

Family in Austrian Incest Case United



This picture taken on April 28, 2008 in Amstetten shows Josef Fritzl's house.

The family of an Austrian man who imprisoned his daughter for 24 years and fathered seven children with her have been united for the first time in what doctors described as an "astonishing" gathering.

Josef Fritzl's daughter Elisabeth emerged from the windowless basement where he had locked her up with three of her children and was reunited on Sunday with three other children from whom she had been separated shortly after birth. A seventh baby died in the cellar after it was born, Reuters reported.

"They met each other on Sunday morning and it is astonishing how easily it worked that the children came together," Berthold Kepplinger, medical director of the Provincial Clinic of Lower Austria, told a news conference on Tuesday.

"The children are quite well," Kepplinger said. Around 200 residents of Amstetten, the town where Fritzl constructed his "house of horrors," held a rainy candle-lit vigil in support of the family in the town square.

"The outside world seems to think Amstetten is a terrible town, and that people in the community do not care for one another. We want to show this is not true," said organizer Elisabeth Anderson.

Austria's justice minister presented a bill on Tuesday to strengthen the country's "victim protection law," particularly in matters of sexual abuse.

In a case that has shocked Austria and the world, Elisabeth, now 42, spent nearly a quarter of a century without seeing sunlight with her daughter aged 19 and two sons aged 18 and 5.

The three other children—two girls and one boy—lived in the

house above the cellar with Fritzl and his wife Rosemarie, who also had seven children of their own.

Kepplinger said his clinic had a school where Elisabeth's children could be educated as part of their recovery process, and the three who had been locked up in the cellar could read and write, although not very well.

The reunion between Elisabeth and her mother Rosemarie had also been "astonishing," Kepplinger said.

DNA tests confirmed that Fritzl, a 73-year-old retired electrical engineer, was the father of all six surviving children his daughter had born, police said.

Prosecutors were now investigating him over the death of the seventh child, whose remains he had burnt in a furnace, and said he could be charged in connection with the child's death.

"Josef F. is being investigated for murder by failing to render assistance," prosecutor Peter Ficenc told Reuters, adding that the pensioner was also being investigated for rape, incest and coercion.

Elisabeth Fritzl says her father lured her into the cellar in 1984 and drugged and handcuffed her before imprisoning her.

Her fate came to light when the 19-year-old daughter became ill and was taken to hospital. Doctors appealed for her mother to come forward to give details of her medical history.

She was stable but critical on Tuesday, in an artificially induced coma and breathing with a ventilator.

The case has shocked Austrians less than two years after teenager Natascha Kampusch escaped from the basement near Vienna where she had been locked up by an abductor for eight years.

Tourism Industry Warned Over Climate Change

Nobel Peace Prize recipient Rajendra Pachauri Tuesday warned tourism industry chiefs they need to reduce their impact on climate change as consumers become more environmentally aware.

"The tourism industry, for its own sake, will have to adapt," Pachauri said to more than 200 Asia Pacific airline, hotel and tourist company chief executives at a conference on tourism and climate change.

"I would appeal to you and urge you to take steps so that you are seen not as the problem but as part of the solution," the head of the UN's Nobel prizewinning climate panel said in a pre-recorded video, AFP reported.

Global warming has the potential to melt ski resorts out of business and drown island getaways with rising sea levels, Pachauri told the first Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) climate change conference.

Promoting energy efficiency and offsetting carbon emissions, he said, must become standard business practices as oil prices rise and savvy tourists start demanding green credentials.

"Climate factors, which are major determinants of tourist demand, could induce tourists to go to new destinations," Pachauri said. "There are issues that will have to be carefully considered and mapped out."

Pachauri and former US vice president Al Gore accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for their work to publicize the dangers of global warming.

Tourism industry leaders said it was time they stopped being defensive every time someone mentioned climate change and did something about it.

"It's fine to lobby, it's fine to justify why we're not as bad as other industries," said Rohit Talwar, CEO of tourism consultant agency Fast Future.

"But I've never seen a good bit of lobbying that could stop a glacier from melting."

Tantalizing slideshows of gleaming silver resorts rising from the water near Dubai were shadowed by charts of climbing carbon emissions which contribute to global warming.

The tourism industry accounted for about five percent of global emissions in 2007, according to the UN World Tourism Organization. Growth in the tourism industry could increase emissions by as much as 150 percent in 30 years.

European and Australian international travelers are already pressuring companies to offset their emissions and to follow environmentally friendly building standards. The European Union has threatened to ban airlines which do not offset their emissions.

Tourism chiefs said they cannot let their Asian resorts and transport agencies fall asleep or they will lose business from the West and from increasingly concerned Asian customers.

News in Brief

S. Africa Lifts Ban

On Elephant Culling

South Africa's 13-year moratorium on elephant culling was set to be lifted on Thursday to combat a surge in population numbers, despite an outcry from animal rights activists.

The South African government earlier this year authorized the killing of elephants from May 1 as a last resort in limiting the numbers of the African elephant that have more than doubled since culling was halted in 1995, AFP reported.

Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk said the issue of population management of the animals had been "devilishly complex" after a long and emotive public debate over plans to reduce elephant numbers.

"Our department has recognized the need to maintain culling as a management option, but has taken steps to ensure that this will be the option of last resort that is acceptable only under strict conditions," he said at the time.

EU Will Sue Italy Over

Rubbish Crisis

The European Commission is poised to sue Italy before an EU court for failing to resolve a rubbish collection crisis in the Naples region, an EU source said Tuesday.

Measures proposed by the government to tackle the situation were "insufficient" or "not satisfying," according to the source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The management plan is not satisfying because it lacks sites for treating waste, no adequate stocking site is foreseen and nothing is planned for sorting rubbish," the official said, reported AFP.

As a result, the commission would decide at a Tuesday May 6 meeting to ask the European Court of Justice to order Italian authorities to take action or face fines, the source said.

The rubbish crisis, which has dragged on for the last 14 years, has long fuelled tensions between Brussels and Rome, which are already soaring currently over Italian efforts to rescue ailing airline Alitalia.

US Medicare Drifting

Toward Disaster

Medicare is lurching toward disaster and it is too late for the Bush Administration and Congress to do anything about it, US Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt said.

He said the next administration will have to act to stop rising costs and get control of the \$400 billion federal health insurance plan for the elderly, which now covers 44 million people, Reuters reported.

"Higher and higher costs are being borne by fewer and fewer people. Sooner or later, this formula implodes," Leavitt said in a speech to the right-leaning Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute think-tanks.

"There is serious danger here," he added. "Medicare is drifting towards disaster."

Leavitt's speech echoes repeated warnings from other federal government officials who have noted that Medicare spending is projected to be 3.3 percent of gross domestic product in 2009.

A separate report released on Tuesday from the National Cancer Institute estimated that Medicare spent \$21 billion on cancer alone between 1999 and 2003.

"The disaster is not inevitable. If we act now, we can change the outcome. In health care, the core problem is that costs are rising significantly faster than costs in the economy as a whole," Leavitt said.

But the administration of President George W. Bush and the current Congress are out of time, Leavitt said.

Late-Pregnancy Depression

Predicts Postnatal Woes

Helping women who suffer from depression during pregnancy could reduce their risk of remaining depressed after giving birth and, in turn, reduce the level of stress they experience in early parenthood, Australian researchers report.

According to Reuters Health, the strongest predictor of whether or not a woman would have postnatal depression was whether she was depressed shortly before giving birth, also known as the antenatal period. Drs. Bronwyn Leigh of Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital Austin Health in Heidelberg Heights and Jeannette Milgrom of the University of Melbourne found. And postnatal depression was, in turn, the only significant risk factor for high levels of parenting stress.