declare a "return to normalcy throughout France" as civil unrest subsides.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The press baron Conrad Black is charged with multiple counts of fraud regarding his dealings with Hollinger International.
- Controversial historian David Irving is arrested in Vienna on charges of denying the Holocaust, a criminal offence in Austria.
- Former rock star Gary Glitter, previously convicted on child pornography charges, is being sought by Vietnamese authorities who seek to question him about under-age sex allegations.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the leader of the world-wide Anglican Communion, is challenged to rethink his personal stance on the ordination of gay clergy in the light of scripture by nearly half of all the Anglican Primates.
- British Secretary of State for Education Ruth Kelly promises that student selection will not return to schools.
- Members of the European Parliament pass an item of controversial chemical safety testing legislation, known as the Registration, Evaluation and Authorization of Chemicals (REACH) law.

Thai PM sues media critic for one billion Baht

In a move that is widely viewed as an effort to suppress criticism, the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra is suing media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul and his

companies for one billion Baht (24.3 million USD, 20.7 million euro).

In addition to the civil lawsuit, the Prime Minister is seeking a court order gagging press related to Sondhi from making defamatory comments about him.

Yesterday the Thai civil court accepted the case submitted by Thaksin's lawyer, Thana Benjathikul, who warned that the media figure could face jail should he not cease his outspoken criticism of the Prime Minister.

The case hinges on Sondhi's accusation that the government illegitimately awarded a contract for a satellite installation to companies controlled by the PM's family.

The government denies that they intend to shut down Manager Media group's website, and stress that they do not plan to try and suppress freedom of the press.

Islamic militant threatens West in a video

A masked man, believed by officials to be Noordin Mohammad Top, a key figure in militant Islamic terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah, threatened Western countries in a video broadcast on Indonesia's Metro TV on Thursday. The man specifically named the US, Australia, the UK and Italy as targets of his group's next attack.

The video was found in a house the Indonesian police raided last week, where Top narrowly escaped

being captured. A similar raid on a house in East Java resulted in the death of his associate, Azahari Husin.

The masked man on the video said that "as long as you keep your troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and intimidate Muslim people, you will feel our intimidation and our terror." He continued, "America, Australia, England and Italy. You will be the target of our next attack."

The man focused especially on Australia, saying: "We especially remind Australia that you, Downer and Howard, are killing Australia, leading it into darkness and misfortune and mujahideen terror." Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer dismissed the message by saying that no democratic country should be intimidated by "a fanatic like Noordin Top".

Noordin Mohammad Top is a Malaysian senior operative of Jemaah Islamiyah, a group which is seen as the regional arm of international Islamic fundamentalist campaign Al-Qaeda. Police have been trying to catch Top, an expert in recruiting suicide bombers, and Azahari, Jemaah Islamiyah's bombmaker, since the 2002 Bali bombing in which 202 people were killed.

The video also showed three young suicide bombers who killed 20 people in attacks on restaurants on the island of Bali on October 1. One of the men, Muhammad Salik Firdaus, said on the film: "My brother and wife, God willing, when you see this recording I'll already be in heaven." Bali police Chief I Made Mangku Pastika said that three men were currently being questioned over their role in the

bombings and that they were "certainly also linked to the Bali bombs."

Australia qualifies for FIFA World Cup 2006

Australia's national soccer team, the Socceroos, have qualified for the 2006 Soccer World Cup in Germany, after beating Uruguay in a penalty shoot out in front of 80 000 spectators at Stadium Australia . This is the first time that Australia has qualified in 32 years and the second time in the history of the FIFA Football World Cup. The Australian team is managed by the Dutchman Guus Hiddink, who led South Korea to the semi finals of the 2002 Soccer World Cup and is also currently coaching PSV Eindhoven, a Dutch football club.

Australia lost the first qualifier to Uruguay 1-0 in Montevideo and needed to win by 2 goals in order to guarantee qualification. A goal by Marco Bresciano in the first half had Australia leading 1-0 at the end of regular and extra time - leading to a penalty shoot-out. Goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer saved the first Uruguayan penalty attempt and Australia made their first three shots count. However Mark Viduka shot wide and the game was again open. Australia's chance was again alive as Schwarzer saved the next shot. The subsequent shot sealed the win for the Socceroos.

US use of white phosphorus in Iraq might constitute a war crime

Yesterday the United States admitted using incendiary weapons containing white phosphorus during a major offensive in Fallujah. The question is to what end the use of the

weapon is legal under various conventions of war.

The way white phosphorus munitions are used determines if it falls in the category of chemical weapons, says Professor Paul Rodgers from the University of Bradford department of peace studies. "It is not counted under the chemical weapons convention in its normal use but, although it is a matter of legal niceties, it probably does fall into the category of chemical weapons if it is used for this kind of purpose directly against people." Professor Paul Rodgers is the writer of the book "A War on Terror: Afghanistan and After".

The Iraqi government will investigate the American use of white phosphorus munitions during the battle of Fallujah. The inquiry will try to determine whether US forces committed war crimes according to international weapons treaties.

A spokesman for the US military, Lt. Col. Barry Venable, said yesterday when US admitted the use of white phosphorus as an incendiary weapon, that "White phosphorus is a conventional munition. It is not a chemical weapon. They are not outlawed or illegal." He added that "it was used as an incendiary weapon against enemy combatants."

Robert Tuttle, the American ambassador to London, wrote "U.S. forces do not use napalm or white phosphorus as weapons," in a letter to the Independent newspaper. When confronted with the US militaries' admission, an embassy spokesperson said "all questions on WP" should be referred to the Pentagon.

Sir Menzies Campbell, Member of

the British Parliament (Liberal Democrat), says: "The use of this weapon may technically have been legal, but its effects are such that it will hand a propaganda victory to the insurgency. The denial of use followed by the admission will simply convince the doubters that there was something to hide."

Battlefield concentrations of white phosphorus gas are generally considered harmless: there are no documented cases of white phosphorus gases resulting in fatalities. However, its use as an incendiary is under question. The United States reportedly ordered civilians to evacuate areas wherein white phosphorus was going to be used.

French parliament extends state of emergency to three months

The French Parliament passed a law extending the state of emergency decreed on November 8 by president Jacques Chirac for a duration of 3 months, the executive being authorized to terminate this period earlier if necessary. The November 8 decision, based on a 1955 statute, could last only for a maximum of 12 days, after which Parliament had to vote on an extension.

The state of emergency allows local authorities (prefects) to prohibit public meetings and regulate movements of persons, including curfews. In addition, in certain zones specified by the executive, where riots have recently taken place, local authorities may close meeting halls or bars; detain firearms; and authorize searches inside habitations during the day or the night by administrative order (normally, searches during formal criminal investigations have to be

authorized by a judge). The government said that it will not use the power to regulate the media, and that searches will be subject to supervision by the judiciary.

The law was defended by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, in charge of law enforcement. Sarkozy spoke before the French National Assembly (which approved the text on November 15) and the French Senate (which approved it on November 16); he defended the actions of the government and explained why, in his opinion, the law had to be voted. Sarkozy is also the head of the UMP party, which holds a majority in both houses, and there was no doubt that the text would be approved.

Sarkozy added that in the forthcoming months, CRS (riot division of the Police) and Gendarmerie mobile forces would operate daily in difficult suburbs as a "proximity police". He contended that the "proximity police" established by preceding left-wing government was too much concerned with social activities and not enough about arresting criminals. Sarkozy has also contended that some of the riots were orchestrated by drug traffickers, gangsters and other criminals in order to secure lawless zones.

The French Socialist Party opposed the law, claiming it was excessive. Some left-wing members of parliament contended that using a law passed in 1955 to help quashing Algerian independence movements against children of Algerian immigrants was somewhat insensitive and unsuccessfully proposed an amendment to repeal the 1955 law. On the other hand, right-wing anti-immigrant politician Philippe

de Villiers has contended that the government was far too soft and called for the use of military force. Jean-Marie Le Pen, a longtime opponent of immigration from poor, Muslim countries, pointed out that the events vindicated what he had long said.

Members of Sarkozy's UMP party blamed the de facto polygamy of some African immigrants for the failure of their families to raise and educate children properly. They suggested a more restrictive approach to immigration.

Nicolas Sarkozy is a probable contender for the 2007 presidential election. According to polls, his approval rate jumped by +11 to 63% during the events; he leads the approval opinions for presidential candidates.

Today in History

1307 - William Tell, a legendary marksman in Switzerland, is said to have successfully shot an apple on the head of his son with a single bolt from his crossbow.

1905 - Prince Carl of Denmark became Haakon VII, the first King of Norway after the personal union of Sweden-Norway was dissolved.

1626 - St. Peter's Basilica was consecrated

1959 - Ben-Hur, a film based on a bestselling historical novel by Lew Wallace, premiered in New York City. It went on to win an unprecedented eleven Academy Awards.

1978 - Jim Jones led more than 900 members of the People's Temple to a mass murder/suicide in Jonestown, Guyana.

November 18 is Independence Day in Latvia (1918), National Day in Oman (1940)

Quote of the Day

"It seems to me that any sensible person must see that violence does not change the world and if it does, then only temporarily." ~ Martin Scorsese

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