

The Brunswickian International

Car Free Day involved 1 000 cities

Chris Connell

On Saturday, September 22, a thousand cities from across Europe participated in the third annual European Car Free Day initiative by closing portions of their urban centres to car traffic, clearing the way for more than 100 million pedestrians, roller-skaters, cyclists and public transport operators to take over the cities.

The European Car Free Day is an awareness-raising event that seeks to directly involve European citizens in environmental action, and it is growing increasingly popular in Europe and around the world. Last year 760 cities participated; this year the number is up to 1,000. In addition, standards for participation are now higher, and local authorities must now make a commitment to implement more permanent measures to reduce congestion and car pollution.

While initially viewed with some concern by local businesses and merchants, acceptance levels of Car Free Day have risen to near 60% in most European countries. These numbers reflect the growing concern and empathy that merchants feel with their fellow citizens regarding issues of air pollution, smog and inner city traffic and congestion.

Eighty percent of Europeans live in urban areas, and organizers are using Car Free Day to draw the attention of these people and their policy makers to the negative impacts that cars can have on the quality of urban life.

The progress achieved since the pioneering inaugural event of 1999, which involved 66 French and 92 Italian cities, was made possible by the active involvement of many key partners in this European initiative, including national ministries and energy agencies, networks of local authorities, NGO's and the European Commission.

Responding to increasing worldwide demand for organized Car Free Days, the European Union web-site (www.22september.org) has

recently renamed its web-site from European Car Free Day to International Car Free Day.

The concept is spreading to other countries. Car Free Day events have been organized, or will take place, in Bogota, Colombia; Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and a dozen Brazilian cities.

This September, Toronto was the first city to bring International Car Free Day to North America. On September 22, Torontonians joined European counterparts in leaving their cars at home, and walked, bladed and biked into the city center to enjoy parades, teach-ins, and guest speakers including Dr. David Suzuki. Organizers hope that Car Free Day will soon gain momentum in other Canadian towns and cities. They also hope to inform people about the advantages of reducing our national dependency on automobiles.

Transportation represents the largest single source of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 27% of our total emissions. There are many ways to reduce our dependency on automobiles. Choosing other modes of transportation, such as walking, riding a bike, or taking the bus, are the most environmentally friendly ways to get to work or school. But if you must drive — and in our modern world, driving is a fact of life for many — carpooling is a simple way to reduce congestion and conserve energy, while saving money along the way.

According to the Canadian Automobile Association, the average commuter spends approximately \$7500 per year or \$15 per day to operate their car. These figures are based on a mid-size car driven 18,000 km annually (a 30km daily trip) and include operating (fuel, maintenance, etc) and ownership (financing, insurance, depreciation) expenses. Sport utility vehicle and mini-van owners can expect to spend over \$9,000 annually. And if you plan on driving to a place with little parking — UNB for example — you can expect to pay a hefty parking fee as well. Carpooling can dramatically reduce these costs.

Indonesia students protest vs. U.S.

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Police fired tear gas to stop about 1,000 Islamic students storming the grounds of Indonesia's Parliament during a protest Wednesday against U.S.-led strikes in Afghanistan, witnesses said.

It was the third consecutive day of anti-U.S. demonstrations in the world's most populous Muslim nation. Witnesses said the protesters tried to break through police lines and push down the legislature's main gate.

Women wearing Islamic headscarves clutched pictures of terrorist suspect Osama bin Laden.

"Allah loves holy warriors!" the crowd chanted.

Earlier, several groups staged noisy demonstrations outside the United Nations building and the heavily guarded U.S. Embassy, demanding Indonesia suspend diplomatic relations with Washington. Police beat some outside the embassy, injuring four

students.

Security Minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono warned that anti-U.S. protests could damage attempts to fix Indonesia's debt-ridden economy and build a strong democracy.

"Let's not become trapped by taking emotional steps such as cutting international ties," he said.

In at least five other Indonesian cities, protesters burned tires, U.S. flags and effigies of President Bush.

On Tuesday, police used tear gas, warning shots and water cannons to disperse protesters after they tried to pull down a barrier of razor wire protecting the U.S. embassy.

The embassy remained closed Wednesday even after Indonesian security forces moved in two additional water cannons. About 100 police controlled a small, peaceful protest outside the British Embassy, which is located on Jakarta's main traffic circle.

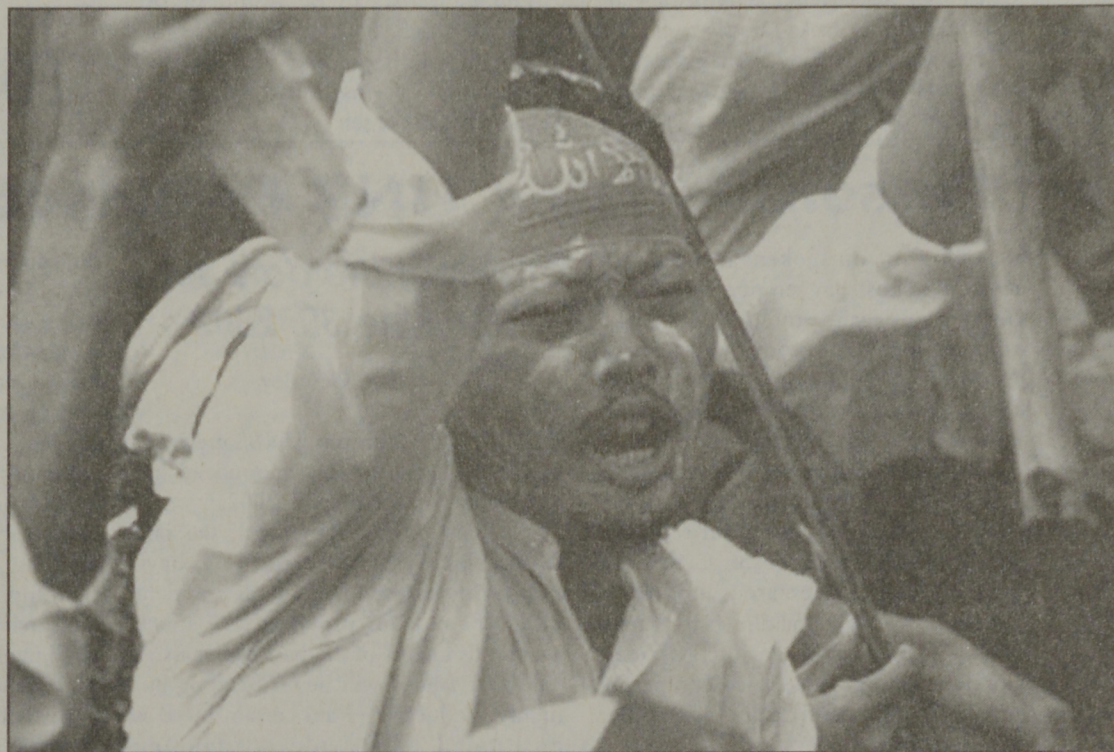
About 85 percent of Indonesia's 210 million people are Muslim. Some fringe Islamic groups have threatened to round up Americans and other Westerners, and have demanded that Indonesia oppose U.S. military action in Afghanistan, where the ruling Taliban militia has refused to hand over bin Laden.

Some U.S. embassy staff have left the country voluntarily.

Several militant Islamic groups have grown in prominence in Indonesia in recent years as the country grapples with massive economic and political problems. Some reports have suggested that they and other Islamic groups in Southeast Asia have forged ties with bin Laden.

On Wednesday, one group, Darul Islam, said it had links with bin Laden's al-Qaida network and Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

So far the anti-U.S. protests in Indonesia have been relatively small, and analysts say the majority of Indonesians are not hostile toward Americans.



Protesters demonstrate in front of the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Tuesday, Oct. 9. (AP)

UNB Rideshare

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Not many people realize that UNB is one of the few universities across Canada that actually has a carpooling program. It's called UNB Rideshare, and it's set up to be flexible, and provide real incentives to those who use it.

In this program, if you form a carpool with a minimum of three people for a minimum of three days per week, you will be able to reduce your parking fee by two-thirds (for example, the three of you split the cost of the \$95.00 annual fee, but each of you receives a rideshare parking permit.) Preferential parking is also available to three-person carpools in the rideshare program.

If you have questions about UNB Rideshare, contact Jessie Davies (UNB Environment and Sustainable Development Centre) at jdavies@unb.ca.

For more about Car free Day or the benefits of carpooling, check the following web sites: <http://www.carpool.ca>, <http://www.carfreeday.ca>.

Algerian Police Impose Restrictions

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — Police prevented leaders of Algeria's Berber minority from staging a protest march on Friday, October 5, making dozens of arrests and blocking roads to stop people pressing for greater rights from assembling.

Friday's escalation in tension between the government and the Berbers comes just two days after Prime Minister Ali Benflis promised to fulfill some of their demands, including recognition of their language and compensation for victims of police brutality. But Berber leaders called the offer "manipulation."

In June, authorities banned all demonstrations in Algiers after a million people took to the streets in protest.

Relations between government forces and the Berbers have been tense since Algerian independence from France in 1962. The Berbers — who claim to be North Africa's original inhabitants, and make up about one-third of Algeria's population — demand an end to what they say is systematic discrimination. More than 100,000 people have been killed in the insurgency, including five new deaths reported Thursday by newspapers and security services.

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