

NATION BRIEFS

Alberta legislation could see criminals pay for hospital costs

EDMONTON—Alberta has introduced new legislation that would allow lawbreakers to be sued to recover health-care costs resulting from their offenses.

Bill 48, introduced earlier this week, is meant to strengthen the province's ability to recover costs resulting from wrongful acts, and includes amendments to allow the authorities recover the cost of treating convicted criminals if the costs relates to their offense.

"Albertans should not be responsible for health costs caused by the wrongful acts or omissions of others," said Alberta health and wellness minister Ron Liepert.

"If passed, this legislation will help us recover these costs, which will benefit Albertans," he said.

Under the new legislation, the province could file lawsuits against drunk drivers and violent offenders to recover the costs of treating them and their victims.

The proposed legislation also paves the way for the province to sue tobacco manufacturers to recover health-care costs resulting from illness caused by tobacco use.

This would allow Alberta to join other Canadian provinces that are filing lawsuits to recover costs for treating smoking-related illnesses.

—Omid Ghoreishi

Lab researcher faces U.S. smuggling charge

SASKATOON (Reuters)—A scientist at a top-ranked infectious disease laboratory has been arrested on charges of attempting to smuggle vials of biological materials into the United States, Canadian and U.S. officials said on Wednesday.

The researcher, Konan Michel Yao, is alleged to have taken vials of basic biological materials including the Ebola gene for vaccine development from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Although the materials contained the Ebola gene, the gene is not infectious and its only possible application would be in developing a vaccine, said Dr. Frank Plummer, the scientific director general of the lab.

"At no time was the health of citizens of Canada or the U.S. at risk, because the seized materials are known to be non-infectious," said Plummer.

The lab is Canada's top facility for the identification, control and prevention of infectious diseases, and deals with the most deadly organisms.

Yao never had access to Level 3 and 4 pathogens, which include the Ebola virus, HIV and H1N1 flu virus, Plummer said. He did have access to a Level 2 laboratory, similar to those at hospitals and universities.

Border agents said they conducted a routine search of his vehicle and found 22 vials in a latex glove wrapped in aluminum foil, inside the trunk.

"It was certainly taken seriously," said Lynn Jordheim, the U.S. attorney prosecuting the case. "... But it's been determined that (the materials) are not a hazardous substance."

Yao was scheduled to start a new job with the U.S. National Institutes of Health at the Biodefense Research Laboratory in Bethesda, Maryland. According to court documents he told officers he was taking the vials to help him get a head start at his new job.

Ottawa says union must concede more to save GM

OTTAWA (Reuters)—A cost-cutting deal between the Canadian Auto Workers union and General Motors Corp that was reached in March is no longer sufficient to ensure the viability of GM's Canadian operations and more cuts are needed, Industry Minister Tony Clement told Reuters on Wednesday.

"The general determination is, given the deterioration of the market even since that moment (March), there is no question that for GM to be viable there has to be more on the table," Clement said.

"We're at a very critical juncture. Over the next 48 to 72 hours there's a lot that has to fall into place and then we'll make a determination on where we stand," he said.

To qualify for billions of dollars in government aid, GM has until the end of the month to secure major concessions from its stakeholders and come up with a business plan that Washington and Ottawa find acceptable.

Dissidents shut out of conference on Cuban revolution

By KATHY XU
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—Despite the rain, a crowd of Cuban dissidents showed up to protest a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Cuban Revolution at Queen's University in Kingston on Saturday.

Around 200 academics, business representatives, and Cuban government officials attended "The Measure of a Revolution: Cuba, 1959-2009," a three-day conference covering a variety of social and economic topics.

Surprised by the presence of

the conference hall. Such remarks as "stupid" and "why don't you go to school" were heard from the attendees when approached by the protesters.

However, hooting from the sidewalk across the street, the protesters were not to be ignored by the scholars and businessmen in attendance. Nelson Taylor Sol of the Cuban Canadian Foundation was critical that dissidents were excluded from the conference.

While the regime is celebrating the legacy of the revolution, he said, the revolution has "made every Cuban a dissident." Cubans have been fleeing their country since 1959.

The few conference attendees who agreed to comment shied away from the issues of human rights violations and political repression in Cuba. They directed most of their criticisms toward America's Cuba policies.

They regard U.S. economic sanctions as the main obstacle to Cuba's economic development rather than the failure of Cuba's own economic model. While Cuba is free to trade with most other nations in the world, by June 2009 the U.S. will be the only country that does not have a formal diplomatic relationship with Cuba.

Mr. Sol, however, said Cuba's economy has been completely bankrupted and most Cubans are living in poverty, a vast departure from the prosperous nation in the pre-revolutionary period.

Dave Thomas of the Cuban-Canadian Friendship Association, who attended the conference, said 800,000 Canadians visited Cuba last year and he is glad that Canada has had long and friendly relations with the country.

But as Mr. Sol sees it, the money Canadians are pumping into the country prolongs the dictatorship and in turn the suffering of the Cuban people. He said that with many of the corporations that have businesses in Cuba, the workers are only paid a fraction of what the government actually receives from these foreign companies.

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the demonstrators on the last day of the conference, some attendees expressed annoyance even though they agreed that Cuban dissidents had the right to protest.

One lady suggested that the protesters could better get their message across by attending the conference. However, a Cuban protester who tried to register was denied admission by the organizers.

The dissidents were mainly protesting against the presence of Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of Cuba, who they see as the chief propagandist for the Cuban regime. Alarcón is an expert on North American issues and has served twice as permanent representative for the UN and later as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

While seeing the U.S. as the overpowering bully in the Cuba-U.S. relationship, the conference attendees showed little interest in engaging Cuban dissidents outside



Tamil protesters gather at Queen's Park in Toronto on Wednesday to call attention to the civil war in Sri Lanka. JASTON LOFTUS/EPOCH TIMES

Tensions run high for Canada's Tamils

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But that protection has come at a price. The violent methods of the Tigers, which experts say have not abated even as the government has reformed discriminatory legislation, has led the international community to label the group a terrorist organization.

The Tigers were officially labelled a terrorist organization by the Canadian government in 2006. The group has admittedly used child soldiers (even after promising to stop in 2003) and carried out hundreds of suicide bombings. The group has also reportedly forced Sinhalese and Muslim inhabitants out of territory it controlled. In 1999, the Tigers were accused of killing women and children in a pre-dawn attack on a Sinhala village.

LTTE supporters frequently denounce these reports as propaganda spread by the Sri Lankan government.

Terrorists or freedom fighters

The Tamils formed in the 1970s in response to discrimination at the hands of the Sri Lankan government. The conflict has its roots in social tensions left after Britain granted the country political independence in 1948.

The Tamils, a minority in the country, were a favoured people of the British, testified Dr. Elliot Tepper, a distinguished Sri Lanka researcher at Carleton University, before the Canadian foreign affairs parliamentary committee in late March.

"The talented [Tamil] minority community took very quickly to English education," he said, which led to better positions in the government.

Almost a decade after independence a new party formed that "stormed to power under the banner of Buddhist nationalism and Sinhala language superiority," explained Tepper.

The new government then imposed a number of measures that favoured the ethnic majority, to the detriment of the Tamil minority, including a constitutionally-enshrined duty to protect Buddhism and language preferences that marginalized Tamils, who are mainly Hindu and Muslim, were also required to score higher than Sinhalese to gain entrance to universities.

"Today we see the long-term results of this political history—a defensive movement by the Tamil population to overcome discrimination, a movement that has shifted from being a moderate and constitutional one to a violent separatist and terrorist one under the leadership of the LTTE."

Raj Thavaratnasingham, a Canadian Tamil and executive committee member for the Association of Sri Lankan graduates of Canada (which is almost entirely comprised of Tamils) likens the Tamils to a violently protective big brother.

He said the situation is like living on a street where some people from further down come up and beat and intimidate friends and family. One day, an older brother gets angry and shoots some of those people, a violent but admired act by the former victims.

"I am not saying what they did was good, but that is how the Tamil people see it."

"Most of us do condemn the violence that is perpetrated by the Tigers but they are the only people defending the Tamils," he said.

In the current conflict, Mr. Thavaratnasingham, a Tamil himself, said the government has gone beyond reasonable force.

"It is like some 50 people taking hostage so they blow up the whole building... That is what is happening in Sri Lanka right now."

He pointed to a May 5 Channel 4 News (of Britain) report that had

video from a displacement camp where Tamil refugees are forcibly confined by the Sri Lankan government. The report claimed dead bodies were left where they fell and there were widespread food shortages and instances of sexual abuse. The Sri Lankan government denies the allegations.

The Tigers are accused of restraining civilians in conflict areas, but Mr. Thavaratnasingham said many also choose to remain because of how they are treated by the Sri Lankan government.

At least 50 people were killed when a hospital was shelled yesterday. Human Rights Watch has accused both sides of using the civilian population as "cannon fodder."

In an interview yesterday, Dr. Tepper noted that the Sri Lankan government's imminent defeat of the LTTE could be temporary given the group's extreme resilience in conducting guerilla warfare.

At this critical juncture he said it is essential to separate essential humanitarian support for the Tamil people from any kind of political support for the LTTE. He thinks the current protests in Canada and elsewhere blur that distinction which works in favour of the LTTE.

Lasting peace, suggests Tepper and others, will demand a change from a violent Tamil insurgency to a mainstream political force, something most observers do not think is possible while the Tamils charismatic leader, Velupillai Prapaharan, still lives.

Dr. Tepper points to one group of Tamils that broke from the LTTE and formed a mainstream political party in Trincomalee, contesting and winning an election to become the highest civil authority.

"The trick is to find a way to support the people without giving the organization another chance to survive and fight on for another day."

Wind turbines blamed for adverse health effects

CONTINUED FROM P1

Acciona Energy and Suncor Energy Products, the companies that own the Ripley complex, buried some of the power lines but the problems continued. Wylds says the company billeted some families in motels in nearby Kincardine, but when they returned to their homes their symptoms reappeared.

Having had enough, Wylds eventually bought a house in Kincardine, but he needs to regularly return to Ripley to tend his herd of 500 cattle. As soon as he sets foot in the house, he says, his symptoms return.

He says his doctor has advised him not to return to the house, which he moved into in 1973 and where he planned to live out his old age.

Studies show no link

Wind energy advocates say studies show no proof that turbines cause health problems and that residents who live near wind farms have few complaints about them.

Sean Whittaker, VP of policy for the industry-affiliated Canadian Wind Energy Association, says he's aware of claims that turbines cause health problems for some people, but several studies have produced no evidence that this is the case.

"It's hard to say why these things are happening. It's certainly of concern, but you do have to look at the peer-reviewed research that's been done on the subject and what that tells you."

Whittaker cites in particular a comprehensive study commissioned by the British government which looked into the low-frequency sound produced by turbines that many suspect is having an impact on their health. The study found that turbines can't produce infrasound at levels that affect humans.

He says polls show 87 percent of people agree with having more wind turbines, and that figure rises to 97 percent for those living within one kilometre of a wind farm.

"It's important to point out that

worldwide there's something like 30 or 40,000 turbines," Whittaker says. "People have been living around wind turbines for a very long time. In places like California, Denmark, and Germany, people have lived around them for 15 to 20 years and more. Complaints about the turbines are very few and far between."

One of the few provinces with regulations governing wind farms, Ontario requires a noise-impact assessment for buildings up to 1,000 metres from a turbine.

"Quit putting them so close to houses"

For Barbara Ashbee it was the noise that became a problem after phase two of the Melancthon/Amaranth wind farm went into operation near her home in rural Ontario in December 2008. Since then she and her husband have been plagued with insomnia.

"The noise coming off them was just horrendous, depending on the speed of the wind, the direction, and the atmosphere. When it all started I had three nights straight of absolutely zero sleep, it was just horrible. Even our dog was upset," says Ashbee.

After several noise studies were conducted, it was discovered that most of the noise was coming from a turbine that had been built just 457 metres from Ashbee's home. Eventually the company that owns the 133-turbine complex agreed to turn off that turbine permanently, while five others are turned off at night.

Although this has helped, Ashbee says a constant "hum-vibration" that varies in intensity continues to cause insomnia, fatigue, and ringing in the ears for her and her husband. She says tests show that the house is also contaminated with stray voltage.

Health problems became so severe for Helen and Bill Fraser, who were residents in the same complex, that they sold the home they'd lived in for 30 years and moved to a nearby town.

"People are being forced out of

their homes," Ashbee says. "[The turbines] are just too close to the residences, that's all there is to it. They've got to quit putting them so close to houses."

The issue of setbacks has become a bone of contention in many countries. Critics say wind turbines are allowed to be sited too close to homes or where people congregate.

Nina Pierpont, a U.S. physician and scientist and author of Wind Turbine Syndrome, said in her testimony before the New York State Legislature Energy Committee that turbines shouldn't be sited any closer than 1.25 miles (2 km) from buildings.

In hilly or mountainous terrain, where valleys act as natural channels for noise, she said the setback should be as much as three miles.

"I would like to stress that these are not 'farms.' One doesn't 'farm' wind any more than one 'farms' water in a hydroelectric dam or 'farms' neutrons in an atomic plant. These are large, industrial installations. They make large-scale, industrial noise," said Pierpont.

Need for standards, public health research

Carmen Krogh, a retired Alberta pharmacist, says she never gave wind turbines a second thought until she vacationed near a wind farm in 2005. When the blades were still she was fine, but when the wind picked up and the blades began turning she says she experienced a number of worrisome symptoms.

"I got this sensation that others have recorded—this vibration in my body. It was very disconcerting, and the vibration in my heart felt like my heartbeat being changed.... I had a terrible headache and I had vertigo, like a kind of nausea," she says.

Krogh, who has been involved in healthcare for over 40 years, linked her reaction to the turbines, left the area, and her symptoms subsided within a few days, she says.

In 2008 she began researching the issue, something she felt qualified to



A wind turbine sits 457 metres from Barbara Ashbee's home at the Melancthon/Amaranth wind farm in Ontario. BARBARA ASHBEE

do having run the drug information pharmacy at Ottawa General Hospital where she researched drug therapies and advised doctors.

A survey Krogh conducted on six Ontario windmill complexes found that 53 of 76 residents said they suffered adverse health effects from the turbines, including sleep disturbances, headaches, and depression.

Krogh believes that in the rush to convert to wind power as part of its Green Energy Act, the Ontario government "let wind turbines come into the province without doing their homework... in spite of all the references and the health concerns out there."

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said in April that he would look into setting standards to deal with low-frequency sound waves and address health concerns regarding wind turbines.

McGuinty said he had spoken with Dr. Robert McMurtry, a former dean of medicine at the University of Western Ontario. McMurtry wants the government to conduct more studies in order to determine the turbines' impact on hu-

man health.

Thirty Ontario municipalities have called on the provincial government to do a comprehensive health study.

Krogh says there needs to be an epidemiological study—"the holy grail for public health research"—undertaken to identify the risks and provide guidelines for the medical community.

As for Glen Wylds, he's worried about his son, his son's pregnant girlfriend, and their two-year-old daughter who continue to live at the Ripley complex. He says their daughter constantly wakes up at night screaming with earaches, and the family has made many frantic visits to the emergency ward.

Meanwhile he's stuck with a house he can neither live in nor sell.

"That was our home, it was our livelihood. I had no intention of ever leaving. I wasn't against the wind farms coming—I never complained about nothing. Everybody was reassured that we would have no problems. This is just like something you see on TV that happens to somebody else."