

NEWS IN BRIEF

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AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA IS DEPORTING A BRITISH MAN BACK TO THE UK CITING HIS LONG AND TROUBLING CRIMINAL RECORD, reports The New York Times. The Australian government canceled Clifford Tucker's visa after reviewing a long list of crimes including attempted murder. Tucker, 47, has lived in Australia for more than 40 years and is the father of three children ages 12, 15 and 16. His family says Tucker suffers from severe mental illness and has no contacts in the UK. Australia has not carried out this type of punishment since 2008, when it deported a serial pedophile back to the UK after he served his 12-year prison sentence.



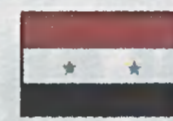
USA

THE WHITE HOUSE HAS RELEASED ITS "FIRST-EVER COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY" aimed at fighting the country's fast-growing prescription painkiller epidemic, reports the Associated Press. Involving educational programs, increased law enforcement and a pill-tracking database, the plan aims to cut the misuse of oxycodone and other opioids by 15 percent in the next five years in response to a doubling of emergency room visits for overdose of painkillers from 2004 - 2009. At the center of the plan are the more than 850 pain clinics, or "pill mills" in Florida, where more than 85 percent of the country's painkillers are prescribed.



CUBA

CUBA'S RULING COMMUNIST PARTY ANNOUNCED THAT CURRENT PRESIDENT RAUL CASTRO WOULD REPLACE HIS OLDER BROTHER FIDEL as the party's leader, reports The Wall Street Journal. While Raul has provided blunt and harsh criticism of the country's economy and future, virtually all leading members of the party are aging former guerrillas from the country's 1959 revolution. Although Raul has promised wide-spread reform, details of that plan remain unclear. Many remain skeptical of the proposal's lengthy timeline.



SYRIA

IN AN ATTEMPT TO APPEASE PROTESTERS, SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD LIFTED THE COUNTRY'S 48-YEAR EMERGENCY LAW, reports Al Jazeera. The announcement was made in conjunction with the dismantling of the state security court; this court controls all trials of political prisoners and the formation of a new law that allows the right to peaceful protests with appropriate permissions from the interior ministry. Just hours before the nearly half-century old law was struck down, police opened fire on protesters in the city of Homs, leaving four dead and raising the death toll to approximately 200 during the last month, according to human rights groups.

Controversial law bans religious veils in France

By Amanda Dahill-Moore & Julia Solheim
STAFF WRITERS

On April 11, tensions flared in Paris, France, as a new law banning any face coverings was put into effect with the arrest of two women wearing the niqab — an Islamic veil which conceals all but a woman's eyes. The official charges stated for the arrest were unauthorized protest.

The law has sparked a wide range of responses from Muslims and non-Muslims alike in France and beyond, who call into question the underlying reasons compelling this decision.

"It's Islamophobic," said Diya Abdo, assistant professor of English. "The French wouldn't dream of doing this to other religious symbols."

In 2004, the French outlawed any religious symbol from being worn in public schools and government buildings. However, crosses and

yarmulkes are still permitted in public spaces, according to on-site personal testimonials.

While the new law does not explicitly mention niqabs, it is perceived as part of the political rhetoric.

In 2009, French president Nicolas Sarkozy stated, "The burqa is not welcome on French territory. In our country, we cannot accept that women be prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, deprived of all identity."

Abdo sees Sarkozy's perception of women's rights as problematic.

"The attitude is paternalistic," Abdo said. "Many women wear the niqab by choice and it is offensive to assume that women are being coerced to wear it. This is a classic case of what we call the 'white men saving brown women from brown men' scenario."

In addition to women's rights, lawmakers stated national security as another reason for the enactment of the law.

"I don't think it's about security," said Robert Duncan, assistant professor of political science. "It is a culture clash, and this is a particularly volatile combination. France is the eldest daughter of the Catholic Church, and remember, France and Algeria fought a bloody civil war not so long ago."

The Algerian War, which took place from 1954 - 1962, was a decolonization movement resulting in Algeria gaining political autonomy after over 100 years of colonial rule by France. According to an Interior Ministry report published in 2000, of the 4,155,000 Muslims living in France, over one quarter were Algerian.

"If people are fleeing their home, they should understand where they are going and be willing to become part of the cultural systems," said Duncan, who felt that both sides were responsible for the culture clash. "This is the French's way of saying 'if you want to live here, you have to assimilate.'"

A third argument put forth by officials addresses the issue of separation of church and state.

"The law as it is may not be perfect, but it represents a positive step in the separation of church and state," said junior Daniel Saperstein, whose father, David Saperstein, works with legislature surrounding the separation of church and state.

"It's an important issue, but it's tricky," Saperstein said. "We need to have the government as much out of religion as possible, but at the same time they have to set up the laws that keep them out of it."

The line between promoting a secular state and prohibiting religious freedom is only one of the issues identified.

According to the Wall Street Journal, efforts to enforce the ban have been inconsistent. On April 11, the day of the first arrests, Rachid Nekkaz wore a Venetian carnival mask that left only his eyes uncovered, and joined a woman wearing a niqab outside of the

Élysée Palace. Both were arrested, but only the woman was issued a ticket.

"I was wearing a full face mask on a non-carnival day so (I) should have been fined too," the 39-year-old said as he left the police station.

"It shows that this law is biased against Islam," reports the Wall Street Journal.

Despite apparent opposition to the ban both within France and abroad, the law passed by an overwhelming vote. The National Assembly passed the bill by a vote of 335-1, and the senate then passed it with a vote of 246-1, according to CNN. However, French officials are aware of the negative responses from citizens and world media that this law has generated.

"It's not a racist law," said Parisian Economist Laurent Berrebi to CNN. "It's just a law that is coming from the history of France and so you need to accept it if you want to integrate into France and with French people."