



The Epoch Times

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VANCOUVER EDITION

MARCH 25 - 31, 2010

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY

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Former British MPs caught lobbying for cash

By DAMIAN ROBIN
Epoch Times Staff

LONDON—Three former British ministers have been suspended from the ruling Labour Party after being caught on tape offering their lobbying services for cash.

The ex-ministers were secretly filmed as part of an undercover television investigation in which they were asked by a fictitious U.S. lobbying firm for their help.

Former British Transport Secretary Stephen Byers said in the video that he was like a "cab for hire" offering his lobbying services for up to \$7,500 a day. He told the undercover reporter that he had previously made deals with ministers, was able to get confidential data from the Prime Minister's Office, and could help large firms to get around the law.

Byers made specific reference to transport company National Express and supermarket chain Tesco. He claimed to have saved millions of pounds for National Express which wanted to get out of its East Coast mainline franchise.

National Express denies having paid the MP and says he was one of many MPs they had contacted because the affected rail line went through their constituencies.

Transport Secretary Lord Adonis said there was no secret deal over a National Express rail franchise and Mr. Byers' assertion was "pure fantasy."

Byers now says he had exaggerated his influence over government policy and had "never lobbied ministers on behalf of commercial interests."

Byers has referred himself to the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, John Lyon. "I am confident that he [Lyon] will confirm that I have complied with the MP's code of conduct and have fully disclosed my outside interests," Byers said.

PLEASE SEE MPS ON P5



The niqab, a style of headwear that leaves only the eyes exposed, has reignited the debate over accommodating minorities in Quebec. CRIS BOURONCLE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Niqab becomes flashpoint in debate over reasonable accommodations in Quebec

By JOAN DELANEY
Epoch Times Staff

Women who wear the niqab must uncover their face when applying for a medicare card in Quebec in order to ascertain their identity, the province's human rights commission has said.

Niqab-wearing women also do not have the right to insist on being served by a female employee, the commission said in an opinion last week.

Asking a woman to uncover her face "in a neutral and administrative framework in a short period

of time" does not infringe on the freedom of religion guaranteed in Quebec's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the commission said.

The decision comes as the Quebec government is preparing new guidelines on the wearing of religious symbols for those using public services after a woman wearing a niqab was expelled from two separate government-funded language classes in Montreal.

Naema Ahmed, a 29-year-old Egyptian pharmacist, was accepted into a French course while wearing the niqab—a style of headwear that leaves only the eyes exposed. When

Ahmed, who sat in the front row, was asked to make an oral presentation facing the class, she refused because there were male students in the classroom.

She was expelled from that class and enrolled in another at a community centre for immigrants where she was asked to remove her niqab for part of the class. Ahmed, who says she wears the garment for religious reasons, refused and was again expelled.

Quebec Immigration Minister Yolande James has said that French immersion courses have to be taken with the face exposed

in order to meet certain "pedagogical objectives."

BAN THE BURQA?

Several commentators and some Muslim groups have expressed support for the government's position, including Raheel Raza, adviser on women's affairs for the Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC).

Raza, a Muslim, says that despite what many believe, covering the face is not a religious requirement in Islam but rather a cultural or tribal practice from Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

PLEASE SEE QUEBEC ON P3

Net giant Go Daddy takes stand on Chinese surveillance

By JAN JEKIELEK
Epoch Times Staff

Host name giant Go Daddy Inc. will stop providing .cn domain name registrations in China, the company told the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

"There appears to be a recent increase in China's surveillance and monitoring of the Internet activities of its citizens," said Christine Jones, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary for Go Daddy.

"We made the decision that we didn't want to act as an agent of the Chinese government."

PLEASE SEE GO DADDY ON P4

Gangs assault police stations in Caracas

By CARLOS MORALES
Epoch Times Staff

CARACAS, Venezuela—Criminal activity in Caracas has risen to new levels this year with gangs escalating their attacks against the people who are supposed to keep them in check.

Criminal gangs have now begun assaulting police stations, killing policemen, and stealing police weaponry to use in their criminal activities throughout the city. Last weekend, up to 51 people were fatally shot by gangs, according to Globovisión TV.

One of the most significant and dramatic police station assaults happened on March 21 when a group of criminals,

riding 16 motorcycles and driving a truck, raided the Nueva Tacagua Metropolitan Police Station.

A public statement from Venezuela's Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs said the gang stole 16 automatic pistols, 29 revolvers, several Heckler & Koch submachine guns, and a batch of tear gas bombs.

Metropolitan Police Chief Carlos Meza and personnel from CICPC (the scientific and criminal investigations police) are now investigating the incident.

Tareck el Aissami, Minister of Justice and Internal Affairs, said at a press conference on Monday that the Nueva Tacagua robbery was due to "police misconduct."

PLEASE SEE GANGS ON P5



POLICE MISCONDUCT: Venezuelan Interior Minister Tareck El Aissami has said there will be an investigation into possible "police misconduct" surrounding the assault by a criminal gang on Nueva Tacagua Metropolitan Police Station on March 21. He is seen here on Jan. 11 presenting a U.S.-registered light aircraft seized during anti-drug operations. JUAN BARRETO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Maternal health motion a debacle for Liberals

By MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

PARLIAMENT HILL, Ottawa—Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff is facing questions about his leadership after a Liberal motion on Canada's maternal health initiatives in developing countries failed to pass, despite having the support of the other opposition parties.

Although the motion did not specifically mention "abortion," many pundits and MPs interpreted it to support abortion.

The motion was a whipped vote for the Liberals, meaning MPs had no choice but to vote in favour of it. Despite this, the motion failed to pass when 13 Liberals missed the vote and three voted with the Conservatives against the motion. The final tally was 138 to 144.

"This was not our finest hour," Liberal health critic Carolyn Bennett said afterwards. Bennett said the Liberals are not about to drop the issue. She refused to comment on rumours that Ignatieff had taken the fall for what happened with the vote.

"We don't talk about what happened in caucus but I think everybody knows that we've learned a lot and that we've got to go forward in consultation, communication, attendance, indicating whether you'll be there or not."

Ignatieff has not commented in detail about what kind of discipline could be carried out against the dissenting voters—Paul Szabo, John McKay, and Dan McTeague, all long-time opponents of abortion.

So far the Liberal leader has said only that the party will be dealing with the matter internally.

"You are not looking at a leader that is happy with the result," he told reporters following the vote.

He disagreed with one reporter's suggestion that as the leader, he was like a general leading the troops, only to have them turn their guns on him.

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