

PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

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MASSACHUSETTS COURT CLEARS WAY FOR GAY MARRIAGES

February 4, 2004 The Associated Press reported: "The Massachusetts high court declared Wednesday that gays are entitled to nothing less than marriage and that Vermont-style civil unions will not suffice, setting the stage for the nation's first legally sanctioned same-sex weddings by the spring.

The court issued the advisory opinion at the request of legislators who wanted to know whether civil unions would be enough to satisfy the court after its November ruling that said gay couples are entitled to all the rights of marriage. That decision had been written in such a way that it left open the possibility that civil unions might be allowed. But Wednesday's opinion by the Supreme Judicial Court left no doubt: Only marriage would pass constitutional muster.

"The history of our nation has demonstrated that separate is seldom, if ever, equal," four justices wrote. "For no rational reason the marriage laws of the commonwealth discriminate against a defined class; no amount of tinkering with language will eradicate that stain. The (civil unions) bill would have the effect of maintaining and fostering a stigma of exclusion that the Constitution prohibits."

Paul Martinek, editor of Lawyers Weekly USA, said that the blunt opinion erases any confusion. "The fat lady has sung and she's singing the wedding march," Martinek said. "It's clear from reading the majority opinion that there's no basis on which the (court) will OK anything other than marriage."

The much-anticipated opinion came a week before next Wednesday's Constitutional Convention, where the Legislature will consider an amendment backed by Republican Gov. Mitt Romney that would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. But the soonest a constitutional amendment could end up on the ballot would be 2006, meaning that until then, the high court's decision will be Massachusetts law. Gay couples could get married in Massachusetts as soon as May, the deadline set by the court last fall..."

FUTURE TERRORIST ATTACKS 'INEVITABLE,' SAYS AUSTRALIAN FM

February 4, 2004 VOAnews.com reported: "Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Southeast Asia's largest terrorist organization has been disrupted, but still presents a major threat. Mr. Downer spoke at a counter-terrorism conference in Bali that was also addressed by U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft.



The Australian foreign minister said that Southeast Asia remains a "front line" in the fight against terrorism, and said further terrorist attacks in the region are "inevitable." Speaking to counter-terrorism delegates from 25 countries, Mr. Downer said regional police forces had arrested more than 200 members of the terror group Jemaah Islamiyah, or JI. But he said the organization, which has links to al Qaeda, is still functioning. "We haven't disabled it," he said. "Key operatives are still at large and JI remains highly resilient and committed to its cause."

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft said militants were spreading their activities across international borders to lessen the likelihood of detection, and said this increases the need for regional cooperation. "This puts a real premium on our cooperation, puts a real premium on working together, because preparations in one arena may literally be the vital link toward devastation which is inflicted in another arena," said Mr. Ashcroft.

Indonesia and Australia have agreed to set up a joint counter-terrorism centre in Indonesia, a move Mr. Ashcroft said would give a further boost to the anti-terror war. Although the United States will not have a direct role in the new centre, Mr. Ashcroft said Washington was eager to share its experience and learn from the experience of others.

Indonesia, which has suffered two major terrorist bombings and several minor attacks in recent years, has had notable success in hunting down and convicting the perpetrators.

But Mr. Downer warned that despite this success, Jemaah Islamiyah and other militant groups are still adding new members. He said JI will present a threat to Indonesia and the region in general for some time to come. "It's planning for the long term, retraining and recruiting young men as the next generation of [terrorist] leaders," he said..."

EGYPT JUSTIFIES JERUSALEM BUS BOMBING

February 1, 2004 Jerusalem Newswire.com reports: "Egypt's largest government-controlled newspaper has characterized last week's massacre of civilians on a public bus in Jerusalem as a totally justified response to Israel's

ongoing war on Palestinian terror. The Cairo-based *Al Akhbar* daily said that the gruesome attack by a young jihadist bomber belonging to Yasser Arafat's PA police force was a fitting answer to an IDF raid on a Gaza City terror hideout a day earlier.

Betraying Egypt's continued support for the eventual elimination of the Jewish state, the piece referred to those killed in the Jerusalem attack as "occupiers". This notwithstanding, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Sunday insisted there is no crisis in Israel's relations with Egypt.

One day after a Palestinian jihadist bomber took the lives of 11 Israelis and wounded scores more, Egypt's largest government-controlled newspaper, *Al Akhbar*, published an editorial characterizing the attack as "an eye for an eye."

The massacre was a legitimate response to an IDF operation on the outskirts of Gaza City a day earlier, the paper said. Up to 13 Palestinians were killed in that operation, most of them armed terrorist gunmen who engaged the Israeli troops. The raid was launched in response to ongoing mortar and sniping attacks against nearby Jewish communities.

Friday's article, penned by *Al Akhbar* editor Jalal Daweidar, referred to those slaughtered in the downtown Jerusalem attack as "occupiers." This despite the fact the bombing took place in western Jerusalem, an area ostensibly recognized by the international community as being legitimately under Israel's control. Dawidar is a close confidant of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. The Egyptian government did not condemn the Jerusalem bombing.

Despite the Mubarak-approved editorial attack, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon insisted during Sunday's cabinet meeting that there is no crisis in Israel's relations with Egypt..."

EXPERTS STUDY POSSIBLE HUMAN-TO-HUMAN BIRD FLU CASE IN VIETNAM

February 1, 2004 The Voice of America reported: "The World Health Organization says experts looking at human cases of bird flu cannot rule out the possibility that it may have spread among members of a family in Vietnam. The United Nations' health agency said Sunday that the bird flu, which has killed millions of chickens across Asia, might have spread among members of a family in Vietnam.

Two sisters died a week ago; they fell ill after their brother died of an unidentified disease. His wife also contracted the bird flu, but has recovered. WHO epidemiologists say they found no conclusive evidence linking the sisters to infected poultry. Laboratory test carried out in Hong Kong confirmed they had the H5N1 virus. Experts say the sisters, aged 23 and 30, may have caught the disease from their brother, who was cremated after he died, before any tests were done on him.

The WHO spokesman in Vietnam, Bob Dietz, says experts are considering the possibility of human-to-human transmission. "This is not confirmed human-to-human transmission, only that, at this point, we cannot dismiss it as not a possibility," he said."

Scientists have long warned the H5N1 virus poses a potential threat to global health if it becomes able to spread as quickly among people as it does among chickens. Bird flu has spread to at least 10 countries in Asia. The H5N1 virus is responsible for 10 human deaths in the past several weeks. Scientists have linked almost all human cases to contact with sick birds.

The family in Vietnam are not the first that epidemiologists have suspected of human-to-human transmission of the disease. In 1997, when the H5N1 virus first crossed from chickens to humans in Hong Kong, a doctor fell ill with the disease, which he may have contracted from a patient. Six of the 18 human cases in Hong Kong in 1997 died. Except for the doctor, all had been exposed to poultry..."

ITALY AND SPAIN AGAINST 'BIG THREE' CORE

February 2, 2004 Euobserver reported: "The foreign ministers of Spain and Italy have both spoken out against the 'big three' - the UK, France and Germany - running EU affairs. Speaking after a bilateral meeting late on Friday evening, Spanish foreign minister Ana Palacio said, "Europe needs to speak with many voices and a directorate would lead to tensions", according to Italian agency Apcom.

Echoing Spanish fears, Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini said, "The idea of a directorate worries us. It worries us, not just because we are a big country in Europe, but because we think that Europe should be a mechanism in which power is shared rather than concentrated".

Mr Frattini has expressed his concern about the issue before, but the support of Spain suggests that a growing body of opinion is against the idea of a core Europe led by France, Germany and the UK..."

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