



Top Stories

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Second oil disaster in Estonia within two months

Estonian and Finnish oil spill response vessels are working on cleaning up the oil spill caused by the sinking of the Runner 4. The Dominican-registered ship sank on March 6 near the Estonian coast in the Gulf of Finland. This oil disaster may be even worse than the one of February, which was described by the BBC as the worst oil spill that Estonia has ever experienced. In the February spill, approximately 35 000 birds died.

Featured story

Thousands in San Francisco protest US wars

Thousands of protesters gathered at San Francisco's Civic Center to protest US wars and foreign policy in Iraq.



Wikipedia Current Events

- Part of a tunnel in the Moscow Metro collapses on a train setting the train on fire. Russian emergency services were dispatched to the scene, passengers were evacuated, and no one was hurt.
- Former Prime Minister of Iraq Iyad Allawi says that he believes that Iraq is engaged in a civil war, although the country has not passed "the point of no return." British and American officials dispute calling the conflict a civil war.
- Polling stations open for the Belarusian presidential election, 2006. The main opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich calls for a re-run of the presidential election within hours of polls closing.
- With the exception of Uganda and South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa is failing to meet United Nations standards for accessibility to clean water or sanitation.

Report Specifies 'Black Room' of Abuse in Iraq

A New York Times report tells of a shadowy military unit named Task Force 6-26 which, in early 2004, used a former Iraqi military base near Baghdad as a top-secret detention center. Inside, American soldiers made one of the former Iraqi government's torture chambers into one of their own, dubbing it the Black Room.

The Black Room was a garaged-

sized room, painted jet-black and with no windows. Inside, soldiers beat prisoners and abused them verbally. They used them for target practice with paintball guns in a nearby area. The intention was to gain information from the detainees as to the whereabouts of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Salafi Islamist militant, a guerrilla leader, and the putative leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The temporary detention site was part of Camp Narma, the headquarters of Task Force 6-26, and was the first stop for many insurgents before going to the Abu Ghraib prison, which was a few miles away.

Avian flu cause of Egyptian woman's death

A 30 year old Egyptian woman has died from an infection with the H5N1 strain of the avian flu. The cause of death was confirmed by the Cairo-based US Naval Medical Research Unit (NAMRU). The woman was keeping birds in her home in violation of a government ban on the practice.

The Egyptian Health Ministry has also reported that initial tests of a 28 year old man indicate that his is the second case of human infection in Egypt. Both cases were from the same area in the country, and both people reportedly were treated with the drug Tamiflu. Doctors are expecting the man to survive.

Nearly 100 people worldwide have died from the H5N1 virus,

according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Queensland braces for category 5 Cyclone

Thousands of residents are evacuating coastal areas of far north Queensland (QLD), set to be lashed by Cyclone Larry tomorrow morning. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology warns that the "very destructive core of Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry, with extreme gusts up to 280 km/hr (174 mph) should cross the coast between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. AEST on Monday (Sunday, 2100 to 2300 UTC). Destructive winds are expected to commence along the coast between Ingham and Port Douglas. Gales are already being experienced along the exposed coast in the warning area."

Tropical Cyclone Larry, currently building off far north Queensland is expected to intensify before crossing the coast. Queensland tropical cyclone warning centre spokesman Bruce Gunn says people should treat warnings very seriously. "This is the worst cyclone we have had for many, many years," he said.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) says the cyclone poses a "very serious threat to life and property" and will now post warnings on the hour on its website.

The BOM also warns coastal residents between Cairns and Townsville of dangerous storm tide when the cyclone crosses the coast. The bureau says the sea is likely to steadily rise up to a level which will be significantly above the normal tide, with damaging waves, strong currents and flooding of low-lying areas extending some way inland. People living in those areas should be prepared to evacuate if advised

by authorities.

Mandatory evacuations have been enforced in low-lying seafront areas, including in the Johnstone and Cardwell shires south of Cairns, which are expected to bear the force of Larry and its four metre storm surge.

Disaster coordination centres have been activated in Cairns and Townsville. "There have been mandatory evacuations of coastal shires south of Cairns ... and emergency shelters set up for people who feel at risk with nowhere to go," said a Cairns City Council Disaster Coordination Centre spokesman. "It's most likely thousands of people are evacuating to avoid the high tide."

Premier Peter Beattie has issued a disaster declaration. Local governments now have the power to enforce mandatory evacuations. Queensland Education Department announced that schools in the hardest hit areas will be closed tomorrow, while flights to Townsville and Cairns have been cancelled.

State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers are doorknocking and advising residents to leave. Bruce Gunn from the Queensland cyclone warning centre says the cyclone will coincide with a high tide. "We are talking seawater a couple of metres above the high-tide mark, possibly more than that, with waves on top, so this is a very serious situation we are talking about," he said.

Mr Gunn told the ABC that severe weather will be experienced several hours before the cyclone reaches the coast. "While we are saying the coastal crossing will be between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. AEST, the few hours leading up to that

will be rather bumpy — not very nice to experience," he said.

PS3 delayed until November

Sony is delaying until November the release of its new PS3 gaming console, for all countries. Playstation 3 was supposed to be released this Spring, but the president of the Sony gaming division, Ken Kutaragi, says the company has decided on improvements since they last announced the release date. He says that Sony wants to include all the latest technology available today, and indicated that the system will run Linux out of the box. The new, later release date could be advantageous to rival Microsoft Corp., which released its competing Xbox 360 console recently. Sony's Australia/New Zealand managing director said the PS3 release in New Zealand is still six to 18 months away.

100s of thousands take to the streets across France

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets across France this weekend to pressure the conservative government to discard a new law, which they say will erode job security.

The marches were mostly reported as festive and peaceful. Other reports indicate that youths pelted police with objects, overturning and setting fire to a car at the end of the main protest in Paris. Police fired many rounds of tear gas. Demonstrations were also reported in Marseille, Rennes and Lille, where police charged and teargassed crowds.

Rally organisers estimate the turnout across the country at over a million people, with around 500,000 of them in Paris. However, the Interior Ministry reported 503,000 nationwide, with

80,000 in Paris.

The protesters are demanding that the Government withdraw the "First Job Contract" (CPE) – which allows employers to fire young workers without explanation in their first two years on the job. In the western city of Rennes, students wore plastic garbage bags with signs declaring: "I am disposable." "I risk working for two years for nothing, just to be fired at any moment," said Paris student Coralie Huvet, 20.

The Paris march began with students in front and workers behind, but turned into a multi-generational mix including many parents who joined their teenage children. Banners declared "No to throw-away youths" and "Tired Of Being Squeezed Lemons." The actions are only the third time in almost four decades – after 1968 and 1994 – that students and workers marched together.

Unemployment is currently a major political issue in France. The French national average is 9.6 percent, and youth unemployment is nearly 21 per cent. The rate rises to 40-50 percent in some of the poor suburbs hit by several weeks of youth rioting last year.

Recent opinion polls show that 68 percent of French people oppose the new law, a rise of 13 percentage points in a week, and that French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's popularity has dropped six points to 37 percent.

Since the beginning of March, protests, occupations and direct action against the new CPE employment law in France have been increasing, with university and school students leading the dissent. Railways have been

blockaded, airports disrupted, and up to two thirds of France's universities have been occupied or disrupted, as well as many schools.

Clashes with police have occurred throughout the country.

Second oil disaster in Estonia within two months

Estonian and Finnish oil spill response vessels are working on cleaning up the oil spill caused by the sinking of the Runner 4. The Dominican-registered ship sank on March 6 near the Estonian coast in the Gulf of Finland.

This oil disaster may be even worse than the one of February, which was described by the BBC as the worst oil spill that Estonia has ever experienced. In the February spill, approximately 35 000 birds died. According to The Baltic Times, specialists say that this time up to 40 tons of oil might have leaked into the sea from the Runner 4. The ship was carrying, according to MTV3, over 100 tons of heavy fuel oil and 35 tons of light fuel oil.

The ship Runner 4 sank due to a collision with another ship, in a convoy following a Russian icebreaker. The crew managed to leave the ship before it sank.

On March 13, a week after the ship sank, the Estonian Border Guard sent its multipurpose vessel EVA-316 to the site to start the oil cleanup. Around the same time, the Finnish dedicated to the cleanup the oil spill response vessels Hylje, Halli and Seili. Also, the Finnish Frontier Guard patrol ship Merikarku was sent to the site to conduct underwater robot examinations of the sunken ship. According to the Finnish Environment Institute press

briefing on this, [1] Estonia does not have adequate equipment for oil spill response in icy conditions, so help was needed.

The reaction to the disaster is criticized by Jouni Pirttijärvi, an inspector at the Finnish Environment Institute (Ympäristökeskus). He says, according to Finland's national broadcasting company (YLE), that the countermeasures should have started a week ago, immediately after the disaster, instead of now. He said, "It's difficult now to get the oil under control. It's spread all around, and ship traffic is spreading it further. We should have come here a week ago. Then the oil would have been closer to the disaster area [the ship's sinking site]. We weren't asked for help [by the Estonians] then, so now we decided to help without asking [before it's too late]." (Translation from the Finnish-language original). [2]

Finland will be paying the costs of the cleanup, as Estonia did not make an official request for help. The Estonian Border Guard's representative Helena Loorents says that Finland was not asked for help, as every day spent in the cleaning costs a lot of money. Estonia simply cannot afford this.

According to Urmas Raudsepp, the director of Estonia's Institute of Marine Research, the oil spill's location was only found out on Thursday March 16. The Finnish ships had, however, arrived at the site on the day before.

Jouni Pirttijärvi also said that the conditions in the site are bad. The wind is over 17 meters per second (38 miles per hour) and it is raining. The oil spill is moving into waters too shallow for the three Finnish vessels, so they can no

longer do their job. Hylje will be heading back to Finland on March 19 and the other two might follow within a few days. According to the Estonian paper Postimees, the oil spill is now a kilometer (0.6 mile) away from the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

More medals for NZ: Commonwealth Games

The following is how the medal table for New Zealand looked after the third day of competition for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, in Melbourne, Australia.

New Zealand won six medals yesterday. Half of them were in the Women's, and Men's triathlon.

In the Women's Individual Triathlon Sam Warriner won silver; followed closely by Andrea Hewitt who won bronze.

Bevan Docherty won silver in the Men's Individual Triathlon

A bronze in the Women's 50m Rifle Prone Pair is the 500th Commonwealth Games medal for New Zealand in the 76 year history of the games.

Labor claims victory in two Australian state elections

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) has claimed victory in the two Australian state elections held in Tasmania and South Australia on Saturday. South Australia will have a majority government, after being governed with a minority government made up of a combination of ALP and other parliamentary members.

Tasmania

In Tasmania, Labor has been returned to its third consecutive term in government. The party has won 14 seats while the Liberals have won seven , the

Greens two. At the close of counting on Saturday night, only two seats remained in doubt.

At his victory speech, Labor leader and premier Paul Lennon said that during the past two terms, Labor has made Tasmania strong.

"We've made the economy strong again," he said.

"We've taken Tasmania from the bottom to the top of the economic pile."

"Now we're rebuilding health, rebuilding education, we're making Tasmania a much better place to live."

"Over the next four years we'll be economically progressive, socially progressive ... and we're going to speak out for children."

Mr Lennon also said that the government can still do a lot for Tasmania.

"We can still have a better Tasmania than the one we've got today," Mr Lennon said.

"I want us to lead the nation economically, I want us to lead the nation socially, I want us to lead the nation with Aboriginal reconciliation."

Conceding defeat, Rene Hidding, leader of the opposition and Liberal Party in Tasmania said that it the result was not unexpected.

"After the disaster of 2002, it was universally accepted that we would need at least two elections to be in a position to win government," he said.

Mr Hidding said that it will be good for Mr Lennon and the state to have a majority government.

"It is good for [Labor leader] Paul Lennon and Tasmania that he will become the premier elected by the people, as opposed to the situation he was forced into," he said.

South Australia

In South Australia, the Mike Rann Labor government was returned to power and will be able to form a majority government. Political observers predict that when counting is completed, the Rann government will have 30 seats in the 47 seat lower house. When brought to power in 2002, the Rann government had to form a minority government with the assistance of an independent member as it did not command a majority in the lower house.

At his victory speech, Mr Rann said that his government will work for all South Australians.

"We made a fundamental promise that we would govern South Australia as if we had a majority of 10 and govern for all South Australians," he said.

"We stuck to that pledge and we will continue to stick to that pledge."

He also promised that independent member Rory McEwan, who gave his support to allow Labor to form its previous minority government, and Karlene Maywald, a representative of the nationals, will retain ministerial positions within his government.

"They have made us a better government by bringing the regions and the country to Cabinet," Mr Rann said.

Rob Kerin, leader of the South Australian Liberal Party and opposition leader, has conceded

defeat and said it's clear that the South Australian people want Labor to govern them.

"It's up to them who they have govern them, and they've made it clear on this case that they want to have Labor for the next four years, so we respect that decision," he said.

The Liberals are expected to hold 13 seats in the lower house.

It is expected that Mr Kerin will resign as party leader in the next few days.

Train kills seven on TV show

A runaway train killed seven people and injured eleven more today in the small town of Young, Uruguay, about 235 miles west of Montevideo. The victims were taking part in an Uruguyan reality game show, *Desafio al Corazon*, or "A Challenge to my Heart," where communities can raise money by performing tasks. The task in this accident was to push or pull a train with two cars attached to it down a railroad track. The train gathered too much momentum and ran down the people in front of it.

One eyewitness, Ana Portela, said that the train was in motion when "somebody slipped and fell under the locomotive, and others were falling alongside it. There were shouts and somebody cried 'my arm!' Everybody was in a state of shock."

Local authorities have declared three days of official mourning as Uruguyan President Tabare Vazquez offered his deepest condolences for the victims of the crash. A spokeswoman from the channel airing the program, Mrs. Graciela Baccino stated, "Channel 10 offers its solidarity and support

to the families involved in this unexpected tragedy that came, in fact, while they were trying to help others." The money raised would have gone towards a local hospital.

Today in History

- 1602 - The Dutch East India Company was established.
- 1852 - Uncle Tom's Cabin, a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe about slavery in the United States before the Civil War, was first published.
- 1883 - The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, one of the first intellectual property treaties, was signed.
- 1987 - The antiretroviral drug AZT became the first antiviral medication approved for use against HIV and AIDS.
- 1995 - The Aum Shinrikyo sect carried out a poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 people and injuring more than 6,000 with sarin.
- March 20 is Vernal equinox (Northern Hemisphere) and Autumnal equinox (Southern Hemisphere) at 18:26 UTC, Norouz (New Year) in Iran, International Earth Day (2006); Independence Day in Tunisia (1956).

Quote of the Day

"The spirit of truth and the spirit of freedom — these are the pillars of society." ~ Henrik Ibsen

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