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AMROZI'S FINAL MARCH

The man they call "the smiling bomber" was, what else, smiling as a judge in Bali pronounced his sentence. The court said it is all over Amrozi. He's the Indonesian religious zealot who confessed to a key role in bombings that took over 200 lives. BBC Online reported: "As the death sentence was read out against Amrozi bin Nurhasyim, a loud cheer went up from the public gallery, where many of the Bali bombing's victims and their relatives were sitting.

The BBC's Clive Myrie, who was at the court, says Amrozi arrived smiling, as he has done throughout his trial, and chanted furiously to the courtroom. "God is great," he shouted, and "Oh Jews, the army of Mohammed is marching back to victory." Amrozi's marching days may soon be over.

A VICTORY FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES?

WHILE CNN reported the sentence, BBC World interviewed an Indonesian official who proudly boasted that his country demonstrated that terrorism can be fought without violations of civil liberties or human rights. His comment implicitly contrasts Indonesia's police-based approach and fair judicial processes with the more militaristic approach adapted by the US. Of course, most human rights groups oppose the death penalty, which was handed down against the convicted bomber.

Families of the victims from Australia cheered

after the verdict was read. Again BBC: "This was the moment they had waited for – Amrozi was guilty and sentenced to death. "Kevin Paltridge, whose 20-year-old son Corey died in the blast, told Australian radio that he wanted Amrozi to die for his crime.

"Amrozi is just one man – he cost 200 people their lives. One life for all those lives doesn't mean a lot but I think it's something," he said. However, others are unhappy that Amrozi now faces a firing squad. Trent Thompson, whose brother Clint died in the blast, said he would rather Amrozi "live a long and unhappy life". "The death penalty is the easy way out," he said."

WHAT DO THE JIHADISTS WANT?

POLICE in that country are still investigating the hotel bombing earlier this week. The Jemaah Islamiah network, which is estimated to have about 1,000 members, has claimed responsibility for that blast and is believed by terror experts to be behind it. What is their goal?

Here's BBC's description: "Its principal goal is the establishment of a unified South East Asian Islamic state stretching from southern Thailand, through the Malay Peninsula, including Singapore and across the Indonesian archipelago, and into the southern Philippines. To this end the organisation's strategy rests on the waging of a "holy war" against those who resist this goal - apostates and agents of "Western imperialism".

UNDERSTANDING THE JIHAD JUNKIES

PEPE Escobar of Asia Times online offers a critique of the Al Qaeda conspiracy theory that we rarely read in the US media. “The administration of US President George W Bush still has not understood that jihad – this worldwide anti-American jihad – is not an enterprise. Jihad is based on individual commitment. It operates as a nebula. It spreads like a virus. Al-Zawahiri sends a signal on tape and a cell somewhere with strike capability seizes an opportunity. Intelligence agencies repeat that dozens of plots have been foiled these past few months. But not all of them. Indonesia will always be a prime target – a fragile link in security terms, crammed with US interests.

“In his tape, al-Zawahiri says something crucial: “We are saying to America one thing: What you saw with your eyes so far were only initial skirmishes, for the real battle hasn’t even started yet. Therefore it is upon the American people whose armies have killed our women and children, if they care about their future and their future generations to come, to start relying on their mind and logic before it is too late to repent.”

European intelligence sources in Brussels have told Asia Times Online “that the US strategy in Iraq is something like a Spanish bullfight. By showing a red rag – in the form of an occupation force – the Bush administration expects to attract all manner of hard-to-find Islamist bulls. According to this logic, it would be easier for the Islamist bulls to attack American soldiers than to attack Americans around the world. The problem is, the bulls are not playing the game. There’s no hard evidence up to now – and not a single arrest – of jihadis attacking the Americans in Iraq.” While

Washington is not publicly responding to this implicit critique of its strategy, it is revising it. The New York Times reports today: “The American military has decided to limit the scope of its raids in Iraq after receiving warnings that they were alienating the public.”

THE LATEST FROM IRAQ

THERE was a car bombing at the Jordanian embassy in Iraq . 10 reported dead so far...Some Iraqis resented Jordan’s support for the US; others are upset that the Hashemite Kingdom gave asylum to two of Saddam’s daughters earlier in the week. Meanwhile, in circumstances that were not reported, two more US soldiers have been killed.

Robert Fisk of London’s Independent has been reporting on Iraqi civilian casualties and a recent run-in with US forces. He quotes a bereaved Iraqi: “Now the future of Iraq is in the hands of foreigners. They promised us freedom. Where is that freedom? They said they would liberate us. Where is that liberation?”

Fisk continues: “And where, I asked him, were the Americans?” ‘They will find you,’ he replied. And they did. Four hundred metres from the graves, a squad of US soldiers holding automatic weapons and bent double came running from ambush positions behind bushes and trees.

“My floppy hat and English accent – cheerily calling out “Good morning, gentlemen” is always an enjoyable experience though they had The Independent’s driver standing by his car with his hands on his head – had the soldiers slowing to a walk before they even had a chance to see if I was Saddam.”

US ATTITUDES TOWARD SADDAM CHANGING?

STEVE Chapman of the Chicago Tribune writes: “Last fall, a majority of Americans said Mr. Hussein was personally involved in Sept. 11, something even the administration didn’t dare to claim. But three months after victory was declared, the proof of a meaningful link between Iraq and al-Qaida is even more elusive than before. And with the furor over weapons of mass destruction providing cover, the administration has quietly slunk away from its pre-war charges.

“When Dick Cheney came out of hiding the other day to make a speech defending the invasion, he conspicuously avoided accusing Iraq of working with al-Qaida. Instead, the vice president said Mr. Hussein had “cultivated ties to terrorist groups,” about as weaselly a formulation as you could devise.

LIBERIA: WHAT NOW?

SEVEN U.S. soldiers are on the ground in Liberia surveying the situation. I asked Bisi of Brooklyn’s Imani House, who has lived in Liberia and is in touch with people there about the situation. She writes:

“Things are still rough in Liberia, but anything is better than it was. The “Peacekeepers,” will probably only secure the capital and later on perhaps a major city or two near the borders like they did during the last war from 1990 – 95. Re. peace, there remains much negotiation, as those who fought turn to politics and boy soldiers get left to their own devices (usually armed robbery).

“Nigerian soldiers are tough but they gifted Liberia with an epidemic of HIV and newborns the last time they were there. They were also

responsible for buying up much of the looted stuff and shipping it off to Nigeria. So we have much to look forward to. The US seems like it will play the same role as it did during the last war, one of sitting on the side, keeping the embassy open and spending some foreign aid to international PVO’s after numerous costly assessment missions...

“Liberians in this country are very divided along tribal/ethnic lines. Unifying them, will end the war for good and help begin the process of rebuilding. Knowing that any government that any ethnic group dislikes can be toppled by sending US dollars from here to arm rebel movements here, is now a fact that will sit with Liberians for the rest of time. Not such a great way to change governments is it?

“Media coverage has been interesting. Last time it was too dangerous they told us to send news people into Liberia. This last war was far more dangerous, but once it became the popular diversion from Iraq, all kinds of petty photographers and news services were willing to risk their lives. We at least got the coverage out, but it will soon pass again. We do have a lot of documentation for history and I do believe that it forced the movement in of this peacekeeping plan.

OTHER AFRICA NEWS MISSING

GERMANY’S Media Tenor (MediaTenor.com), the media monitors reports that regular coverage of the African crisis remain episodic and scanty. See their report. Concern International reports on one such story: “Extreme drought continues to plague Ethiopia. Agriculture accounts for 90% of exports and 80% of employment. The impact has been that over 11 million people in the region face the risk of starvation. Presently, it is estimated that

the total number of people in need of food assistance in Ethiopia is 13.1 million. Among them are thousands of children who are already suffering from malnutrition. Two-thirds of all children in Ethiopia have some kind of deficiency as a result of chronic malnutrition.”

ZOO PARADE IN CALI

BACK in the USA, the California recall election is shaping up like a food fight out of one of the Animal House movies. Arnold “Hasta La Vista baby” has cast his biceps in the ring. A so-called moderate Republican with reported family ties back in Austria to the far right Anschluss advocates, he says he will run. His fame is his claim to fame. Apparently you only need \$65 and a few hundred bucks to be declared a candidate. No doubt this circus will distract attention from the presidential race. Among those running is activist Arianna Huffington, a one time rightist turned liberal activist: She told TomPaine.com.

“...this is not a normal election. It is a chaotic situation brought about by a recall process that I oppose, which I’ve written about, and which I consider a power grab. But at the same time, out of this chaos can come a historic opportunity to really bring about fundamental reform in California. When the system is predictable and stable, as it is in most election cycles, it is really hard to bring about change. ... The pent-up frustration in the electorate, and the fact that this is an extraordinary circumstance that we are presented with, makes it possible for someone like me to run as an independent, which is what I’m doing, and to have a platform through which I can reach a lot of people who feel excluded by the political process, who feel shut out, who feel that they cannot make a difference.”

The zoo-ish quality of the race may make “politricks” more interesting for younger voters, as Micah Sifrey writes: “American politicians seem afraid of anything that might seriously inspire young people. And one big reason is that for more than 20 years, they’ve been running away from the ‘60s, the not-entirely mythical decade of youthful idealism and protest.

If you doubt that proposition, check out Danny Goldberg’s new book, *Dispatches from the Culture Wars: How the Left Lost Teen Spirit*. Goldberg, a 52-year-old music industry exec. and progressive activist, calls himself an “aging hippie” and he’s got the chops to prove it. ...”

MEDIA NEWS NOW

Our media news takes us first to China where Falun Gong reports that it was able to jam a Chinese TV transmission and replace regularly scheduled programming with their own show. Their Information Center reports: “Instead of the regularly scheduled program, according to reports, hundreds of thousands of residents saw two programs reporting on the human rights abuses against Falun Gong practitioners in China – something Jiang Zemin has gone to great lengths to conceal.

According to the statement, Falun Gong practitioners in southern China had employed high-powered transmitters controlled by timers to remotely transmit the programs to televisions throughout an entire city, and then automatically shut down to resume regularly scheduled, state-controlled programming.” Says spokesperson Erping Zhang, “During the war in Iraq, the Iraqi state-run network was one of the Allied Forces’ first targets. Why? Because just like in China, it was said that the Iraqi regime controlled the

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

media and used it as a weapon to mobilize the populace for its own misguided cause.”

From Chicago comes word that “Labor journalist Harry Kelber, who has covered AFL-CIO conventions and Executive Council meetings for more than twenty years, was denied a room at the Drake Hotel because of a pamphlet he wrote calling for greater union democracy. The AFL-CIO persuaded

Drake management to deny Kelber accommodations because he posed a “security risk.”

A Tony Blair-backing TV executive, Barry Cox of Channel Four, has joined the campaign against the BBC. The Guardian reports: “He called for regulatory powers to be stripped from the BBC governors and handed instead to the new media watchdog, OFCOM.”

