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### News this month

#### Hot spot

Political tensions spilled out on to the streets of Milan ahead of April's national election. On March 11th the Corso Buenos Aires, a shopping boulevard, became a battleground of burnt cars and broken shop windows when an authorised rally went amok. Tricolour Flame, a neo-fascist group running with Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia coalition, clashed with around 200 left-wing anti-globalisation protesters intent on thwarting their march. Fifteen police officers were injured—nine from the blast of a nail bomb—and up to 45 people were arrested.



AFP/Getty

#### Not a normal shopping day

Romano Prodi, the centre-left candidate for prime minister in a contest against Silvio Berlusconi, the incumbent, condemned the violence. Three peaceful marches later followed the skirmish—one by shop owners protesting against the violence and two by leftist groups commemorating the death in 2003 of a protester at the hands of neo-fascists. However the US State Department cautioned Americans travelling to Italy to take care as "even peaceful demonstrations have the potential to escalate into violence".

For background see: [Television drama](#), March 16th 2006

#### A reliquary up your jumper

Since 1970 some 51,260 religious artefacts, including crib figurines, religious paintings, crucifixes and reliquaries, have walked out of Italian churches. In Milan, church officials are taking the matter very seriously, and the military police have issued a new self-help manual to men of the cloth. Written by Vito Cicale of the national police unit for protecting cultural heritage, the manual's main advice for Milan's 10,000 churches is simple: take an inventory of what is there, because catalogued items are more difficult to sell on the black market.

The long list of missing religious art in Italy is headed by Caravaggio's "Nativity with SS. Francis and Lawrence", which was stolen from the Oratorio di San Lorenzo in Palermo, Sicily, in October 1969 and now carries an estimated price tag of \$20m. The prize for most imaginative thievery goes to those who lifted an entire chapel of a Naples church—complete with altar, marble decorations and statues. It was later found and restored to the church by the military police.

#### The long vacation

In something of a nightmare for working mothers, most schools in Lombardy will be open for no more than ten days during the entire month. Schools used as polling places for national elections will be closed on April 8th, 10th and 11th, followed by the Easter holiday from April 12th to 19th. Schoolchildren are back at their books for two days, then off again for a long weekend for the April 25th Liberation Day celebrations.

A group of mothers in Milan, whose children attend Luigi Cadorna

It is 11:23 a.m.  
Saturday in Milan,  
50°F/10°C  
([Forecast](#))

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comprehensive school in Via Dolci, protested against the schedule and suggested shortening the Easter break. Romano Mercuri, the school's principle, explained that the calendar was decided by the regional government.

### Primary colours

There is no quick fix for grey Milanese fog, but city officials are hoping to brighten up the city by introducing a range of official municipal colours. Their "colour plan for urban decor", the result of collaboration with architecture professors from the Politecnico university, includes cheery wild reds and yellows for lamp-posts, clocks, rubbish bins and benches which have otherwise been coated in dreary grey, black and green. This subtle improvement is a last gasp from the mayoral authorities before municipal elections in May. The main target for the paint job is the historic centre of Milan, including Corso Vittorio Emanuele, Piazza Scala and the pedestrian zone that runs from Piazza Duomo to the Castello Sforzesco.

### The case of the two memorials

Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist, is most famous for his death in 1969 when he fell from the fourth-storey window of Milan's police headquarters during an interrogation. He was under questioning for his alleged involvement in the Piazza Fontana bombings, which killed 16 people three days earlier. The left had always blamed the police commander at the time, Luigi Calabresi, for Pinelli's death; Calabresi was murdered by leftists anarchists in 1972 in retribution, but he has long been cleared of guilt. Pinelli sympathisers erected a plaque at Piazza Fontana in his memory, describing him as an innocent man who was murdered.

But on March 3rd, city authorities controversially removed this plaque and replaced it with one of their own that said Pinelli "died tragically". This switch brought a thousand left-wing supporters and friends of Pinelli on to the streets, including Dario Fo, a Nobel-prize-winning Italian playwright whose play "Accidental Death of an Anarchist" was inspired by the Pinelli case. They complained that the new plaque misrepresented Pinelli's death. There are now two plaques at the Piazza Fontana—one official and one unofficial—and each tells a different story.



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