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TIMES OF OMAN



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26 Shawwal 1418

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PAKISTAN - PAGE 5 Time for Benazir, Sharif to go: Leghari



PHILIPPINES - PAGE 9

Estrada jumps gun on rivals with advanced think tank



SPORTS - PAGE 16

Shane Warne throws gauntlet to Tendulkar



Sitting pretty with a hat-trick

HM, Clinton discuss latest development

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and US President Bill Clinton discussed over the phone yesterday the latest development in the region. — ONA

HM issues 3 decrees

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has issued three

Royal Decree No. 2/98 promulgates the real estate register regulations. The decree states that the minister of housing will issue the rules and decisions required for implementing the provisions of the regulations. Until such rules and decisions are issued, the current rules will remain in force insofar as they do not conflict with the provisions of the regulations.

The decree cancels anything in conflict with the regulations or their

It becomes effective from its date Royal Decree No. 3/98 appoints Ahmed bin Saud bin Said Al Siyabi

as secretary-general at the office of the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate. The decree becomes effective

from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. 4/98 appoints
Khalid bin Salim bin Said Al Saidi as secretary-general at the council of

The decree becomes effective from its date of issue. - ONA

HM greets Kuwaiti emir

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, emir of Kuwait, on the occasion of his country's national day. — ONA

Curfew in

AMMAN - King Hussein of Jordan warned yesterday that he would not tolerate violent protests, as heavily-armed soldiers enforced a strict curfew on the town of Ma'an after two days of pro-Iraqi riots.

Troops in full camouflage battledress backed by armoured cars mounted with machineguns patrolled the deserted streets of the southern town which were still littered with rocks and burned debris from the

Suicide attack

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas today staged a suicide attack against two navy boats transporting a total of more than 50 soldiers in the north of the island, military officials said. The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used at least five boats filled with explosives to ram the naval craft in a pre-dawn attack off Point Pedro, officials said.

They said a total of about 50 army soldiers were aboard the two craft, the Pabbatha and Vaalampuri bound for the northern peninsula of Jaffna when they came under attack immediately known but a fleet of Dvora gunboats was sent to the area to rescue survivors. — AFP

Logo of year of private sector



MUSCAT — Consequent upon the declaration of 1998 as the Year of the Private Sector by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in his 27th National Day address, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has announced a logo. The logo highlights the significance of promoting and motivating the private sector to make concerted effort for national development.



Thuwaini receives Arab Scout delegation

His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini bin Shihab Al Said, personal representative of His Majesty the Sultan, with an Arab Scouts Organisation delegation yesterday. — Report on page 3

UN, Iraq reach deal

Accord to be signed today

BAGHDAD — UN Secretary General Kofi Annan reached an agreement aimed at peacefully resolving the crisis over UN arms inspections during talks with Iraqi leaders here yes-terday, UN spokesman Fred Eckhard

'We have reached an agreement We have a text," Eckhard said. "We feel it's positive, very positive.'

The UN spokesman said the accord would be signed some time before a 10:30am (0730 GMT) press conference today

The announcement came after Annan met with Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz a fifth time to iron out the last details of the agreement. Earlier in the day, Annan held three hours of talks with Iraqi President Saddam

Eckhard said the deal granted unfettered access to all suspect sites by UN inspectors seeking weapons of mass destruction, in line with the demands of the UN Security Council.

The secretary-general feels that this agreement fulfills the two principles he had in coming here," he said. "Those are the respect of the Security Council resolutions and the preservation of the integrity of the

It says it will be the final judge of any deal and has reserved judgement until it sees the details of the agree-

Earlier a diplomat said yesterday Iraq and the United Nations have resolved the last problem blocking ar agreement to end peacefully the UN weapons inspection standoff.

All the major issues have been resolved," the diplomat said, esting anonymity

The diplomat said an accord was reached during Annan's talks with President Saddam Hussein, and that the two sides fine-tuned the agreement during a last round of talks between Annan and Deputy Prime Minister Tarea Aziz.

"The time-limit is resolved as I

Diplomats had said the stumbling block to a deal concerned the duration of inspections of the presidential

It was understood that Aziz, in private talks with Annan since Friday, had refused to drop Iraq's insistence that UN inspections should be completed within a 60-day timeframe and take place on a one-off basis at each site

The UN Security Council has unanimously rejected such a stand and insists that no time limits can be set for the inspectors to complete their work. UN resolutions provide for full and unconditional access to

Meanwhile the official Iraqi news agency quoted an official UN source as saying "most of the outstanding questions, if not all of them, have

been resolved.' A UN spokesman, Ahmad Fawzi, also told INA that the talks between Aziz and Annan took place amid an "optimistic atmosphere

The initial US reaction was cool. Secretary of state Madeleine Albright said the United States would pursue its own interests in Iraq if it was unhappy with any deal reached by the

"It is possible that he will come with something we don't like in which case we will pursue our national interest," she said on the ABC television programme "this week"

Albright said Washington would nothing short of unconditional access for UN weapons

US Defence Secretary William Cohen said the real issue was whether the UN security council was "going

to insist upon full compliance with its own resolutions' Cohen said he would sign orders to call up "several hundreds" more

military reservists.

He acknowledged that Saddam's prestige among Arabs could be bolstered by any US strike that left him in power. — AFP, Reuters



STUDENTS' PROTEST: Egyptian students protesting in Cairo against US threat of a military strike against Iraq. - AFP

Sonia: Ready to die for India

20 killed in election violence

BOMBAY - Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of assassinated former premier Rajiv Gandhi, yesterday an election rally estimated at 300,000 that India could be torn apart by Hindu fanaticism and she was ready to die for the country's unity.

The 51-year-old Sonia, accompanied by her son, told the event - the biggest public rally in two decades in this Hindu nationalist stronghold — that India's multi-religious

culture was under grave threat.
"I warn you, if power goes into
the hands of Hindu nationalists India will be split into pieces," she said.

"The slogan of one village, one religion, one culture and one people will destroy and finish this nation," she said to thunderous applause.

Police estimates put the crowd at 300,000. The event was held to coincide with the second day of polling in Indian general elections.

Bombay, India's financial centre

and the home of its major stock market, is the capital of the western state Sonia Gandhi, whose mother-in-

law Indira Gandhi and husband were both former Congress prime ministers and were both assassinated, said she was willing to die to preserve India's secular identity. "I will live and die by the ideals

that my mother-in-law and her son stood for. Those ideals will never leave me till I die ... I am ready to give my life to protect the unity and integrity of I die ... integrity of India. An ecstatic crowd shouted slogans

such as "We are with you Sonia Gan-dhi, go ahead," "Sonia Gandhi has

come and brought a new light into our lives" and "Sonia Gandhi is the second Indira Gandhi'

Congress president Sitaram Kesri echoed them, saying: "I am the leader of the party but she is the only person who is capable of leading all of

Shivaji Park, the rally venue, was festooned with streamers, Congress party flags and scores of giant-sized cut-outs of the Nehru-Gandhi dy-

Roads around the ground were closed to traffic and thousands of police in anti-riot gear stood guard in and around the ground.
Sonia Gandhi also attacked Ma-

harashtra's ruling Hindu right-wing party, which was accused of attacking Muslims after the December 1992 demolition of a historic mosque in northern India by Hindu fanatics.

"There is a party today which propagates oppression and de-struction. It terrorises the people and it divides our society. In 1992-93 you saw the poison and violence that had spread in the city and the riots that took place in the name of religion," She also derided the Bharatiya

Janata Party, which topped the 1996 general elections and formed a twoweek government until forced to quit for failing to prove a legislative ma-

jority.
"Their government lasted only 13 days. They talk of a theocracy. They hit at the foundations of our national life. They are opportunists and traders and take India backwards.



SONIA: Ready for sacrifice

Maharashtra provides 48 of India's 545 members of parliament. The Hindu nationalists won 33 in the 1996 national polls, with the Congress holding the rest. Meanwhile, at least 20 people

died in scattered violence and several others injured as more than 110 million people — a turnout estimated at around 55 per cent — cast their ballots yesterday across 11 of 25 states. Most victims died in street clashes

between rival activists. Nine deaths occurred in the eastern state of Bihar, India's most lawless province which accounted for most of the 30 deaths in the first phase of balloting on February 16. The violence, however, was overshadowed by the constituBJP leader A.B. Vajpayee's hunger

A frail-looking Vajpayee told reprotest "so long as my physical strength permits me." The BJP also made a legal appeal over Uttar Pra-desh, telling a court yesterday that the dismissal was illegal.

Yesterday's voting was for 183 of 545 parliamentary constituencies, with 222 decided on the opening

BJP president L. K. Advani yes-terday charged Uttar Pradesh Governor Romesh Bhandari with "outrageous assault on democracy" and demanded his immediate dismissal. Addressing a news conference here, Advani expressed hope that

President K. R. Narayanan would take a quick decision on the matter as he alone could dismiss the governor under Article 156 of constitution as it was a fit case Earlier, he had a 30-minute meeting with the president at the pres-

idential palace. He said Congress, Left parties

and the Samajwadi Party would have to pay a very heavy price for their "misadventure"

Advani said the indefinite fast by Vajpayee was the beginning of the struggle and the party would unveil several other steps to sharpen our offensive against the evil forces of fascism. He was confident that Bhandari's move would boomerang on the parties which were behind it. The Congress party yesterday strongly de-Singh government. — AFP

8 gunned down in Karachi

KARACHI — Unidentified gunmen opened fire in an eastern district of Pakistan's violence-marred port city of Karachi late yesterday killing at least eight people, police said.

They said the victims included two girls, aged eight and 10. At least 10 people with serious bullet injuries were admitted to the

city's Jinnah Hospital. Hundreds of relatives and friends thronged the hospital where many were seen offering blood for transfusion. Witnesses said the victims included people sitting near a mosque

or walking in the narrow street of eastern Karachi's Korangi district when a group carrying automatic weapons sprayed bullets and fled in a waiting car and motorcycles. "I was on my way home when

suddenly the gunfire erupted," said an injured man who received a bullet ound on his left hand. "I have no political affiliation," he

said adding two girls who were passing by the mosque fell on the ground. 'I rushed ... but they had already

Local police officials said the incident could be an act of "terrorism" or it resulted from simmering tension between the city's powerful Muttaheda Oaumi Movement and its dissident MQM-Haqiqi faction.

Activists of the two groups had exchanged gunfire earlier in the day too, residents and police said.

The MQM, which represents the Urdu-speaking Mohajir settler community, was split in 1992 and since then the two factions have been at loggerheads

Shoaib Bukhari, a senior leader of the mainstream MQM, blamed the rival MQM Haqiqi faction saying five

MSM reserves 25 per cent shares for small investors

hammed Al Jarwani, executive pres- small investors. He added that the re- than all expectations. ident of the Muscat Securities Mar- maining 75 per cent of new shares ket, announced yesterday that 25 per cent of new shares floated would be reserved for individual Omani small investors who have applied for less than RO500 worth of shares.

He said that the decision had been taken on the basis of the results of the share floatations since the beginning would be distributed to the remaining share applicants at the ratios laid down in the current regulations. Asked when surplus funds submitted by applicants for Topaz energy and marine shares would be returned, Al Jarwani said the rush of applications

to enter the Omani market among individual and institutional investors.

He said that the issue manager was obliged to return excess funds to applicants within 15 days - the period laid down in the issue prospectus. This period would expire next Saturday, he said. — ONA



for Topaz shares had totalled around

RIGHTS OFFER - NOTICE

Based on the resolution passed at the Extraordinary General Meeting of National Bank of Oman dated February 8 1998 the Board of Directors are pleased to invite the shareholders to the rights issue of the Bank.

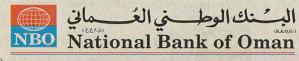
The issued and paid-up capital of the Bank will be increased from RO 20 MM to RO 30 MM based on this rights offer, and the nominal value of the rights shares will be RO 1/- per share.

The total number of shares offered for subscription to the existing shareholders is 10,000,000 shares. As allowed by article 83 of the Commercial Companies Law (CCL) No.4/74 as amended, every shareholder registered with the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) as on February 19 1998, will be eligible to subscribe to one share for every two held by him and the offer price is RO 6/- per share including a premium of RO 5/-per share.

The offer will be open from February 28 1998 to March 14 1998 and the subscription can be made through the following banks:

- 1) National Bank of Oman (SAOG)
- 2) Commercial Bank of Oman (SAOG)
- 3) Oman International Bank (SAOG) 4) Bank Muscat Al Ahli Al Omani (SAOG)
- 5) Bank Dhofar Al Omani Al Fransi (SAOC)
- 6) Bank of Oman Bahrain & Kuwait (SAOG) 7) Oman Arab Bank (SAOC)

According to the provisions of the CCL if the rights offer is not fully subscribed then the un-subscribed portion will be re-offered to the present shareholders as additional rights.



Absolutely Professional

\$415,000 for 'Abdication Desk'

NEW YORK — The table at which The duke became King Edward Britain's love-struck King Edward VIII in January 1936 on the death of his father, George V, but abdicated to VIII signed away his throne in 1936 was auctioned for \$415,000 in New marry a divorcee, American Wallis York on Saturday, more than eight Warfield Simpson The couple married in June 1937

imes what Sotheby's had expected. The 'Abdication Desk,' a George III mahogany table circa 1755, had been estimated to sell for between \$30,000 and \$50,000, but rapid-fire bidding sent the price over \$200,000

within 30 seconds The desk, with a brass plaque nscribed "On this table King Edward VIII signed the instrument of abdication 10.30am on December 10th 1936," was bought by an anonymous bidder by telephone.

It fetched the highest price of any

lot yet sold in the nine-day auction of

items from the Paris home of the

duke and duchess of Windsor.

included an Aubusson carpet (\$244,500), a pair of Italian neo-classical silver console tables and paintings by Degas and Chilean artist Claudio Bravo. For many buyers seeking a piece

of royal history, money was no A Cecil Beaton sketch of the duchess serving cocktails sold for \$178,500, compared with its high estimate of \$7,000, and a signed

and spent their lives at the forefront

of the fashion and social worlds.

Several six-figure lots on

Saturday, the third day of bidding,

portrait of Turkey's Mustapha Ataturk between \$200 and \$400 fetched

A Bernard Lorjou lithograph inscribed to the duchess and estimated at between \$250 and \$350 was worth \$25,300 to one bidder.

A set of three shot glasses, dubbed 'Amusing' in the catalogue and estimated at \$300 to \$400. commanded \$1,380. A pair of Austrian cigarette boxes put at \$600 to \$800 went for \$24,150. Other noteworthy lots included a

pair of empire-style fauteuils which sold for \$145,500 - 16 times the high estimate — and an untitled Andy Warhol painting inscribed "To the Duchess" which sold for just under \$40,000, more than three times

More than 40,000 items from the couple's home are being sold by businessman Mohammed Al Fayed, father of Dodi Al Fayed who died in a car crash with Diana, Princess of Wales, last year. Proceeds will benefit charities supported by Dodi Faved and Diana. Sotheby's estimated the total

Windsor sale of furniture, paintings, decorations, books, photographs, coins, medals, jewellery and clothing at \$5 million to \$7 million, but by Saturday the total was already at Meanwhile, according to the

Sunday Telegraph Britain's Queen Elizabeth is secretly bidding for heirlooms from the sale in New York of property once owned by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

Maghrib

Prayer

timings

Sultanate aims at sustainable growth of agriculture, fisheries

CAIRO — The Sultanate's plans and programmes for developing and protecting its agriculture and fisheries are aimed at guaranteeing continuity and sustainable development for the coming generations, the agriculture and fisheries minister has declared.

Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan bin Mohammed Al Rowahi was speaking at the 25th general assembly session of the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, which is currently being held here.

He explained that the Omani government was committed to food security and self-sufficiency in food production, and to ensuring that the agriculture and fisheries sectors made a greater contribution to the country's GDP and the diversification of its sources of

He added that the Sultanate's agriculture and fisheries development strategy had succeeded in boosting production and narrowing the food gap.

Call for governing body to monitor construction activity

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Construction activity in the Gulf should be monitored by a governing body, in order to increase the lifespan of buildings and reduce deterioration of concrete by ensuring that the contractors maintain right specification and workmanship.

This will be in the interest of people's safety as well as the builders who have to bear the expenses of repair, said Jameel Al Alawi of Bahrain Society of Engineers, which has organised a three-day course on 'Concrete durability in the Gulf region' along with the Muscat Municipality.

The course, which concludes today at the Gulf Forum Hotel, will be run in Bahrain for the next three days by experts from the Concrete Society of UK.

Stressing that concrete deterioration is a real problem, he told the *Times of Oman* that substantial amount of money is spent on repair in this part of the

The Bahrain Society of Engineers, which is specialised in organising conferences related to concrete, hopes to follow the current course with another on repair.

Pointing out the significance of the course, he said in recent years the number of engineers has increased, especially in comparison with a decade or so ago. Previously they were sent out for special training. Instead, such courses are now organised locally to benefit more people, he said

NOTICE

pending claims against him should be submitted in writing

within one week from today. Any claims after that will not be

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authorised to represent our company. All

JAMEEL AL ALAWI

And according to him, with the availability of knowhow and proper maintenance it will not be difficult to raise the lifespan of buildings to around 30 to 40 years, depending upon the specification and workmanship.

"Assuming that proper products and workmanship are utilised, there should be no problem in making

Specifying that contractors in the Middle East are required to provide a guarantee of ten years for every construction, he said the same could be increased. It is like a vehicle guarantee, which in paper may be one year, but lasts much longer than that, he added.

Placing greater emphasis on

costs. "Basic problem is the corrosion of reinforcement in the concrete. Chloride, humidity and heat corrodes the reinforcement. And when it corrodes it becomes bigger and pushes the concrete, which inevitably cracks. The cracks are open to humidity, which again accelerates the entire process. Contractors should catch the bars before they corrode and this calls for monitoring. Early detection of the problem will minimise the

concrete last that long," he said.

monitoring of the construction, he

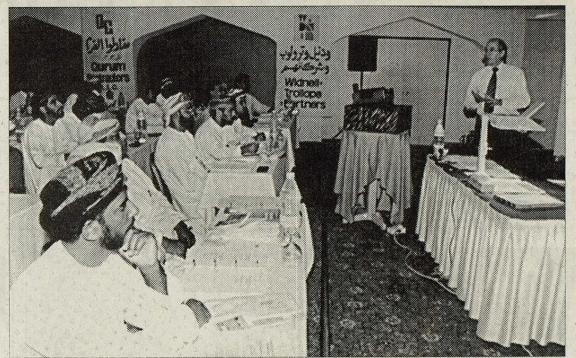
expenditure," he explained.

He also blamed the problem on the lack of qualified contractors to supervise the projects. "In this part of the world, majority of the labourers do not have formal education or training and they can use inferior products," he said, pointing out that the situation was bad in Bahrain. "You can change the marble or

alter some part of a building. But when concrete deteriorates, the whole building has to be demolished ... I have seen many projects, where even before the contractor leaves the site the building starts cracking," he

Explaining the role to be played by the authority concerned in maintaining a semblance of uniformity, Jameel Al Alawi said: "In countries like Switzerland there are construction police, who inspect all construction sites, even the construction of houses of the builders. The house could be sold in a couple of years time, is their

Majlis panels review plans



Prof. Ted Kay addressing the participants yesterday. - Photo by Rodolfo Alfons

So far, there has been no specification or construction standard set by the government to be applied by contractors. In Bahrain, the society has drafted a set of rules to guide contractors. It is awaiting approval from the government. "It is not enough for government to ensure the safety of their buildings alone," he added.

In Bahrain, there have been

at the joint meeting.

The Education and Culture Com-

mittee approved the minutes of this

year's previous meeting, as well as

the ideas put forward at the joint

meeting. It also reviewed some ed-

ucational studies that had been de-

ferred during the Majlis's previous

number of general topics covered by

terms as well as recent developments

in the educational field and current

educational and cultural targets.

The committee also discussed a

many incidents where people have been injured or killed due to construction errors, especially by weak balconies or canopies, he said However, he wasn't aware of such situations in Oman. And according to him, such incidence would be less here since concrete structures started coming up in Oman only in the 70s, unlike Bahrain, which saw it in the 30s and the 40s

"By 70s people in general were more aware of the problem and better specification was available,"

Pointing out that it was difficult to specify the actual lifespan of structures in the region, he said 15 years ago, they didn't even last one year. However, with the present specification, it will not be difficult to raise it to 40 years, he said.

OMAN TV

EVENTS

Opening of a glass factory in Sohar Industrial Estate, today, at 10am.

• The Ministry of Commerce and In

dustry will organise a seminar on Specifications at the ministry building, at

• Exhibition of archaeological artefacts at the Oman Cultural Club in Qurum will continue until Feb. 27.

Oman-Japan seminar on Energy and Petroleum Industries on February 25, on the Ministry of Oil and Gas premises.

The Kuwaiti ambassador will host a

reception on February 25, at 9.30pm, as part of Kuwaiti National Day celebra-

• SQU will host the sixth Arab inter-

Royal Anthem Holy Quran Morning Coffee Cultural Achievements Children's Teaching Programme Children's Serial News Cultural Programme Arabic Serial Azan of Dhuhr Prayer

Competition Programmem News Horse Race Azan of Asr Prayer Children's Programm04:36 Children's Serial

This Evening News Azan of Maghrib Prayer Religious Programmeme Cultural Programmeme Treasur of the Nature Foreign Serial Azan of Isha Prayer Football Match English News Bulletin Sports Evening News

Umsiyyat Late Night News Holy Quran Royal Anthem

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What the papers say. Classical relaxation. Festival of classical music.

Music in lighter mood. News highlights.

and news headlines.

Places of interest.

The world of piano music Preview of afternoon programmes

Weather forecast and TV Focus on development/women on

programmes. Preview of evening programme

the move Arabic writing today

News bulletin

Jazz tracks

Soul hour. Kaleidoscope

3.00 3.02 4.00 4.03 5.00 6.00

Business report. Weather forecast and TV

Local news bulletin

News headlines

pharmacies on duty noon time Health is wealth.

MUSCAT — His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Al Said, minister of national

Credentials received

MUSCAT — Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, minister responsible for foreign affairs, received a copy of the credentials of Brunei Darussalam's ambassador

He welcomed the ambassadors, wishing them success in their new posts and a pleasant stay in the Sultanate. He hoped that the Sultanate's relations with their countries would continue to expand and prosper.

Hamad bin Hamoud, head of the minister's office department and acting under-secretary at the ministry, and Hamad bin Nasser Al Toobi, head of the Asian

rector-general of agriculture, livestock and fisheries in the governorate of Dhofar, and several specialists and farmers in Salalah. - ONA

Sayyid Faisal to open folklore, traditional games festival

heritage and culture, will open the five-day Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) folklore and traditional games festival on March 1

The first day of the festival will be held at Mina Al Sultan Qaboos and will coincide with the arrival of the ship Shabab Al Alam on March 1. The ship's arrival will mark the end of a voyage which began in Japan early in January with youngsters from the Sultanate and other AGCC states on board, as well as young people of various other nationalities.

On the second day, the festival will move to Qurum Natural Park, where it will be held every evening until it ends. Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal Al Busaidi, deputy secretary-general of the council of ministers, will preside at the closing ceremony. — *ONA*

designate to the Sultanate yesterday.

He also received a copy of the credentials of Thailand's ambassador-

The credentials presentation ceremonies were attended by Sayyid Badr bin

Meet on Disabled Welfare Week

MUSCAT - Khalfan bin Nasir Al Busaidi, wali of Dhank, held a meeting at his office yesterday to discuss the wilayat's preparations for taking part in Disabled Welfare Week.

The meeting included heads of government departments, and sheikhs and dignitaries of the wilayat of Dhank.

The wali gave a speech in which he called for cooperation to make the event a success. — ONA

Lecture on grapevine cultivation

SALALAH — A lecture on grapevine cultivation was delivered yesterday at the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries in the govern-orate of Dhofar, under the auspices of Mohammed bin Mubarak Kofan, adviser to the minister of social affairs, labour and vocational training.

The lecture was delivered by Eng. Bakhit bin Mahad, assistant researcher in fruit cultivation, who talked about the nutritional value of grapes and their various types, as well as proper cultivation of grapes, pruning times, and meththe Majlis during its first and second

The lecture also reviewed practical methods of grape planting.

The lecture was attended by Sayyid Hilal bin Musallam Al Busaidi, di-

Kaleidoscope. News bulletin. Weather forecast and pharmacies on

Guest of the week Music oasis. The Holy Quran. News summary, preview of morning programmes, pharmacies on duty, close down.

National Anther WEATHER

PARTLY cloudy skies over Musandam, Al Dhahira, Al Dakhilia, Shariqiya and Al Ba-tinah with chance of isolated rainshower and Clear to partly cloudy skies over the rest

of the Sultanate.

Winds: Over coastal areas of Gulf of Oman winds will be easterly light to moderate. Over the rest of the Sultanate winds will be southeasterly moderate overnight becoming fresh during day.

Sea conditions: Slight with significant was beight of Omeron.

wave height of 0.5 metre along Gulf of Oman coast and slight to moderate with significant wave height of 1.0 metre along the rest of the

Tides: Muscat Area

Low 11:03pm - High 4:08am Low 11:53am - High 7:21pm Surrise 6:35am - Sunset 6:06pm Dhofar Area High 7:18pm - Low 10:34pm High 3:36am - Low 11:52am Sunrise 6:46am - Sunset 6:28pm

Temperatures recorded in other cities: Muscat 25, Abu Dhabi 32, Dubai 27, Sharjah 28, Ras Al Khaimah 29, Doha 23, Bahrain 22, Riyadh 28, Makkah 29, Madinah 23, Jed-

dah 27, Kuwait 22, Sanaa 25, Aden 31, Mukalla 30, Baghdad 18, Beirut 16, Amman 14 Damascus 11, Cairo 18, Tehran 09, Karachi 25, Bombay 27, Ankara 07, Geneva 13, Brus sels 13, Frankfurt 15, Paris 11, London 12, New York 04, Tokyo 10. Seeb..... Mina Sultan Qaboos

Khasab. Mad'ha.

Fahud. Sohar ... Rustaq Saiq Jabal Shams Adam. Haima... Marmul. Mina Raysut Oairoon Hairiti

THECOAST Prizewinners

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Syed Wajit Ali

Elwyn Gonsalves

Mohamed Igbal

Neera Dogra

Haridas N. Toprani

M. Ravindrakumai

Vilas Suravandas

S.P.M. Basheer

V.M. Mohanan

M.N. Thankappan

Somai bint Mansoor bin Al Habsi

Khalaf bin Suleiman Masoud

Mohd. bin Ali bin Al Hofi

Vijay C. Tawdiwala Jalgi Khan Abdulhanan

Issa bin Suleiman bin Mubarak

Sakthivel

2ND PRIZE 250gm Gold

100gm Gold (2 Prizes) Assam bin Shambe Al Balushi Noorjehan bint Yusuf Hussain

Mrs. P. Sawhney Gregory Gomes Hiral S. Tanna

3RD PRIZE

50gm Gold (3 Prizes)

MUSCAT - The legal and educa-

tion and culture committees of the

Majlis Al Shura met at the Majlis

building yesterday. The legal com-

mittee meeting was presided over by Salim bin Hamad Al Mushaifri and

the Education and Culture Committee

meeting was presided over by Al

taken on the basis of studies carried out during earlier Majlis terms, as

well as recent developments in the legal, educational and cultural studies fields.

The committees discussed action

The meetings follow His Majesty

Khattab bin Ahmed Al Kindy.

5th Prize — 5gm Gold (40 Prizes)

Mohd. Nurul Islam S.S. Suvarna Asha bint Talib Al Zadjali G. Dhamayanthi H. Parthasarathy Ashok Salar Issa Abdulla Khalifa Mohd. Nurul Islam Usha Srinivasan S. Moorthy Hamid bin Salam bin Salim B.A. Hamdulay Mahmood Al Hasan Mohd. Wahid Hassan P.M. Jameela Mohd. Rafiq C.C. Balapriya T. Mohamedali Iman bint Ibrahim Dawood S. Meera Hussain Mazin bin Hilal bin Yahya

G.A. Antony M. Srinivas C. John Mohd. bin Ali bin Hamad P. Govinda Rajan Mohan Lal Zainab bint Ali bin Salah K.A. Jaffar Ali S. Karan Dawood M. Suleiman P. Basheer Isma bint Mohd. bin Said

All prize winners are being notified by post/telephone.

Sneha P. Soni



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Transgulf Co. meeting

MUSCAT — Transgulf Co. for Industrial Investment is due to hold its first ordinary meeting on March 15 to discuss various issues including distribution of bonus shares to current

the Sultan's directives at the opening

of the Mailis Al Shura on the need for

Mailis members to contribute their

minutes of this year's previous meet-

ings and reviewed the main legal

studies discussed by the Majlis during

laws in force in the Sultanate and

modification of those laws to bring

them into line with the basic law of

some ideas that had been put forward

Its discussions also touched on the

The committee also reviewed

its first and second terms.

The legal committee approved the

Since its inception in 1996, Transgulf had successfully invested in a host of vital projects in industrial and financial domains.

The company is a partner with 7.5 per cent stake in the Industrial Bank of Oman (under formation). It also owns 10 per cent in the Gulf Mushroom Company, 10 per cent in the Gulf Quarries Co. Transgulf also owns shares in Mazoon First Fund, Muscat Depository and Transfer Co. and Al Madina for Financial and Consultative Service Co. — ONA

Heavy rain in Buraimi

MUSCAT — Light to moderate rainfall was recorded in several areas of the country yesterday and on Sat-

It rained heavily in the wilayats of Buraimi, Ibri, Izki, Al Hamra and Bahla, and there was moderate to heavy rain in the governorate of Mus-Nizwa, Al Musana'ah and Wadi Moderate rain was recorded in the

wilayats of Mahdhah, Bidbid, Al

Khabourah, Al Suwaiq, Sohar, Saham and Khasab There was light to moderate rainfall in the wilayats of Adam and Barka and light rain in the wilayats of Su mail, Al Mudhaibi and Ibra. — ONA

Azizi opens training course on administrative techniques



Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Matar Al Azizi at the opening of the course.

MUSCAT — Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Matar Al Azizi, minister of civil service and head of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), opened a course on recent developments in administrative training syllabi and techniques at

the Holiday Inn The four-day course has been organised by the IPA in conjunction with the Arab Organisation for Administrative Development.

In his opening speech Azizi noted that the course reflected the IPA's desire to expand its cooperation in the Arab and international arenas Sulaiman bin Hilal Al Alawi, acting principal of the

IPA, explained that the institute had played a major role in developing the administrative skills of Omani government employees since it was established at the end of 1977. Dr S. Ahmed Saqr Ashour, director-general of the

Arab Organisation for Administrative Development, gave a speech in which he said that the course would provide participants with the opportunity to re-evaluate current administrative training practices and conditions in their ministries and departments.

The opening ceremony was attended by undersecretaries and directors from the Ministry of Civil Ser-

Thuwaini receives Arab scouts delegation

MUSCAT — His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini bin Shihab Al Said, personal representative of His Majesty the Sultan and president of the National Organisation of Scouts and Guides (NOSG), received the Arab scouts organisation delegation yes-

The delegation includes Mohammed Al Triki, commander in chief and chairman of the Arab Scouts Committee, and Fawzi Mahmoud Farghalli, secretary-general of

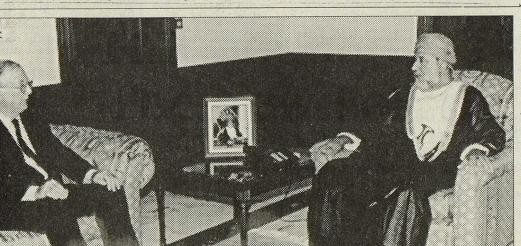
the Arab Scouts Organisation. After welcoming the visiting delegation to Oman and wishing them a pleasant stay, Sayyid Thuwaini briefed them on NOSG's role and explained that NOSG always kept abreast of developments in the Arab Scout Movement.

The chairman of the Arab Scouts Committee conferred the Arab Scouts Organisation's medal marking the 85th anniversary of the founding of the Arab Scout Movement on Sayyid Thuwaini, together with a certificate commemorating the occasion, in honour of Sayyid Thuwaini's services to scouting in Oman and the Arab

Sayyid Thuwaini thanked the delegation for the honour and wished the Arab Scout Movement progress and

Sayyid Soud bin Ibrahim Al Busaidi, minister of education and vicepresident of NOSG, also received the visiting delegation yesterday.

The two sides discussed matters of mutual interest, including the Arab Scouting Movement, NOSG's activities and steps taken to promote the scouting movement's strategy for the



Al Harthy receives British ambassador

Sheikh Hamoud bin Abdullah Al Harthy, president of the Council of State, received Richard Muir, Britain's ambassador to the Sultanate, yesterday. They exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and Al Harthy briefed the ambassador on the Council of State's role and prerogatives. — ONA



Walking, shooting contests

Brigadier Zayed bin Saif Al Hosni, commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade at the Royal Army of Oman, yesterday distributed trophies to the winners of walking and shooting contests conducted by the Northern Border Battalion. The Second Platoon won the championship while the Third and First Platoons emerged first and second runners-up.

Trade team sees wide scope for Oman-UK tie-ups

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — The Gulf states, including Oman, are the easiest markets to get into, mission leader and export development counsellor of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce said in an informal chat with the Times of Oman yesterday.

Norris Myers, who has 30 years experience in the region, said that after the European Union, market attention would automatically shift to

"The Middle East is very friendly to Britain," Myers said, adding that English proved to be the ideal communication tool in business

Not only did both sides benefit because of this, it also widened the scope of gaining inroads into the

market and being more involved in it. Myers heads a 28-member trade delegation that covers a wide range of sectors, including petrochemicals, oil, energy, furniture, curtains, medicines, pipes, industrial equipment, interior

decoration, training, etc. He said that team was on the last leg of its three-day Gulf tour, and would leave today. Before coming to Oman they had visited Dubai and

"Our team has a good mix of sectors, and some are very experienced exporters and have made many forays into Oman, while others are coming for the first time."

The delegation met the director-general of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). "We had a very positive meeting, and discussed many areas of cooperation." One area of cooperation was in the training sector. Myers stressed the importance of training and said that it was important in the growth of the business sector. He said that once the training sector itself improves, the overall scope in development would receive a boost. "It would have a knock-on effect."

Coming back to the economic and investment cooperation between Oman and the United Kingdom, and the result of such trade visits. Myers said that they would "offer no false promises"

It was more of an exploratory visit and both sides were keenly looking into identify areas of cooperation and joint ventures. Companies that have already visited Oman have established representatives, while others were looking out for. "All in



NORRIS MYERS

all it's a successful visit; the companies are encouraged by the

prospects," Myers said He also said that His Majesty the Sultan's declaration of this year as the Year of the Private Sector was a positive step. "Everywhere there is a private and public sectors. The

private sector greatly contributes to the growth of the country. It brings in quality and a sense of healthy

He also noted that overgrowth was a negative phenomenon emanating from this and cautioned

that this should be avoided. Myers, who has worked in Oman in late 1960s, said his main area of interest was in promoting business

and trade. Bristol Chamber, which is based in the south west of England, has been working in the interests of improved trade and economic development since 1823 and plays an active role in assisting UK companies to export. Recently, the chamber has become a partner in Business Link West and the two organisations now work together to support and assist

local companies. Meanwhile, a press note gave a brief insight into some of the companies. Mission member, Geo Science, provides specialised geo-technical consultancy services, Sand P Coil Products manufactures of heat-pipe-based dehumidification systems, either as stand-alone units or for incorporation in air-conditioning systems, Lancashire County Fire

Brigade International provides training in avoiding fire and dealing with outbreaks, Regent Carpets offers complete floor-covering service for all types of public buildings,

including hotels, etc. The mission representative of Hospitality Equipment Supplies said the company sells a wide variety of equipment, including dishwashers, pizza ovens, and added that he was returning to the region "with the particular aim of promoting our

of hotels serving the tourist trade". Shipbroker and chartering agent Killick Martin Chartering's managing director said that they would focus on the dry cargo market and bulk cargo needs of Middle East clients.

products to the ever-growing number

Two companies active in corporate image assessment are taking part in the mission. Inhouse and open training programmes and workshops in inter-cultural skills are run by Green Light Image Consultants, which is looking to

break into the Middle East market. Blurred Vision offers training in communications and presentation skills for front-line employees such receptionists, etc.

Jarwani to attend UAE meet on bourses

MUSCAT - Mahmoud bin Mohammed Al Jarwani, executive president of the Muscat Securities Market, will take part in a seminar on the projected

The one-day symposium, due to start tomorrow, is organised by the UAE's Institute for Banking and Financial Studies.

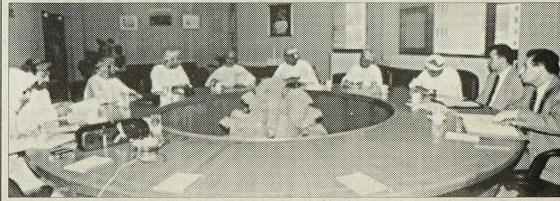
Working papers to be presented at the seminar will cover issues pertaining to the operation of bourses in the next millennium, the trends of securities markets in east Asia and the Arab world as well as the experience of Gulf countries in stock exchanges.

Jarwani will present a working paper on the experience of Gulf countries in operating stock exchanges. — ONA

Chairman of UK trade board due

MUSCAT — Sir Martin Laing CBE, chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, will arrive on a three-day official visit today.

During his stay, Sir Martin will be calling on the ministers and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry officials. His visit is aimed at developing closer contacts between British and Omani business and identifying suitable investment opportunities. — ONA



OCCI panel meets

The committee in charge of establishing a company for organising exhibitions in the Sultanate yesterday held its second meeting at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and selected a constitutional committee to follow-up the project. — ONA

OCI finalises alliance with Dutch company

MUSCAT — Oman Cables Industry (OCI) has finalised a strategic alliance with Draka Holding N.V, The

This was stated by Hussain Salman, vice-chairman and managing director of OCI, while inaugurating the Cable Day function at Rusayl In-

dustrial Estate Authority (RIEA). Speaking on the occasion, Hussain stated that Draka now hold 35 per cent of OCI's increased equity.

Draka cable products were formally launched during the function.

Draka is an international giant in the cable industry with about 36 manufacturing units in over 16 countries, that manufacture special application-oriented cables for the diverse needs of its varied clientele.

The combined turnover of the company exceeds one billion Dutch

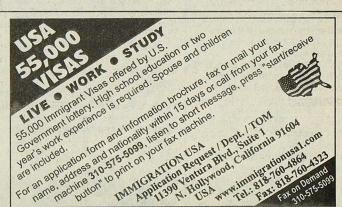
florins.

The key speakers at yesterday's

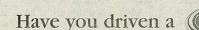
function were A.C. Roy, general manager of OCI; Lee Parsons, business development manager of Draka Holdings; and Nico Holtring, sales director, Draka Projects Centre.

The seminar was attended by dig-nitaries from the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Electricity and Water, Petroleum Development Oman, Oman LNG, and almost all major industries in the Sul-

- 1500 Big 1860 1



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Eight perish in two Paris Irish peace talks to resume amid tension apartment block fires

PARIS — Eight people died and four suffered serious smoke inhalation in two separate fires overnight in northern Paris, firemen announced yes-

terday.

Five of the victims died in a blaze that swept through a five-storey building in a central northern district of the French capital early yesterday.

Two of the victims died of suffocation from the smoke, while three burnt bodies were found on the fifth floor of the building.

The fire, started early yesterday, was probably caused by a boiler according to police.

Rescuers set up a helicopter landing zone in front of Paris' historic opera building to transfer the injured to hospital, including an elderly couple and two others severely injured in the

Earlier yesterday, a man, a woman and her nine-year-old daughter

A police source said the fire was started by a drug-user who accidentally set fire to his bed cover while melting heroin with a candle. The suspect was taken in for questioning by the authorities, the

The man was found dead in the staircase, while the mother and daughter died intoxicated by the

heavy smoke. A dozen people were taken to a nearby hospital suffering from the

effects of smoke. About 30 apartments were dam-

aged in the blaze and inhabitants took shelter in a nearby laundrette. Thousands of apartment buildings in Paris are 19th century multi-storey apartment buildings without fire es-

China to launch 10 satellites by 2000

BELJING - China plans to launch 10 satellites by the end of the century, the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday.

This year should see the launch of a Sino-Brazilian satellite to monitor the earth's resources, it quoted Chinese Academy of Space Technology

director Xu Fuxiang as saying.

Over the past 30 years China has launched around 40 satellites, the

But following the unsuccessful launch of the Donfanghong-3 com-munications satellite in 1994, five failed launches in less than four years have cast doubt on the reliability of Chinese rocket launchers

Work on the improved Dongfanghong-4 communications satellite is nearing completion, Xu added.

Landslide kills Spanish climber in Chile

mountain climber was dead and anshowered a group of six hikers with rocks and snow in southernmost Chile, police said vesterday.

The other four climbers emerged unscathed from the incident, which took place on Thursday in the Torres del Paine mountain range, some 1,800km south of here.

Antonio Alonso Susperregui died crushed by the landslide, which dragged off his companion Gaiska Raskin Izquierdo, police said.

Two air force and police helicopters and teams of patrols on the ground were searching for Raskin Iz-quierdo on Saturday. Martin Zabaleta Larburo, Gerardo Tellechea Iturburu, Josetxo Rodriguez Salazar and Andoni Areizaga Orube returned to the

German MPs to visit Sri Lanka

delegation of German parliamentarians was due to arrive in Sri Lanka on a three-day official visit, the foreign ministry said. The team is expected to have

COLOMBO — A seven-member

talks with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, the ministry said in a statement.

The purpose of the visit is to get themselves acquainted with the current political and economic situation in this country," the statement said.

Diana fund to open office in US

office in the United States to allow

dation otherwise if they give to a British foundation they cannot claim tax advantages which is important to some people," she added.

Last month, the institution announced that all future professional legal work would be put out to tender, following disclosure that London lawyers Mishcon de Reya had sent a £500,000 (\$800,000) bill for legal

Anthony Julius, a partner in the princess during her divorce from Prince Charles, is interim chairman

BELFAST - Peace talks on the future of Northern Ireland are to resume today without Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, amid a climate of violent ten-

sion exacerbated by a car-bomb blast two days ago.

Despite a lack of hard evidence, police suspect that the hardline republican group Continuity Army Council (CAC) may have been behind the explosion late Friday outside a police station in the Protestant village of Moira. Lending weight to these suspicions on the eve of the resumption of talks

were the British Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam and Sinn Fein lead-"One of the problems we have in Northern Ireland is the number of groups who are not committed to the ceasefire, who in fact are intent on destroving it," said Mowlam

A Sinn Fein leader Mitchel McLaughlin said in a television interview yesterday that "the speculation at the moment would appear to point towards the

Any hint of Irish Republican Army (IRA) involvement in the Moira carbomb would bring a permanent end to Sinn Fein's historic participation in the talks and would leave the peace process in tatters.

As representatives prepared for today's round of talks, frustration was running high in both loyalist and republican camps over the expulsion until March 9 of Sinn Fein, due to police suspicions of IRA involvement in two re-

The small Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), expelled in January for a month from the talks due to links with a Protestant militia involved in a series of killings, described the shorter Sinn Fein ban as unjust.

The UDP is to rejoin the talks today, when discussions are expected to focus on the thorny problem of how much influence the Irish Republic should have in the running of British-governed Northern Ireland.

Protestant representatives want this influence shorn down to the bare minimum, while Catholic republicans see Dublin's involvement as crucial.

Sinn Fein supporters, many of whom at grass-roots level are increasingly disenchanted by the peace process, are meanwhile smarting over their party's expulsion. Leader Gerry Adams is to be kept informed of the progress of the talks in his absence and is next week expected to meet Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and possibly British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In the aftermath of Friday's bomb, Adams and his number two, Martin McGuinness warned of the consequences of excluding Sinn Fein from the

Both are aware of the flagging confidence in the peace process, which has been overshadowed by mounting violence despite claims that both unionist and republican ceasefires are intact.

"There are many dangers but we are prepared to face up to those difficulties," said McGuinness yesterday, adding: "We believe we can only hope to bring about a peace settlement if we can bring about inclusive and meaningful negotiations. Adams said on Saturday that "before Sinn Fein was expelled from the talks

we warned there would be groups or individuals from within a wide spectrum who would do their best to keep us out."

The incidents of the past two days, including the discovery of an explosive

device under a taxi belonging to a former republican prisoner in west Belfast on Saturday, have done little to defuse tension between Protestants and Cath-

The discovery of the device drew instant accusations of an attempted loy alist attack from Sinn Fein local councillors, countering local Ulster Unionist MP Jeffrey Donaldson's claims that the IRA may have "sanctioned" Friday's

Meanwhile, police suspect that a splinter group of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was behind a car-bomb blast outside a Northern Ireland police station, sources close to the investigation said yesterday. No one has yet claimed responsibility for Friday night's blast in the Protestant village of Moira, 30km west of Belfast, which slightly injured 11 people.

According to the sources, police have little hard evidence, but investigators speculate that the hardline Continuity Army Council (CAC) may be behind

A Sinn Fein leader Mitchel McLaughlin lent weight to this theory yesterday in a television interview in which he said "the speculation at the moment would appear to point towards the Continuity Army Council.'

Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam stressed that hardline factions such as the CAC, which refuses to respect the IRA ceasefire, were bent on derailing the peace talks.

"One of the problems we have in Northern Ireland is the number of groups

who are not committed to the ceasefire -- who are in fact intent on destroying

Brazilian film grabs Golden Bear award

BERLIN — The Brazilian film Central do Brasil by director Walter Salles yesterday won the top Golden Bear award at the 48th Berlin film

The film, about a small boy searching for his father, also scored a best actress award — a Silver Bear for the performance of Brasilian star Fernanda Montenegro who plays the boy's mother, a hard, ferocious

Based around a road movie trip from one end of Brazil to the other, both characters are in search of something. The 10-year-old boy looking for his father, his mother in search of herself.

Salles' film received a 20 minute standing ovation from the audience at this year's festival who applauded the film's gritty portrayal of daily life in Brazil, frequently both violent and poor. US actor Samuel L. Jackson won best actor for his role in the Ouentin Tarantino-directed Jackie time arms smuggler in search of money owed to him in Mexico.

Irish film-maker Neil Jordan won the Silver Bear award for best director for his movie, The Butcher Boy, another movie about a difficult childhood like Central do Brasil.

French director Alain Resnais also received an award for a lifetime achievement and his latest film, On connait la chanson (We know the song) was well received. Wag the Dog, a US film by di-

rector Barry Levinson about a president who fakes a war with Albania to divert media attention from a sexual scandal in the White House, won the jury's prize.

The film which bears echoes of US President Bill Clinton's own trials and tribulations amid a sex scandal involving himself and a young White House worker, stars Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro. — AFP

Dyslexia is hereditary: Researchers

LONDON - Two British research scientists say they have proved that dyslexia is an inherited condition.

Oxford university professor John Stein and Professor Tony Monaco of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics told the Observer newspaper they had found three common genes associated with dyslexia in blood samples from 90 fam-

"This discovery proves once and for all that dyslexia is hereditary," Stein told the Observer, published

He said research was carried out by studying DNA samples in blood supplies from 90 families in which a parent and a child suffered from chronic difficulties with reading and spelling, despite high levels of intelligence.

The researchers found that the section of chromosome linked to dyslexic problems is close to the genes that control immunity, suggesting that sufferers may be susceptible to attacks from anti-

Stein said he hoped his research would help to lift the stigma suffered by dyslexic people and help establish early tests for problems. — Reuters

Georgian kidnappers release one hostage

ZUGDIDI (Georgia) — Gunmen holding four UN observers and six locals in a remote village in western Georgia released one of their hostages, an Uruguayan captain, after four days of tense negotiations, of-

ficials said vesterday. The man's liberation follows indications from the 20-strong armed group that they would release one of the two Uruguayan UN military observers they held in return for UN troops replacing the 2,000 Georgian soldiers ringing the village of Jikhashkari.

His release leaves nine other hosages in the hands of the gunmen: The other Uruguayan, a Swede and a Czech who were all snatched Thursday while on UN monitoring duty, and six Georgians, including the mayor of the village and his family.

There was confusion over the identity of the freed hostage, how-The Georgian official who first

announced his release, Georgian par-liamentary deputy Gia Jakeli, said the Uruguayan was Captain Ronald Gar-

Later, in the Urguayan capital of Montevideo, Defence Minister Raul

Iturria confirmed the release, but said the freed hostage was Captain Julio Navas, 37.

Journalists near Jikhashkari saw the freed hostage leave the village. He was driven in a security ministry car to Zugdidi, 18km away, where the UN monitors' base is located.

UN representatives made no immediate comment on the development, nor was there any sign of UN troops replacing Georgian security forces The leader of the gunmen, Gotsha

Esaybua, earlier told state television his men "could go as far as taking extreme measures" unless his group's demands were met, saying "we have nothing to lose." Esaybua heads a group of diehard supporters of late president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, ousted in a January 1992 coup, who have never recognised the legitimacy of his successor, current President Eduard Shevardnadze.

The gang first threatened to kill their hostages when the drama erupt ed on Thursday. They are demanding a meeting

between Shevardnadze and their movement's leadership; the release of jailed "Zviadists" including those linked to a February 9 bid to kill Shevardnadze; and the closure of Russian military bases in Georgia.

Esaybua reinforced his threats in a second interview with Russia's television station ORT, saying: "The fate of the hostages is in the hands of Shevardnadze. We will go all the way if our demands are not met.'

Shevardnadze talked by telephone with Czech President Vaclav Havel and Uruguayan President Julio Maria Sanguinetti late on Saturday to discuss the crisis.

The Interfax news agency cited Georgian Security Minister Jemal Gakhokidze as saying that the talks he was conducting would continue until the hostages were released, and ruled out launching a raid on the farmhouse. Deputy presidential spokesman Soso Tkebuchava earlier hinted the authorities were looking into the possibility of a meeting between Shevardnadze and the Zviadist

"The parties are examining the question of a meeting between President Shevardnadze and the Zviadists, not as representatives of the govern-

tion party," said Tkebuchava. - AFF Australia ready

SYDNEY — The impact of the

tion is imminent," Deputy Labour op-position leader Gareth Evans told na-

tralian economy.

"Rock and roll started and finished with Elvis Presley, right, and everybody since then has been ripping off everybody else and I'm ripping off people who have come before me and I'm sure in 10 years' time people will be ripping off me and

writer and guitarist, was joined at the press conference a few hours before their performance by bass player Paul McGuigan ("Guigsy"). Lead singer and Noel's younger brother Liam was

"probably shopping or in bed."

The band later treated a mainly expatriate audience to 90 minutes of the best of "Brit Pop", spiced with expletives between songs, in Hong Kong's cavernous Convention Centre

mainstay of British rock group Oasis, renewed his war of words with ex-Beatle Sir Paul McCartney and took pot shots at current pop sensations the Spice Girls on the band's first appear-

Gallagher, with the band on their "Be Here Now" world tour, rebuffed accusations of plagiarism by saying that everybody, even the Beatles, had

— venue for handover celebrations last July. — AFP

party killed in Kerala

MALAPPURAM (Kerala) - Seventeen members of a marriage party, including 10 women and two children, were killed in the southern Indian state of Kerala when their jampacked jeep and a private bus collided head on at Kattungal in the district yesterday, police said.

spot, two succumbed to injuries in hospital. The condition of another Medical College hospital, was stated to be serious, according to official re-

The deceased included the jeep driver. The ill-fated jeep belonged to the bride's relative and had been engaged at the last minute when the tempo booked by the party did not turn up in time, the reports said.

the spot, saw the jeep in a totally wrecked condition under the impact of the collision. Meanwhile, Chief Minister E. K.

Nayanar, who was on an election tour in the district, cancelled all his engagements and visited the accident spot and residences of the victims. On the chief minister's instruction, an ex gratia payment of Rs10,000 to the kin of the deceased and Rs5,000 to the injured had been sanctioned, District Collector Pradeep Ku

Evans said yesterday there was a

Asian financial crisis and signs that the economy is set to slump have set the wheels in motion for an early election in July, senior opposition figures said yesterday.

He said the government had to go to the polls before the full impact of

"The real impact of the Asian crisis has not yet become apparent in terms of business collapses and so on in the region. A real fall away in domestic growth, that'll come later.

land rights legislation in full. Aborigines and Labour have bitterly opposed the bill, which would reverse most of the land rights granted under a series of high court rulings to Australia's Aboriginal

In preparation, Howard has mapped a platform of tax reform, including the introduction of a goods and services tax (GST) to fund income tax cuts and a better deal for

More recently, amid fresh signs of

of an election this year.

Last month he said he

see out his full three-year term. And in confirming the budget due on May 12 would be on schedule, he effectively ruled out an election before mid-year.

But Evans, foreign minister in Paul Keating's previous Labour gov-ernment, said domestic growth was eroding rapidly and the government would not wait. "There's no doubt that there was a

lot of complacency about this last year," he said.
"The first export figures beginning to show up demonstrate that

the implications for us are going to be really quite serious." Australian Bureau of Statistics figures on Saturday showed trade with

key Asian nations was slashed by up

to a third in the December quarter. The London-based Economist Intelligence Unit has sharply reduced Australia's 1999 growth outlook to 2.3 per cent from 3.7 per cent, well below government predictions of 3.25 per cent growth in the financial year to June 1999. — AFP

UK royals to appoint 'spin doctor'

LONDON — Queen Elizabeth is to appoint a professional "spin doctor" to boost the image of Britain's royal family after in-depth opinion polls found the royals were seen as remote, wasteful and badly advised, the Sunday Times reported.

The newspaper said what it called the "royal spin doctor" would be responsible for promoting greater understanding of the monarchy's role and its contribution to national life.

The new director of communications would have direct access to the queen and would make sure that key members of the royal family took the same line on big news stories.

The press offices for different royals would be merged to ensure a united front and annual reports on the royal household would be published,

The newspaper reported the de2 cision followed dismay at Bucking-ham Palace over the findings of an opinion poll conducted by Mori following the death of Princess Diana last August, when the royals were criticised for appearing out of touch with the tide of grief that swept the

Buckingham Palace could not be reached for comment on the report or, on the findings of the Mori survey, which was intended for private use by the royal family.

The Sunday Times said the survey found that despite a warming towards, heir to the throne Prince Charles and consistent respect for the queen herself, most people wanted the royal family to listen more to public opin-

It said people also wanted less of the "bowing and curtseying, white gloves and courtiers dancing at-

"Much of the criticism of the royal family is focused on the 'antics' of the younger royals," the newspaper quoted the Mori report as saying. They were criticised for lacking dignity "while still expecting deference,d financial support and extended hol-It said recent moves to cut the

number of royals whose living ex-penses are met by taxpayers, and other efforts to modernise the monarchy - such as the queen agreeing to pay income tax - had failed to register. fully with the public. - Reuters

Lanka police grill bombing mastermind COLOMBO - Sri Lankan de-

tectives are questioning a Tamil man believed to be the mastermind behind a devastating truck bombing of Buddhism's holiest shrine, police said yesterday.

The man identified as Muttusamypillai Darmalingam, 45, was

women and two men who were sheltering him in the district of Trincomalee before his planned escape to rebel-held territory, police said.
"The man is being interrogated now," a police source said. "He seems to be the man who planned out

arrested on Friday together with four

the attack while his deputy has already escaped to Mullaitivu (in the north-east). Dharmalingam was awaiting a boat of the Liberation Tigers of

officials said They said he was the key figure who organised the January 25 truck bombing of the 16th century Temple

killed and about 25 wounded. Police declined to say how the ar-rest was possible but said it was based on information from several

elling as a businessman to the northern and eastern provinces where the LTTE is active. The government had said three members of the LTTE drove the ex-

plosives-packed truck to the shrine, 8 1

regarded as Buddhism's holiest, and

set it off, killing themselves as well

posed by a New York state legislator to ban nose piercing for those under 18 has raised opposition from South Asians, who say it is a centuries-old tradition in the subcontinent. Citing health concerns, a state Senator, Frank Padavan, has introduced a law that would make nose piercing illegal in New York for those under 18. The move could also mar the present fad amongst the young to get various parts of their bodies - ranging from navels, eyebrows, lips to tongues

The law, which was introduced in January, would fine merchants for piercing any part of the body, except the ears, of a minor.

pierced.

make it a misdemeanour to pierce or apply a tattoo to anyone who is intoxicated. Padavan said in announcing the legislation: "Since the majority of tattooists and body piercers are not

Many South Asians said that nose

for those under 18.

"I personally don't like it," Sunita Kanwar, manager of Krishna Jew-ellers, said. "There's no way they would pass it. That would be kind of "In India, nose piercing has been done since the beginning of time and I don't think it has anything to do with health concerns," she said. Kanwar said her store performs nose piercing but that it requires minors who want piercing to have their parents present. "When we tell them we

Shelly Khan, 18, and a student at a borough of Manhattan Community College, said law to restrict nose piercing for those under 18 is not a good idea. "That's a cultural thing for Indians. There shouldn't be a law

A spokesperson for the CDC told newsmen that there is no known case of HIV being transmitted through body piercing, but it recommends tattooists and those offering body piercing follow the same guidelines as health professionals.

On January 1, a law went into ef-od fect in California that forbade those under 18 to get pierced (except the 59 ears) or tattooed without parental ap-

Christie Todd Whitman vetoed a bill last month that would have severely to restricted access of minors to body piercing and tattoos. Padavan would not say whether he expected the New

York bill to pass. Another sponsor of the New York bill, Assemblyman Anthony Seminerio, a Democrat from Queens, said that cultural traditions in South Asia should not determine law in New York State. "In South Asia that's

- India Abroad News Service

LONDON - The Diana, Princess of

Wales, Memorial Fund will open an US citizens to deduct their donations from tax, the organisation announced yesterday. It is the first office outside Britain set up by the fund, which was created after Diana's August 31 death to raise money for her favourite charities. "America is a particular case because of the tax situation." Vivienne Parry, an official of the fund, said.

If you raise money in the USA

services to the charity. firm and the man who represented the of the fund - AFP

LUANDA — Landmine victim Sandra Tigica, 12, will never forget Princess Diana's visit a year ago to An-

gola, because their brief meeting changed the girl's life. The war-shattered southern African country was where Diana began her campaign for a world-wide ban on anti-personnel mines, a crusade cut short by her death in a car crash

in Paris last August.

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Sandra has since been reunited with her family whom she had last seen before an air raid in November 1994, in the closing days of Angola's 20year-long civil war. Donations have helped her attend

With the help of the International

anda, where most learning centres are crippled by a lack of teaching materials and poor infrastructure. Sandra stays with expatriate staff from the Norwegian People's Aid, which runs Angola's biggest mine

a private school in the capital Lu-

clearance operation. During Diana's visit to Angola, one of the world's most heavily mined countries, she witnessed the destruction of war and the plight of some of the country's estimated 35,000 landmine victims. She died before her promises of gifts for people and funding to quicken the pace of clearing Angola's estimated 10

But Sandra, who was 11 years old when she posed with Diana for photographers under a tree at Luanda's red cross-funded orthopaedic centre, still sees a positive future. Diana watched doctors at the or-

thopaedic centre fit Sandra with an

artificial leg. She had stepped on a

million landmines could be fulfilled.

northeastern Lunda Sul province.

Angolan mine victims

IT ISN'T ANTHRAX: L. Siller, left, special agent in charge of the Las Vegas office of the FBI and his

deputy Walt Stowe, announcing during a press conference that laboratory tests have determined that a

substance seized in Las Vegas earlier this week is a harmless veterinary vaccine to prevent anthrax and not

Diana changed lives of

the dangerous bacteria that could spread the disease to humans or animals. - AFP

"My life is different now and l am very happy. I go to school and I might go to school in Portugal when I pass my exams," Sandra says shyly. Angola is a former Portuguese col-

She says she was saddened by Di-

ana's sudden death and watched the

funeral and the thousands of people who mourned her loss on television. "It is very sad," she says, going to cupboard in her bedroom where she keeps mementoes of Diana's visit. She pulls out a postcard of Diana sent to her by a British television crew retracing the princess's landmine campaign in Angola and a few

months later in Bosnia. "She never sent me the toys she promised, but I understand that she was very busy. She was very famous," says Sandra, who admits that when she first met Diana she did not realise who she was. Landmines scattered across Angola's vast countryside prevent people from going

back home and rebuilding their lives. A survey by Norwegian People's Aid shows that just a small percentage of minefields were mapped by the many armies which took part in Angola's war after it obtained independence from Portugal in 1975. It takes five minutes to plant a

mine, but several hours to lift one. In Huambo, once Angola's breadbasket but a city now in rubble, Diana walked alongside a minefield and later detonated a mine found by de-miners from the British-based Halo Trust.

The site has since been cleared

and families are able to grow crops.

thopaedic Centre, which treats about 100 new patients a month, Diana met more victims including 12-year-old Daniel Felizberto, whom she watched play soccer with his artificial limbs He was the only survivor in a group of friends killed when a land-

mine they found on their way to

Diana lasted just a few minutes and

Daniel says his conversation with

school exploded.

the publicity he has received after the visit has not always helped. Workers at the orthopaedic centre say Daniel, the youngest of six children in a family who survive on one meal a day, is often chased from home unless he brings money from journalists who interview him over

his meeting with the princess.

ana because then his mother hears of his meeting with journalists and she demands money from him," one said. "If he doesn't bring home anything, his mother kicks him out of the house. This is very traumatic for him." The ICRC head in Huambo, Vibeke Skauerud, agrees Diana's vis-

it helped focus world attention on the

"Sometimes Daniel will not talk

about his meeting with Princess Di-

"It has become easier to obtain funds for the lifting of landmines. But for people here (in Huambo), they didn't know who she was and she was just another lady visitor.' Diana's visit to Angola, in support of a British Red Cross campaign to

ban anti-personnel mines, drew more

attention to the issue in a few days

than international meetings had in

scourge of landmines.

Gallagher takes shot at McCartney, Spice Girls HONG KONG - Noel Gallagher.

'ripped off" their predecessors. Everything's been done before by every band, a million times," he said.

that's the way it is."

Noel Gallagher, the group's song-

17 of marriage

While 15 of them died on the three, admitted to the Kozhikode

A PTI correspondent, who visited

for July elections

"All the signs are that a July elec-

the Asian crisis was felt by the Aus-

election must be called by March 1999 Prime Minister John Howard has already vowed to go to the polls early if the upper house refuses a second time to pass controversial Aboriginal

stark choice for the electorate.
"If they vote for the (ruling) Liberals they get a GST. If they vote for

falling support for his government, Howard has tried to calm speculation

> Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to make his escape when police swooped on him,

> > of the Tooth where 17 people were

others who had been taken in for The key suspect had been trav-

as 14 Buddhist pilgrims. — AFP Law against nose piercing opposed in United States

Merchants who pierce a minor would face a \$500 fine or three months in jail. The law would also

trained as health care practitioners, the risk of bacterial infection, hepatitis B and Aids has been recognised by the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) Aids/HIV division.

piercing is an important tradition

among them that should remain legal

need their parents' consent, they don't come back," she said.

against that," she said

Padavan said that public health concerns outweigh the cultural significance nose piercing may have for some. "While culture is important, we are talking about health and welfare

of children here," he said. In the New York law, there is no provision for parental consent for

later negotiations on the bill. Bills to limit access of minors to be body piercing have been sprouting up as in legislatures across the country re-us cently, as the popularity of body and piercing has grown among teenagers. 101

body piercing, something which ex-

ists in laws in other states. Padavan

a parental consent clause in the New 31

York law should that be proposed in

said he "would consider" agreeing to

proval. A similar bill was signed in in Delaware recently. But in New Jersey, Governor

fine, but you're in America," he said.

1,200 illegal immigrants arrested

ISLAMABAD — In a big operation, the law enforcement agencies have apprehended 1,200 illegal immigrants from different parts of Pakistan, says an official report, made available

here yesterday.

The report, released by the federal government, says that most of the arrests have been made in the Sindh and Punjab provinces of the country. "The arrested illegal immigrants include the nationals of India. Bangladesh and Burma," it adds.

In a recent action, the report says, the law enforcement agencies arrested 60 criminals from Karachi division and recovered lethal weapons from their possession. "The forces have also arrested five terrorists while four accused have been killed in an armed encounter with the law enforcement agencies,'

it says.
"In an operation clean-up in Akakhel and Hasankhel areas of the Khyber Agency in tribal areas, 11 hostages have been rescued from their captors and 28 houses of the culprits have been demolished," the report says.

It says that armed contingents of the Balochistan Frontier Corps have been deployed on Rojhan-Dera Ghazi Khan section of the Indus Highway to provide security to the staff of a Turkish construction company. Similarly, it adds, the paramilitary troops have been posted on Kandhkot-Kashmir section of the Indus Highway to guard the material of the National Highway Authority. - Internews

Tribal love youth seeks govt help

KARACHI - A Karachi youth who this month broke a tribal taboo by secretly marrying an Afridi Pashtun girl urged Pakistani authorities vesterday not to hand over his beloved to her parents, claiming they

"I know the tribal traditions. Some are barbaric in nature. If the girl is given to them, then there will be the death of my love," 30-year old Kanwar Ahsan said.

"Let my love live. I want my wife alive," he said as the tribesmen from the country's north warned that unless Riffat Afridi was handed over the Pashtun community would call for a nationwide strike

The Pashtuns claim Riffat was abducted by Ahsan, who is from the Urdu-speaking Mohajir community. They paralysed Karachi with a day-long strike on February 11 that sparked violence in which two people

"We both have pledged to face any danger," said Ahsan, who is now in police custody. Police have not yet found Riffat and sources here said she was safe "in protective custody."
Elders of the Afridi tribe

including Riffat's parents now say the girl was already married to her cousin Nizabat Khan, who has petitioned the Sindh High Court for her return.

Ahsan said his bride would be taken to the tribal area bordering Afghanistan if she were handed over. "They will shoot or stone her to death," he said.

He cited an earlier incident in which a girl who had married without her parents' consent was killed and the body thrown in a river.

Ahsan said he and his wife, facing death threats, would seek asylum abroad. — AFP

It's difficult to identify nationals from aliens

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's top census officer has said his office cannot distinguish between national and aliens unless they reveal their

identity voluntarily.
"If someone is holding a Pakistani identity card, there is no way our men can say that they are not Pakistani citizens," Chief Census Commissioner Javed Akram told reporters here yesterday.

Pakistan next month conducts the massive population and housing census, the first in 17 years. Spread over 16 days, the gigantic counting exercise will be conducted by over 150,000 civilian enumerators and 60,000 military troops to ensure

peaceful and correct counting. "We have asked the provincial governments to identify the areas where they believe illegal aliens are residing. We would be taking more care in those areas to identify the illegal immigrants and bona fide

residents," Akram said. According to official estimates, there are over seven million illegal aliens residing in the country, most of them from Afghanistan. Other nationalities include Indians, Bangladeshis, Iranians, Sri Lankans, Burmese and Chinese. The Afghans are the hardest to identify as their appearances and language matches those of Pushto-speaking peoples of

North West Frontier Province and Balochistan Detailing about the penalties for misreporting or miscounting, the commissioner said, the punishment for false reporting or exaggerated enumeration had been enhanced to

enforce accuracy. "False information will entail imprisonment and/or fine of up to six months and Rs 15,000 respectively. This step has been taken to serve as a deterrence against

wrong provision of figures," Akram "Besides," he added, "if an enumerator, who is being paid one month's salary for helping the government carry out this exercise, is found guilty, his salary would also be deducted." — *Internews*

Time for Benazir, Sharif to go, says Leghari

needs an alternative leadership as both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto have failed to deliver the goods, said former president Farooq Leghari in an interview here

"The military played no role in the ouster of Benazir Bhutto's government in 1996 or in bringing into power Nawaz Sharif. Both of them have pushed the nation into an ocean of frustration and the people will reject them in the next polls, Leghari said.

To get out of this rut, he said, needs to substitute its present leadership with one that is better tuned to reality and responsive to the people's requirements.

Asked what was the "secret" behind the unprecedented mandate of the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Leghari said he had none because he believed in open, not secret politics. He opined that the people were fed up with the ruling junta, including of Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Zardari.

"Perhaps the people thought

Bhutto except Nawaz Sharif," he

"Due to foolproof arrangements for the general elections in 1997, rigging or tampering with election results was not possible, while the army was impartial during the election process. This was the reason that none of the politicians complained about rigging in the elections," the president said when asked

about Bhutto's charges of rigging.

About why he had sacked the government of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, the exconfidante of the PPP chairperson said he had done so to "save the country from being declared a defaulter by international monetary and financial institutions."

What was his relationship with Nawaz Sharif like while he was president? "I made it clear to him to concentrate on the revival of national economy if he wanted to justify his 'mandate," Leghari said.

Alleging that both Sharif and Benazir made much money through

commissions, he said those who plun-

dered national wealth and transferred

that Benazir lied when she accused the secret agencies of destabilising her government.

He denied former chief justice Sajjad Ali Shah's contention that the army cheated him by asking him to put off disqualification references against the prime minister. "During the court proceedings against the prime minister, I got time off for Nawaz Sharif from the chief justice, not the army, as now alleged by him," Leghari maintained.

However, he defended Sajjad Ali Shah as a good person. "He is an upright person. He does not lie and if he joins politics, it will be a good omen. Though he is not a politician, he is a good Muslim and the people also like him. He is a man of principles and our politics needs such people."

Talking about the economic policies of the present government, the former president said that the priorities of the Prime Minister were different from the needs and demands of the people. "The agenda of constructing motorways and airports is dangerous for the national economy. The policies of the Sharif government

are taking the country towards economic disaster," he opined.

To a question about leasing out the Islamabad-Lahore section of the motorway, the former president said several frontmen were involved in it. These people will plunder everything and I am collecting proofs in this respect," he added.

Referring to Sharif's examples from the past about constructing roads, Leghari said, "I have yet to come across someone so foolish and reckless as him." When asked about the prospective substitute of Sharif and Bhutto, he said, "it is difficult to anything about this, however, both the top leaders have frustrated the nation

About the future of the country, the former president said new issues were coming up and Sharif was mishandling them. "The handling of Karachi situation and Pakhtoonkhwa issue will promote provincialism in the country. However, the transfer of power to the local bodies from the provinces and then to the street level will create a sense of people's participation in power," he said.

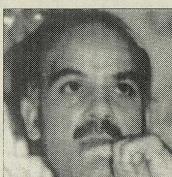
Over 8,000 Shahbaz orders go disobeyed

powerful provincial chief minister in Pakistan and brother of the prime minister, but the government departments he heads have refused to obey thousands of his directives, terming them illegal.

"Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif last year issued 8,104 directives to 102 departments, including those working under the federal government. Only 436 were implemented," an official of the Punjab Chief Minister Secretariat was quoted as saying by daily Nawa-i-Waqt here yesterday.
"A total of 5,427 of Sharif's di-

rectives are still lying pending, while 1,345 have not been looked into," he added. According to the official, various departments sent back 896 directives of the chief minister with apologies, saying those orders were unlawful. Provincial Law Minister Basharat Raja recently told Punjab assembly that the Chief Minister Secretariat did not issue any directive on behalf of Shahbaz Sharif. However, it has been admitted in the correspondence between the provincial civil secretariat and that of the Chief

Minister Secretariat that Sharif did



SHAHBAZ SHARIF: Helpless indeed issued all these directives.

The official informed that the secretary of implementation and liaison has held several meetings with the of-ficials of the department and in-formed them about the chief minister's anger at the non-

implementation of his directives. 'Out of 75 directives, the food department implemented only one, while three were implemented by the information department out of a total of six issued. The housing department entertained only eight orders of the chief minister out of a total of 249 and sent its apologies over

the official said.

'Only two directives have been implemented by the finance department out of a total of 93, apologies were tendered over 85, while six have not been received by the department. Ten orders have been adhered to by the livestock department out of a total of 17, while four of out 10 have been implemented by the transport department," the official said.

According to him, out of a total

of 154 directives of the chief min-

ister, issued to the local government department and rural development department, just 21 have been implemented. He said that the works and communications department obeyed 110 orders out of a total of 233, while the education department entertained not even a single out of the 1,302 directives. "The police department abided by Shahbaz Sharif's 39 orders out of a total of 520, the population welfare department en-tertained four of 16, the health department adhered to 28 out of 515 and the co-operatives department implemented 16 orders out of a total of 52 issued," the official added. — Internews

hold up plane

ISLAMABAD — Three drunken Pakistani parliamentarians held up a passenger flight at a New Delhi airport and went on a shopping spree at the airport's duty-free arcade, a news

"On December 23, three members of the National Assembly belonging to the ruling Pakistan Muslim League of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held up a Pakistan International Airlines flight for over 40 minutes while they shopped at the duty-free arcade at the Indira Gandhi International Airport," the daily The Nation reported.

Although the rest of the pas-sengers had boarded the Lahorebound plane well in time, the three privileged parliamentarians did not bother to attend to the repeated announcements made by the PIA staff

2B, 2C, without the help of the crew, the report said.

'Since they had not quenched their thirst completely, they carried shopping bags full of liquor bottles along with them into the plane. Liquor in Pakistan is banned and nobody can consume, sell or carry this commodity. But since they were the lawmakers, nobody dared check them for the wrongdoing," the newspaper

The flight got delayed because the parliamentarians were buying liquor from the duty-free shop, which is not possible in Pakistan. When the flight No. PK-271 took off, one of the three started dripking on board

started drinking on board.

"To the shock of all the passengers and the crew, the privileged parliamentarians got so drunk that he could not even rise to the call of nature. Then and there his bladder refused to carry anymore weight and the worthy legislator emptied his bowels on his seat," the report

The incident is reminiscent of former military president of Pakistan Yahya Khan, who also got so drunk that he urinated in front of dozens of presidents, prime ministers and heads of states at a get-together in Tehran where he had gone to represent his

take into account their precious time and dignity," he added.

Shopping MPs for 40 minutes

report revealed here.

"Since the three MPs had the boarding passes, the plane couldn't have taken off without taking them along. After a delay of over 40 minutes, when the three privileged finally boarded the plane, they were drunk and unable to arrive at their seats, 2A,

added.

country at a royal extravaganza hosted by king Riza Pehlavi of Iran.

"It was like an emergency on

board," a passenger travelling in the plane said. "All the passengers were appalled at the apathy of the leg-islators and the crew, who did not

port, the parliamentarian was escorted on a wheel-chair, arranged by the efficient PIA crew, to his car waiting outside. "Would PIA have delayed the flight to tolerate such a disaster for a common passenger," the aghast passenger asked. — *Internews*

for boarding the plane.

As soon as the plane landed at air-

Pakistan not serious to wipe out terrorism: Iran

TEHRAN — Iran has accused Pakistan of lacking resolve in tracking down extremists responsible for a string of terrorist attacks against Iranian nationals and warned that ties could be affected, Iran's official news agency Irna said yesterday.

The Pakistani ambassador here,

Javid Hussein, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, hours after two Iranian construction engineers were shot dead by unknown assailants in the Pakistani port city of Deputy Foreign Minister Mohsen

Aminzadeh "protested that Pakistani officials are not serious in pursuing and punishing culprits for such incidents and demanded an explanation," Irna said.

"We are concerned that Pakistan has been turned into an unsafe place Iranian nationals and urge Pakistani officials to seriously review the means by which they confront the culprits," he said.

The enemies have made relations between the two countries a target of their ominous plots and if Pakistani officials do not review their methods, relations will be seriously affected," Aminzadeh warned. Three people attacked the engineers at their work site and fled on

two motorbikes, police and witnesses said. The Iranians were identified as Ali Mohammed Habib Zadeh, 36, and Murtaza Adib Zadeh, 48. The two were supervising the construction of a flyover by an

Iranian company in the seaside Clifton area. They had arrived about eight months ago to work on the Rs300 million project being built by Machine Sazi Arak Iran. Their bodies arrived early yesterday in Tehran and several officials, the victims' families and col-

leagues and the Pakistani ambassador attended a ceremony for the slain MP Mahmud Astaneh told Javid that he regretted that Pakistani of-

ficials "are taking no serious action to deal with the terrorists." "The criminals are now convinced that the Pakistani government is

weak and unable to confront them.

So they feel safe," he said, quoted by Irna. The MP urged Pakistani judicial officials to speed up proceedings and issue verdicts against suspects in previous terrorist attacks against Iranian nationals in Pakistan. The Pakistani ambassador was also called to a meeting on Saturday

with parliamentary speaker Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who blamed "foreign hands" for the killings.

"Many people do not want us to have freindly relations and are seeking to cause problems," he said. "We are sure foreign hands are involved in such incidents.

The speaker also urged Islamabad to take "seriously this sensitive and important matter." "Our people are waiting to learn about the results of your actions," he added.

The attack was the latest in a series against Iranian nationals in the past few years. Five Iranian air force personnel were gunned down in September in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi. An underground tremist group claimed responsibility

Risk of Indo-Pak N-war greater than considered **STOCKHOLM** — The risk of nuclear war is not fully appreciated by Pakistan and India because of the faulty notion that nuclear deterrence has stabilised the Indo-Pak conflict, says a startling report. greater incentive for Pakistan to deploy nuclear armed ballistic missiles and perhaps more nuclear warheads and the materials of which they are made, the study says. "As the nuclear weapons states continue to reduce their nuclear arsenals "Despite the common perception that India does not receive much and international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons are

These statements come from a report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Spiri), titled 'Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in south Asia After the Test Ban,' made available here. "Despite the recent popularity of the notion that nuclear deterrence is stabilising the Indo-Pak conflict, there is good reason to believe that the risks of war and of the use of nuclear weapons are not fully appreciated," it says.

deters war and therefore reduces the risks to the country in covertly supporting insurgencies on Indian territory," the report says. However, it adds, "this perception is based on a poor understanding of Indian military planning. As a result, the probability of an increase in Pakistani support to insurgents and an Indian military response is higher than

"There's a common Pakistani perception that Pakistan's nuclear option

unencumbered by nuclear arms control," says an independent Swedish think

intensified, south Asia remains a unique region, almost entirely

is generally appreciated.' According to Spiri, the bases of Indian and Pakistani military planning are different and the mismatch of perceptions could lead to nuclear escalation. "Pakistani leaders have said that nuclear weapons could be used early in a war, while the Indian military plans on the assumption of a long conventional war that would include counter attacks which would also

debilitate the Pakistani command and control system," it says.

Arms suppliers have furnished India with the technology that could make a counter attack against Pakistan's air bases successful, creating a much

western military support, almost every major arms exporter has provided strategic defence technology to India, including France, Israel, Italy, Russia, Sweden, the UK and USA," Spiri claims.

The findings also claim that India's reluctance to enter international arms

control commitments stems from an exaggerated perception of the risks that arms control poses for the nuclear option, rather than the purported fear of China. "Sino-Indian relations are improving and neither side has taken the other into account in its nuclear planning. Nuclear weapons are irrelevant to the border dispute between the two," it says.

Pakistan, the report says, could take a number of significant arms control initiatives that would improve its international standing and put India on the diplomatic defensive. "For example signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), but a self-perpetuating dynamic in domestic politics has caught the Pakistani arms control establishment in a rut that is disadvantageous to the country, military as well as politically," it adds.

According to military analyst Eric Arnett, the author of the Spiri report, the Indian independent military technology base is not fruitful, "because of the severe bureaucratised and vicious circle where the scientists are not

in the best Indian scientists leaving the country," he says. Arnett also claims that there is no coordination between the armed forces and the researchers. "One example is that of the Arjun tank, which cannot even cross a canal. The much-dreaded Prithvi is a very primitive weapon reminiscent of the German technology of the 40s and it provides an incentive for Pakistan to go for nuclear missiles."- Internews

comfortable. The governmentis attempts to centralise research, has resulted

Forthcoming events on the Island of Golden Smiles.

Family Fun



27th March

Annual Against the Clock Race organised by the Rotaract Club of Manama-Salmaniya at Al Bander Hotel and Resort. The event comprises a series of games, played in teams, ranging from purely physical co-ordination to mental fitness. A raffle draw will take place at the end of the day to win many attractive prizes including a return air ticket to Hong Kong. Tickets: 500 fils.

Music



26th February

Piano Concert by Polish musician, Professor Cezary Owerkowicz. at the Bahrain Arts Centre, next to Al Sawani Restaurant. 7 p.m. Entrance is free. Tel: 291131.



An Evening of Poetry by well-known Bahraini poets, Ebrahim Buhindi, Ali Al Shargawi and Khalifa Al Lahdan at the Bahrain Arts Centre, next to Al Sawani Restaurant. 7 p.m. Entrance is

2nd - 6th March

free. Tel: 291131.

23rd February

Chinese Arts Exhibition at the Bahrain Arts Centre, next to Al Sawani Restaurant, Tel: 291131.

9th - 19th March

Exhibition of paintings by famous Bahraini artist, Omar Al-Rashed, at the Bahrain Arts Centre, next to Al Sawani Restaurant. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tel: 291131.

Sports



27th February and 7th March

Horse racing at the Equestrian and Horse Racing Club at Sakhir. Entrance is free. 3.30 p.m. onwards. Tel: 440330

27th February and 7th March

Autocross at the Bahrain Motor Club, one of the many events of Bahrain's Car Racing season. 3.00 p.m. Tel: 686295.

Exhibitions

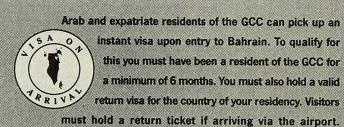


28th February - 3rd March

Mefex '98, the 10th Middle East Food, Hotel & Catering Show and Salon Culinaire will be held at the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre. Free admission to trade and special invitees. Others: BD 7. Daily from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. only. Tel: 550033.

14th - 24th March

The 8th International Bahrain Book Fair at the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre. Tel: 727111



Please note all information supplied is correct at the time of going to Press. We advise you to call the telephone number listed with the event before you decide to visit the venue.





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Sonu Nigam, Suchitra to perform in **Dubai** fair

DUBAI — Musical performances by Sonu Nigam and Suchitra Krishnamurthy and fashion shows by Tarun Tahiliani and Ritu Beri will be the highlights of a month-long India Fair to be held here as a part of the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF).

Indian Association president Ajay Bhatia said that a large contingent of 60 craftsmen, 200 performing artist's and 25 street performers will be flown into Dubai exclusively to take part in the fair to

be held from March 19 to April 18. Bhatia said the fair will transport the ambience of native India reflecting the distinct flavour of the country's ethnicity and will present a kaleidoscopic view of India's rich tradition to multinational visitors and

fellow Indians here.
He said folk dances from the length and breadth of the country will be presented by artist's from the various zonal cultural centres in India, in addition to the performances by Bhupinder Singh Chawla, Shaan, Sagarika and Shweta Shetty. Bhatia said special technicians from Calcutta will build replicas of Charminar at the entrance

of India Fair grounds which will accommodate 125 stalls. The Indian pavilion which will put up the largest show by any country during the DSF, has been allotted the maximum area of 500,000 square feet in recognition of the excellent performance by the Indian team last year.

Losers trying their luck once again

KOCHI - Five losers of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF), including the father and son duo, K Karunakaran and K. Muralidharan, are trying their electoral fortunes once again from Kerala.

Senior Congress leader and upper house member, K. Karunakaran, who failed in his maiden attempt to secure a Lok Sabha seat from Thrissur, is trying his luck this time from the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency. In 1997, an overconfident Karunakaran had been humbled by Communist Party of India's (CPI's) V.V. Raghavan by a

narrow margin of about 1000 votes. His son, K. Muralidharan, who had represented the Kozhikode Lok Sabha constituency twice, had to taste defeat at the hands of Federal Minister, M.P. Veerendra Kumar in the last elections. He has shifted his constituency from Kozhikode to Thrissur to avenge the defeat of his father from there last time.

V.S. Vijayaraghavan Krishnadas of (CPM-LDF) by 23,423 votes, is again in fray from the same Palakad constituency. K.K. Vijayalakshmi (Cong-UDF) is also trying her luck again from the Ottapalam reserved constituency

LDF has put up only one loser Francis George of KC(J) in Idukki

Jaya not to celebrate 50th birthday

MADRAS — The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) supremo and former chief minister of Tamil Nadu Jayalalitha, who is turning 50 tomorrow, has decided not to celebrate her birthday in view of the loss of lives in bomb blasts at Coimbatore last week. In a statement here, she said" I am deeply pained and disturbed because of the heavy loss of lives and injuries to more than 200 people in the serial blasts.

There should be no celebration whatsoever in the name of my birthday on that day," she said, adding that all the programmes already chalked out for that day stood cancelled. It is enough if feeding the poor and orphan children is organised on that day, Jayalalitha said. She also directed her partymen not to hold any seminar, debate, symposium and public meeting on February 24. Partymen need not come to Madras to convey their greetings, she said. She, however, advised partymen to keep vigil at places where ballots were proposed to be counted. Constant vigil should be maintained on those coming to the counting centres and going out of them, so that no irregularities were committed, she added.

B.IP workers besiege Kesri

NEW DELHI - Congress president Sitaram Kesri was virtually besieged by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists at Delhi airport yesterday when he was leaving for an election campaign. The activists raised slogans against Kesri accusing him of being responsible for the political

The party supporters had been holding a demonstration at the Delhi airport raising slogans against Uttar

In a swift political development on Saturday the ruling coalition partners Loktantrik Congress along with the Janata Dal (Rajaram) withdrew support from five-month Kalyan Singh government and staked claim to form government.

A new ministry headed by Loktantrik Congress leader Jagdambika Pal supported by the Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samjawadi Party was sworn-in on Saturday night in the state. — PTI

None of the parties seems strong enough to cross the 272 magic mark: Report

NEW DELHI — "Stability", 'incumbency-disadvantage" national and local issues or prime minister probables and myriad combinations — catchy slogans but none seems potent enough to catapult any one alignment across the magic

have another new lower house of parliament. As dust over yet another round of whirlwind campaigns settles down and the poll process for the 12th Lok Sabha enters home stretch reports across PTI bureau indicate a close

mark of 272 as India gets ready to

contest on the cards. While precariously poised parties claim victory for their camps observers analysing prospects on a state by state basis predict another hung parliament in the offing with not much change in the final tally for major political formations.

Here is how the poll scene looks like in the four battle zones across

• NORTH Uttar Pradesh: With the highest number of seats at 85, UP which has given seven prime ministers to the country so far, voted for 52 BJP lawmakers in 1996.

Former chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party won 16 seats with the BSP and the Congress finishing way behind with six and five seats respectively. Sonia Gandhi's campaign for the Congress, may make the going a little tough for the BJP while Yadav faces stiff competition at the hands of Front ally Janata Dal, after they failed to arrive at a seat adjustment for all seats.

Delhi: Two women candidates Sushma Swaraj (BJP) and Meira Kumar (Cong.) — are among front runners in seven Lok Sabha seats from the national capital region, which elected five BJP candidates conceding two to the Congress in the

Ŝonia Gandhi's regret for 1984 anti-Sikh riots and denial of tickets to Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and H.K.L. Bhagat for their role, made the contest in the capital a closely-watched affair.

Haryana: Prohibition or the lack of it seems to have generated an anti-incumbency wave for Chief Minister Bansi Lal's Haryana Vikas Party and its ally the BJP. How much of it works in favour of opponents the Congress and Haryana Lok Dal led by former chief minister OM Prakash Chautala remains to be seen. The ruling alliance had won 7 of the 10 seats last year, with a then divided Congress emerging victorious in two

Punjab: Prime Minister I.K. Gujral contests from one of the 13 seats here, interestingly backed by the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal, which has a formal alliance with the BJP. Congress MP R.I. Bhatia and Sukhbans Kaur defend the only two seats in their kitty with regret for Blue Star while the BJP hopes to open its score in the state by pitting film star Vinod Khanna against

Bhinder from Gurdaspur. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Kanshi Ram who was among his party's three successful MPs last time has shifted

from Hoshiarpur to Sahranpur in UP. Himachal Pradesh: Former chief minister Shanta Kumar leads the BJP fight against the Congress which made a clean sweep in all the four seats last time. Entry of expelled Congress leader Sukhram's Himachal Vikas Congress has added a significant dimension to the poll with analysts observing how deeply it cuts into the destinies of both Congress

Jammu and Kashmir: Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's son Umar Farooq makes his electoral debut contesting for the prestigious seat from Srinagar. An interesting poll is on the cards with the entry of National Conference, which boycotted elections last time. The dissolved house had four Congress and one MP each of the BJP and the

Janata Dal from the state. Rajasthan: The sprawling desert state where the Congress and the BJP equally shared the spoils with 12 seats each conceding one to the breakaway Congress(T) leader Sicee Ram Ola. With no major local issue, both parties are wooing the electorate with stability and secular issues.

• EAST

Bihar: The volatile state with 54 lawmakers has become a battleground for the Janata Dal and its breakaway faction Rashtriya Janata Dal led by Laloo Prasad Yadav seeking entry to

the Lok Sabha for the first time. Making the contest difficult for the Yadav would be George Fernandes' Samata Party and the BJP whose formidable alliance in last polls bagged 24 seats.

The issue of seat-sharing between the UF remained unresolved here too with the JD fielding candidates from 37 places, the CPI in 19 and the CPM four seats.

With the exception of BJP-SAP, none of the alliances has a complete understanding with its allies.

West Bengal: The red bastion with 42 seats witnesses a keen three-cornered contest among the Left Front, the Congress and the Trinamul Congress of firebrand Mamata Baneriee in a strategic alliance with

Major contestants include veterans Somnath Chatterjee, Indrajit Gupta, A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Priya Ranjan Dasmunsh

The BJP which has yet to win a seat here, is contesting 13 seats, in a 'limited' seat adjustment with Trinamul Congress which has put up candidates in the rest of the 29 constituencies. Whether the two Congresses together improve on their previous tally of nine or cut into each other's bank to the benefit of the Left Front which won 36 seats last time would be monitored closely.

Orissa: A divided Janata Dal faces the electorate after the son of its most charismatic leader Biju Patnaik joined hands with the BJP to mar the

poll fortunes of the Congress, which bagged 16 of the 21 seats in 1996. The BJP hopes to open its score in the state with the BJP's backing in nine places. The new JD is contesting in the remaining 12 seats. The Congress only hopes that the vote

divide in JD works to its advantage. Assam: Scam-tainted Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta of the Asom Gana Parishad has fielded wife Jayashree from home ground Nogaon in a bid to improve AGP's performance. Both the AGP and main opponent the Congress won five seats each leaving one to BJP and three

others to regional outfits. Letter-of-credit scam, militancy and foreigner issues were highlighted during the campiagn in which CPi (ML) candidate Anil Baruah was killed leading to countermanding of

polls in Dibrugarh.

•NORTH EAST: it is mainly a fight between the Congress and regional parties for the 11 seats for (1), Nagaland (1), Meghalaya (2), Tripura (2), Arunachal (2), Manipur (2) and Mizoram (1). While Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma is contesting the Congress seat from Tura in Meghalaya, a significant development is BJP's entry in Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

• SOUTH Tamil Naidu: Former chief minister Jayalalitha's AIADMK has reached an understanding with the BJP to stop the repeat of DMK-TMC sweep. Observers say an

anti-incumbency factor could favour the opponents which also has a faction of Congress backed by Sonia's campaign in the fray for the 39 seats at stake

Andhra Pradesh: Perhaps the only state where the United Front constituents have cleanly worked out seat adjustments to put up a strong fight against both the BJP and Congress. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's TDP is contesting 35 seats, while Janata Dal one and the Left parties in six of the

The mood in both the Congress and the BJP camps is upbeat following the entry of Sonia Gandhi and many cine celebrities in the saffron fold. Congress had won 22 seats while the UF won in 19

Karnataka: Beleagured in its stronghold, the Janata Dal is dangerously poised with veteran leader Rama Krishna Hegde throwing his mite behind the BJP, that had emerged second in most of the 28 constituencies in last elections With the Sonia factor raising hopes of Congressmen, observers say both the camps may benefit at the cost of former premier Deve Gowda's party that had sent 16 lawmakers to the 11th Lok Sabha

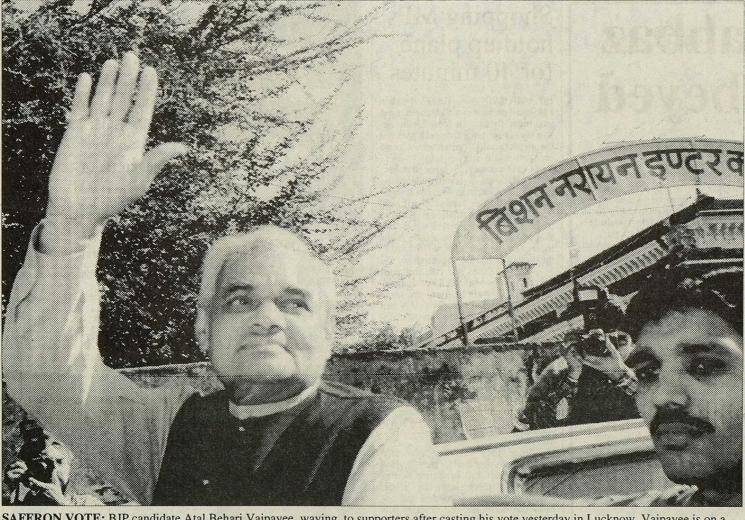
Kerala: Mostly a fight between the CPM-led ruling front and the Congress-led opposition United Democratic Front, Kerala's 20 seats will this time see the BJP fielding candidates in all the places. While the wind blew towards the left in last elections, mainly due to a divided the Congress fold, the effect of Sonia Gandhi in this communist bastion will be a thing to be watched. Congress won seven seats last time. with former chief minister K. Karunakaran among the prominent

•WEST Gujarat: What was a straight fight between the Congress and BJP in the last polls, has a new player -

Shanker Sinh Vaghela's Rashtriya Janata Party - in the contest for the 26 seats. While stability is being touted by both BJP and Congress, Vaghela's party is focusing on development for an independent foothold in New Delhi. Maharashtra: The BJP-Shiv Sena's 'now or never' attempt to

'capture' New Delhi could face stiff. competition in its stronghold after Sonia Gandhi's entry altered political equations in the state. The combine won 33 of the 48 seats last time, leaving 15 to Congress, which has now joined hands with Samajwadi Party and the RPI in a bid to garner. the Dalit and Muslim votes. Madhya Pradesh: Stalwarts

Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath, V.C.Shukla and Scindia lead the ruling Congress' contest for 39 seats in Madhya Pradesh, which incidentally, elected 27 BJP MPs in 1996. Analysts feel an undivided Congress could help improve over its previous tally of eight in the state.



SAFFRON VOTE: BJP candidate Atal Behari Vajpayee waving to supporters after casting his vote yesterday in Lucknow. Vajpayee is on a hunger strike unto death to protest against the dismissal of the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh. - AFP

Latin American media awakens to Sonia charm

MEXICO CITY — Latin Americans love heroes. They delight in being able to underpin their revolutionary fervour and political ideologies with the charismatic face of a dauntless

figure that transcends time and space. So when the name Gandhi surfaced in the confusing parade of more than 6,000 faceless candidates campaigning for a complex four-phase election in the world's largest democracy, suddenly Latin Americans took notice.

It didn't matter that Sonia Gandhi was in no way a blood relative to the great Mahatma. It didn't matter that she was not even a native of India and had only inherited the name by marrying into the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty. It didn't even matter that she wasn't running for any office.

The name Gandhi conjured up romantic illusions of that grandiose hero of all humanity that was so certain of his own cause that he never bothered to pick up a gun or wear a

And so it began. From the very day that Rajiv Gandhi's widow first stepped out of her self-imposed seclusion to agree to campaign for the demoralised Congress party, the Latin American media began devoting nearly 10 times more its air and print space to India than before.

"For the first time, the Indian elections had a face - and a name for our readers," says Carlos Ferreyra Carrasco, editor of the International Section of El Universal newspaper in

LUCKNOW — Political developments in Uttar Pradesh

took another surprise turn yesterday with the one-day-old

Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) government, headed by

Jagdambika Pal, losing the support of 12 of its legislators.

to the LCP made a surprise appearance at a press confer-

ence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state unit chief Rajnath Singh and claimed that they, along with five other

legislators, continued to be with ousted BJP chief minister

Kalyan Singh. They also claimed that Deputy Chief Min-

ster Naresh Agarwal was with them and would resign

soon. The dramatic develpment unfolded as the BJP

mounted pressure for the removal of Governor Romesh

Bhandari who, however, found strong support from the Congress and the United Front constitutents for his action

Pal, who was sworn in as the head of 18-member Lok-

tantrik Congress ministry in succession to BJP-led co-

alition on Saturday night with a directive from the govern-

or to seek a vote of confidence by tomorrow, sought three

now under scrutiny by the Allahabad High Court.

Seven members of the legislative assembly belonging

Mexico City, the nation's largest daily. "It wasn't so much that they were really interested in trying to understand the labyrinth of intricacies that stir 600 million voters to divide their loyalties amongst 650 parties. They

just wanted information about So-

And that is what Ferreyra Carrasco gave them. In the last month, he notes, his paper has run two fullpage profiles of the Italian-turned-

Mexico City's government-backed *Cronica*, which usually devotes only four or five pages of its 32-page daily to international news, also ran a full-page report on the In-dian electoral process and the influence Sonia Gandhi has had on vot-

Argentina's left-leaning Diario Clarin and progressive Pagina 12 each ran two-part series on India's elections, dedicating more than half the agate lines of their reports to the magnetic role Sonia has played in re-vitalising the moribund Congress par-

In Chile, where steadfast political dreamers still cling to the memory of their former leader Salvador Allende, the powerful Ercilla newsmagazine ran a five-page report on the spiritual and ideological parallels that linked the murdered president to the tragic 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

"These two men," the text reads, "were separated by nearly two decades of chronology and an entire

UP crisis takes new turn: 12 MLAs defect

more days for the trial of strength.

confidence motion against him.

ocean of distance, but in spirit, they

They both died in service to humanitarian values and dedication to

social justice. Like Allende's daughter, Isabel, who took up her father's political banner writing about the turbulent years of the Augusto Pinochet military regime that followed his death, the Ercilla article depicts Sonia and her children as the "next generation of freedom fighters for the world's downtrodden masses."

What the Chilean magazine conveniently manages to neglect to men-tion in its analogy of the two families is the fact that neither Isabel Allende or Sonia Gandhi perceive themselves as the ideological reincarnation of the men they survived.

"I think every Latin journalist, at least at the start of his career, is a bit of an armchair revolutionist who feels he can change the world with his words," says Mario Enrique Maldonado, a correspondent for the Gua-temalan journal Kommentar currently based in Mexico.

"Whenever we hear about heroic figures, our appetites are whetted and we want to write about them. Who in Latin America has heard of Yashwant

But the name Gandhi has universal appeal. And Sonia is bright and pretty and easy to like. So when Indian politics adopt her image, they suddenly become international news."

In a show of strength ahead of the confidence vote,

In New Delhi, President K.R. Narayanan, who is said

BJP's prime ministerial candidate Atal Behari Vaj-

non-BJP parties initiated a move for the removal of speak-

er Kesri Nath Tripathi of the BJP by giving notice of a no-

to be unhappy with the governor's conduct, met Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, BJP president L.K. Advani, CPM

leader Harkishen Singh Surjit and a Congress delegation.

payee moved to New Delhi after casting his vote in his

constituency here and continued his fast unto death started

immediately after the dismissal of the Kalyan Singh gov-

ernment. Non-BJP parties flayed him for bringing im-

moral pressure. After day-long arguments at a special sitting, a division bench of the Allahabad High Court

yesterday adjourned the hearing on a petition challenging

the governor's action dismissing the Kalyan Singh govern

ment till today when it is expected to give its verdict

- India Abroad News Service

Satyajit Ray's wife rejects Bharat Ratna

CALCUTTA - The family of India's late film maestro Satyajit Ray has decided not to accept the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award, proposed to be conferred on him in Delhi on March 1.

"We have decided not to accept the award," Ray's wife Bijoya said here yesterday.

Bijoya said she had received a letter on Thursday from the joint sec-retary of federal home department, informing her that the federal government would confer the award on Satyajit Ray at a function in Durbar

Hall of Rashtrapati Bhavan on March 1. "I am very upset that after re-maining silent for so many years, they have suddenly taken the decision and want us to go to Delhi at such short notice. At this age I cannot make it to Delhi," she said. Bijoya said she had conveyed her

decision to the joint secretary over telephone yesterday

Curfew hits life in Ajmer

JAIPUR - Normal life was paralysed in Ajmer in Rajasthan yes-terday following a total bandh called by Ajaimeru Raksha Samiti in protest against communal clashes in which about 60 people have been injured since February 17, an official spokes-

All business establishments remained closed and the public trans-portation were off the road, the spokesman said here in the state cap-

The curfew continued for the fifth day yesterday as a preventive measure, he said, adding: "The situation was under control and tension eased out as khadims withdrew their indefinite dharna on Saturday.

The essential commodities, including milk, bread, vegetables and grocery were sold out under heavy police protection in the curfew-bound areas of Ganj Thana and Clock Tower, he said.

In a memorandum, the Ajaimeru Raksha Samiti urged the government to probe into the "incidents of violence between two communities on a petty issue," the spokesman said.

The Rajasthan minorities Vikas Manch here has also demanded a judicial enquiry into the incident and suggested that the dargah be opened for pilgrims, according to a release.

UDF, LDF step up campaign to woo voters in Ernakulam KOCHI – Political vival.

parliamentary constituency of Kerala even as campaigning in Ernakulam Lok Sabha constituency is slowly gathering momentum, both the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) and opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) are leaving no stone unturned to woo the voters.

The main contest is between the LDF supported independent candidate and sitting member of parlia-ment (MP) Sebastin Paul and UDF's George Eden, who is a member of the legislative assembly. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has also put up a candidate this time -V. V. Augustine.

With an eye on the vote bank of the Latin Christian community, which has a sizeable 350,000 votes, the two fronts and the BJP have put up candidates from the community. It remains to be seen whose efforts will pay dividends.

Congress's star campaigner Sonia Gandhi's public meeting at Kochi last month was a huge success, boosting the morale of grass-root workers, party leaders say.

For the LDF, state leaders, including Chief Minister E. K. Nayanar, have already addressed meetings in the constituency.

Eden has been in politics for quite some time. He was district president and state general secretary of Kerala Students Union and district convener of the UDF before being elected to the state legislative assembly in 1991.

In comparison, Sebastin Paul is considered 'a rolling stone'. He has worked as lecturer, advocate, journalist and trade unionist before jumping into the political band-

In the 1997 byelection, Paul won by a narrow margin of 8,693 votes over his UDF rival Prof. Antony Is-Except for three occasions, this

constituency has elected the Congress candidates in all the 13 elections held so far. V. Vishwanatha Menon won on Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) ticket in 1967, while the ruling LDF had supported the candidature of former Congressman Xavier Arrackal (independent) in

1996. Following his death, Se-

bastian Paul won the by-election held last year. Prof. K. V. Thomas, who had successfully represented the constituency three times in the past,

was not considered this time.

Thomas, who was an accused in the unauthorised French ocean survey case, was recently exonerated by a trial court here.

The constituency has seven assembly segments — Parur, Njarackal, Ernakulam, Mattancherry, Palluruthy, Tripunithura and Aluva: In five of these segments, the UDF is likely to register impressive. leads on the basis of last assembly elections, while the LDF can win only in Paravur and Mattancherry. In the 1997 byelection also, the UDF could retain its lead in the Ernakulam assembly segment and in

Mattancherry and Aluva. The BJP, which claims to have nearly 50,000 votes in the con-

stituency, had not put up a candidate in the byelection. This time, its cadres are making all efforts to give a good fight to the candidates. of the two fronts. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Indian National

League (INL) have not put up any candidates in the consituency. Thes PDP is supporting the Congress and! the INL candidates in some constituencies. In the byelection, their PDP candidate had polled 25,958

The constituency has an electorate of 11,26,687, with nearly 50,000 new voters. — *PTI*

Controversy over adding 'Spice' to Khajuraho

NEW DELHI — Even as authorities deny it, reports that Spice Girls will perform against the 11th century world-famous temples of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh has raised a fresh controversy over the use of monuments as props.

Should the Spice Girls perform at Khajuraho? Is their performance there an affront to Indian culture? Will it destroy the sanctity of the place? How do such shows affect the monuments? Is there a policy on the use of cultural While opinion over the use of monuments as props is divided, artists and

conservationists blame the government for not evolving a policy or conducting any serious research to study the consequences of such programmes. "The profile of the Spice Girls does not match that of the temples," says dancer Geeta Chandran, who first raised the issue and wrote to the district coll-

lector, seeking a stay on the proposed performance of Spice Girls.

While Geeta claimed in her letter that, "by making the temples an erotic prop of their pop-performance, the Spice Girls would be hurting the sentiments of centuries and centuries of sacred creativity in India," the Archaeological Survey of India has denied the very issue.

"We have no information about the Spice Girls performing at Khajuraho from any source," says Ajai Shankar, director general, ASI. "Normally, we do not permit performances within the restricted area of the monument (300 metres) but we can consider in exceptional cases," says Shan-

"In case of Khajuraho, there is a designated site where classical dances have been held. I don't think the Spice Girls can be described as classical dancers. But, it's not that we would allow only classical dancers. We would consider case by case - merit by merit," said Shankar, adding

that ASI would look into the matter when approached. However, eminent writer Khushwant Singh says: "This (Khajuraho) is not monopoly of classical dancing ... there is nothing sacred about Khajuraho.

They are totally erotic sculptures. But Ajai Shankar's predecessor, M.C. Joshi, says: "Monuments have to be preserved for posterity. Noise, air vibrations even human breath can affect

The normal policy should be not to allow festivals to be held in or near the premises of such monuments," says Joshi. Interestingly, conservationist O.P. Jain, of Intach (Indian National Trust of Archaeological and Cultural Heritage) says the use of historical monuments

like the Taj, Ajanta, Ellora "is not a very good idea" "There has to be some sensitivity ... there has to be some sanctity," says Jain commenting that he wouldn't mind Sufi music being performed in a mausoleum or a Bharatnatyam recital in the Lodhi Gardens

But, veteran danseuse Sonal Man Singh says: "Artistically you cannot deny rmission to any one group. If they are performing outside and not within the compound, I think it

should be open to anyone provided the concert is organised properly and is not If Yanni can perform at the Taj then why not Spice Girls? With this kind of performance, the subsequent commerce earned given to Indian charity, it would be even better," says Sonal. She, however, wonders

what happened to the money earned from Yanni's show. 'All our dances were born in temples, nurtured there so the basic approach of our classical dances is different from the art form represented by Spice Girls," argues Bharat Natyam exponent Shovana Narayan. — PTI

Student finds lost Mark Twain papers

NEW YORK - Siva Vaidhyanathan said he didn't quite be-17 lieve it was real when he came across a century-old manuscript by Mark Twain detailing the famous author's argument for extending

copyright protections. Vaidhyanathan, a graduate student, found the paper in piles of papers belonging to the famous author at the Mark Twain Papers, a collection housed at the University of California at Berkeley. Vaid-6 nyanathan's story was first reported

in the New York Times. The paper, entitled "The Great" Peanut Stand," was written while Twain was travelling in Austria in-

It was never published and Vaidhyanathan said it is likely to be a draft of a project that Twain never returned to. The 7,000-word paper is written as a Socratic di

Vaidhyanathan is a doctoral candidate in American studies at the University of Texas and is writing a dissertation that explores the cultural history of copyright in America from Twain to the present.

In the paper, Twain argues that a writer should be able to control the rights to his work indefinitely, as position he argued unsuccessfully to Congress at the time. It was not until 1976 that Congress granted authors copyright protections for as long as the author is alive plus 50"

Vaidhyanathan told the Times he plans to publish "The Great Peanut Stand" in a book of Twain's

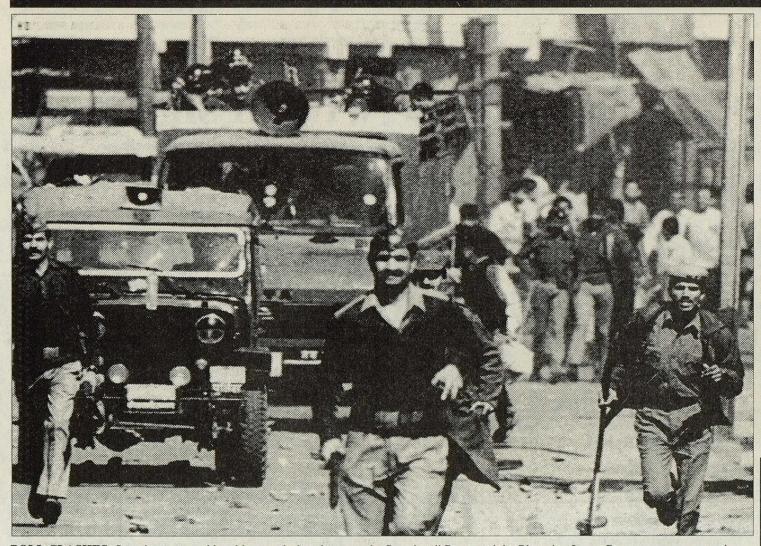
years afterwards.

writings on copyright. - India Abroad News Service

crisis in Uttar Pradesh. Pradesh Governor Romesh Bhandari.

Sambhal to choose either

minister or 'murderer'



POLL CLASHES: Security personnel breaking up clashes between the Samajwadi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party supporters near the BJP headquarters as polling turned violent yesterday in Sambhal. - AFP

Muslim votes hold key in Hyderabad

busy making garlands, oblivious to the din of a party workers procession going down the narrow bylane in an old quarter of this historic southern Indian city

"Tell me whom to vote for," the 48-year-old wants to know as he squats on a small elevated roadside platform which is his shop, deftly stringing together the small red and white flowers.

But he nods in approval when asked if he will vote for Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, the prominent local

Thirty five-year-old Sheikh Hassan, who makes a living ferrying pasthrough the crowded bazaar in the vicinity of the city's most famous landmark, the Charminar, will also vote for Owaisi 'sahab' (an Urdu honorif-

45 per cent voter turnout was re-

ported in the second phase of polls

Orissa and West Bengal while mil-

jured in Orissa and Bihar with poll

disruptions by the GNLF reported in

the Darjeeling Hills of West Ben-

of elections to 20 seats are being

held, two ministers were detained

In Bihar, where the second phase

Ittehadul-Muslimeen (AIMIM), has been representing Hyderabad in Parliament for over a decade winning in four successive general elections.

Mian and Hassan are typical of the Muslims who make up 40 per cent of the population of Hyderabad, once known for the wealth of the princely Nizam family who ruled over this state.

A large part of the fabled treasures of the former royal family of Hyderabad can still be seen in all their grandeur at the local Salar Jang Museum. But it is a life of deprivation and squalor for most of the inhabitants of the dilapidated buildings around the medieval Charminar, the famous historic gateway with its four towering minarets

The unlettered Mian, with five daughters, earns Rs 40 (about one

Moderate polling in Bihar

landa, state Minister for Welfare

Sita Sinha and ruling Rashtriya Jan-

Baitha were detained at Samastipur

A member of CPI-ML Patna dis-

trict committee Suresh Bind was

shot by a rival party activist at

Dhanarua in Barh constituency, two

were killed in group clash at Runni

Saidpur in Sitamarhi and one died in

turbances during polling

Orissa, WB and MP

CALCUTTA — A moderate 30 to rinarayan Singh was detained in Na-

in the three eastern states of Bihar, ata Dal (RJD) legislator Bhikhar

itant strikes and rival clashes allegedly for 'violating the model

claimed five lives and left 12 in- code of conduct and creating dis-

monthly rent of Rs 200 (about five dollars) for his one room tenement. Hassan, also illiterate and with four daughters, earns about the same.

Poverty and illiteracy are the lot of the typical resident of the old city of Hyderabad.

Although several households have members employed in the Gulf, they are mostly in relatively low paid, unskilled jobs. Political rivals of the AIMIM ac-

cuse it of exploiting the fears and insecurity among India's largest minority community. Owaisi's main challenger in this election is Baddambal Reddy, of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whom no Muslim is likely to vote for.

Owaisi is no ordinary leader. Political observers here consider his victory certain on the strength of

the "brute majority" of the Muslim vote in the city. The Hyderabad parliamentary constituency is made up of seven state legislature constituencies, four in the city and three in the surrounding countryside of Ranga Reddy

Votes in the three rural segments are traditionally divided between the Congress party, the BJP and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu

Surprisingly, the BJP is not considered a pushover in Hyderabad with Reddy elected to the state assembly

The BJP was the runner up to Owaisi in the 1996 and 1991 general elections. In 1991, Reddy lost to the AIMIM nominee by over 39,000

- India Abroad News Service

The Yadav-versus-Yadav battle has generated nationwide interest, particularly since the two men were once friends, with Mulayam Singh Yadav acting as his current opponent's political mentor. That friendship is clearly a thing of the past. ponents, blaming them for vote-rigging and violence Armed police and 10,000 paramilitaries, drafted in as support, underlined the point yesterday as they surrounded polling booths in the town of Sambhal and across the surrounding district. vas in reality a victim. Twenty-four hours earlier they were given permission to shoot on sight in the case of riots. By mid-day, there were reports of mobs on the street and sporadic clashes amid firing at police and the sound of explosions. Voter turn-out was estimated at around 70 per cent and even 100 per cent in some polling

Road to politics

D.P. Yadav — the second alternative and the area's sitting member of par-

D.P. Yadav's candidacy in this northern consituency 150 kilometres east

His opponent, the outgoing Defence Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav,

heads the socialist party and is a renowned arch-enemy of the nationalists, ac-

"I may have a reputation of a criminal but I am not a traitor to my constituency and that is what matters," he argued.

"In democracy, the bottom line is whoever wins is a clean man."

of New Delhi is being backed by the right-wing Hindu nationalists.

30 criminal charges, including murder, to his name.

liament — said voters should not be put off by him.

cusing them of trying to impose a theocracy in India.

NEW DELHI — Women work as hard as men in India, toiling away for long hours in fields or carrying back-breaking loads of bricks at construc-

But on the political stage, even though the country once had a woman prime minister, opportunities are still scarce.

In the six-phase elections to the Lok Sabha, which began on February 6, only 119 women have been given tickets by political parties. Another

In the last election, in 1996, there were 599 female candidates, of whom about two-thirds were independents. Forty women candidates won their

"The independents have yet to be counted, but even when that is taken into consideration, women's participation in the elections this time around is very bad," says Mohini Giri, chairwoman of the National Commission

And it is not just women who are grumbling.
"It is a bit of a disappointment," Chief Election Commissioner M.S.

"In spite of the tall claims of all the parties, the final number of women candidates is minuscule.

He said the representation and quality of parliament would have im-

In 1993, the government amended the constitution to provide 33.3 per

The landmark move in women's empowerment sparked hopes that more women would be able to take part in the legislature. But the Election Commission data shows that women elected in 1996

amounted to a dismal 6.7 per cent of the total deputies, while 86.5 per cent of the candidates could not even procure one-sixth of the votes in their constituency and had to forfeit their election deposit.

and they will not be able to do much for the party," Giri said. "If women run independently, they have a hard time getting the backing, not to mention funds to campaign.

world — advantages parties are keen to nurture. Women politicians say the fact that they are women helps immensely in the field.

"They find me more accessible," said Sushma Swaraj, spokesperson for

the front-running Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a candidate for re-

through dingy narrow lanes of her constituency which, although lined with open sewers, are festooned with flags and banners of welcome.

their shacks

ter and even wash my feet," says Sushma, who debuted as india's young-

thing they would never do for a man candidate." Men and women have flocked to election rallies to catch a glimpse of

dhi who has raised the Congress party from its deathbed. Opinion polls have said that although the daughter-in-law of India's

only woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, is not running for office, her tireless rallying has brought many back to the Congress party. the empowerment of women, NCW said the gap between the percentage of male voters, which was 62.0 per cent, could lessen considerably.

"We just need more politicians, especially women, who will work, keeping the benefit of Indian women on the whole in mind," she said

SAMBHAL — Residents in Sambhal constituency had a simple choice yesterday - vote for the country's defence minister or for a man with more than scores of complaints about bogus voting and said a decision on a possible repoll would be taken later yesterday There were also reports of fighting in narrow lanes and clashes between two communities in the town of Sambhal, home to 124,000 people.

Local police chief Chabi Nath Singh said here: "There are 1,500 polling

stations. Sambhal's chief administrator Deepak Trivedi said he had received

booths in the district. All have been declared volatile." The prospect, however, did not seem to put off the voters yesterday, with

thousands queuing up before polling stations. The Muslims, which make up around 14 percent of the district's 1.1 million voters, were out in force. Iqbal Hussein, standing in a queue, said they were determined to stop the Hindu nationalists. "There will be 100 per cent voting in our area," he said.

Mohammed Jabber, chief of Sirsi village in the district, added: "We will vote for Mulayam not because of any special love but because he is the only man who can match the muscles and the brains of D.P. Yadav, who is a ter Both Yadav camps yesterday pointed the finger firmly at their op

D.P. Yadav, meanwhile, speaking from a palatial farmhouse in Thanari, 30 kilometres from Sambhal, said he was being painted as a criminal when he

Yadav, named in a recent magazine article as among around 70 "unsuitable" election candidates, pointed out: "I have been described as a mafia don only by the police and my rivals but I have not been convicted in any case.

tough for women

33 are fighting as independents.

way through to the lower house of parliament.

for Women (NCW).

Gill told reporters on the eve of the polls.

proved with more women sitting on its benches.

cent representation for women in local government at all three levels of rural and urban bodies.

"Many parties still think that women cannot yield the muscle a man can

The handful of women who have managed to secure a seat in parlia-

ment mostly come from affluent families with strong ties in the political

election to the south Delhi constituency.

Draped in a paisley-patterned sari, the lawyer-turned-politician walks

Barely taller than the children skipping excitedly beside her, Sushma aciously accepts marigold garlands and biscuits offered by women from

"You see how the women want to come near me, give me coloured wa-

"They even come to hug me when I am campaigning, which is some-

Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gan-

In the previous election, women voter turnout was 53.4 per cent. With

"A while ago, women just voted for whoever their husbands did, but now we see more and more cases where the women themselves choose,'

These are the types of people women will want to vote for." — Reuters

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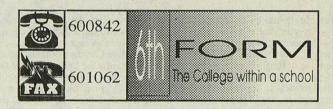
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by the police for creating disexplosion at Chak Kosturi in Hajturbances as 35 to 40 per cent votes Meanwhile, Election Commiswere cast till 0930 GMT. Incidents of firing, bomb explosioner M.S. Gill has said that 324 sion and group clashes claimed two lives in Stamarhi constituency and were arrested in Bihar Bomb explosions, firing, snatchone each in Barh and Hajipur. ing of ballot boxes and ballots and intimidation of voters were reported

Thirty-five per cent votes were cast in the first phase of elections from Hajipur, Vaishali, Siwan, Motill 0830 GMT in Orissa as the thari, Muzaffarpur constituencies. banned People's War Group (PWG) In West Bengal, highest 55 to 60 gunned down a cop of a patrol party per cent polling was recorded at Barin the hilly Seshkhal area, 15km asat, while Darjeeling, facing a from Rayagada, in the tribal Kor-GNLF-sponsored bandh and poll boycott, registered a low 10 per aput constituency yesterday morn-

An assistant sub-inspector of po-GNLF activists, ransacked a booth in Kalimpong, snatched and lice and the driver of a private vehicle requisitioned for poll duty, tore ballots and severely assaulted were injured in the attack and hosthe presiding officer. Polling was suspended in the booth.

Police said polling started late in Platoons of Rapid Action Force three booths under Kalimpong seg-(RAF) were rushed to the area. PWG had called for a poll boycott ment as polling personnel had to walk there after they were waylaid In West Bengal, an overall 45 and dragged out of their car by the per cent votes were cast with the

GNLF workers. Polling was, by and large, peaceful in all 12 districts. Poll boycott calls on local issues were reported in 18 booths under Lok Sabha constituencies of Bankura, Raigunj, Katwa, Birbhum, Bolpur and Malda.

Communist Party of Revolu-

jeeling R.B. Rai, demanded repolling in some booths of the three hill subdivsions of Darjeeling. 30 per cent polling was recorded in the plains of the district till 0800 GMT.

Police lathicharged to quell a mob using brickbats at Nanoor and under Birbhum constituency, while unofficial reports said police fired in air to quell vi-

The trouble started when voters confronted a group of people, stated to belong to a Naxalite faction, which called for poll boycott there and a clash ensued.

One policeman was injured in brickbatting, 12 arrests were made. Polling, which was suspended for a brief period, resumed shortly there-

A homeguard personnel, on duty at a booth under Ratua assembly segment in Malda district, fell sick and died on the way to hospital.

Reports of election boycott till were received from two booths under Nabadwip and Krishnagar Lok Sabha seats, seven booths at Chhatna in Bankura and a few booths under Malda constituencies on local issues.

In Orissa, anti-socials forcibly entered a booth at Ullala in Anandapur sub-division of Keonjhar (ST) constituency and tore some ballot papers leading to suspension of pol-ling in the booth. Four arrests were

In Madhya Pradesh, three incidents of booth-capturing were re-ported from Hoshangabad from where Congress leader Arjun Singh is contesing while too such incidents occurred in Chhindwara, the constituency witnessing a contest between former federal minister Kamalnath and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) heavyweight Sunderlal Pat-

AP rebels snatch ballot boxes

HYDERABAD - Naxalites of the outlawed People's War Group (PWG) opened fire at a policeman guarding a polling booth, snatched away two ballot boxes and over 2,000 ballot papers in three separate incidents in Karimnagar and Wasince Saturday night, police said.

They said these PWG Naxals opened two rounds of fire at the policeman posted at a polling booth at Ghanpur in Warangal district early

The rebels fled the scene when the guard returned the fire, the police said, adding that no one was injured in the incident. In another incident at Meesampet

village in neighbouring Karimnagar district, the PWG extremists took away two ballot boxes, the police They also snatched away over 2,000 ballot papers from a polling

booth at Kalukarthi village in Warangal district. Despite the PWG poll boycott call, there was moderate to brisk polling in Telangana districts with Nizamabad registering 20 per cent turn-out, Karimnagar 17 per cent, Warangal 14 per cent, Adilabad 10 per cent and Hanamkonda 10 per cent, state election office sources

Elections

LUCKNOW - Barring few incidents of clashes, an estimated 55 per cent voters cast their votes in a by and large peaceful polling for the second phase of elections to the 33 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh yesterday.

The first phase of polling for 52
Lok Sabha seats was held in the state

peaceful in UP

tionary Marxist candidate for Daron February 16 last. - PTI

Maharashtra sugar-belt turns sour for Sena

BOMBAY — They call it the sugar bowl of India. But for the ruling Shiy Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance, this politically influential region in western Maharasthra state continues to remain sour. The ruling coalition's bid to finally wrest the region from the Congress party has got a setback with Sonia Gandhi's poll

in hilly areas of Koraput.

GNLF activists ransacking a polling

booth in Kalimpong, to enforce

their poll boycott and people boycotting elections in 18 booths in six

parliamentary constituencies on lo-

Prasad was put under 'house arrest'

at Motihari, former minister Ha-

Bihar Energy Minister Brijbihari

campaign helping put an end to Congress factionalism in the Ever since the Shiv Sena-BJP combine took office in 1995, it has given top priority to the task of breaking the Congress stranglehold on the area which not only produces sugar but also chief ministers and influential national politicians.

Stretching from Pune to Sangli, Satara, Sholapur and Kolhapur, the

sugar belt covers 11 Lok Sabha constituencies and is the site of 60 of the 105 sugar cooperative factories in

The sugar barons, who influence the voting pattern in the region, had always decided who would be the state chief minister till the last state assembly election which brought the

Sena-BJP combine to power. The last two years have seen an intense struggle between the ruling coalition and the Congress party to gain political control of the sugar belt. While the Sena-BJP alliance has had state power on its side, the Congress had a legacy of prominent politicians emerging from

After initial progress in winning over the sugar barons, the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance ran into

resistance as the election drew nearer. The factionalism within the Congress, which had created confusion among the sugar barons during the the assembly election, is a thing of the past with state party

leaders putting up an unprecedented show of unity According to a senior Congress party leader, the sugar barons were inching towards the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance, but the entry of Sonia Gandhi changed the political scenario

A Shiv Sena minister in the state government agreed. "The policy initiatives of the coalition government directed at attracting sugar barons away from the Congress party came to a nought overnight with the entry of Sonia Gandhi," the minister, who did not

want to be identified, said. In November last year, the Shiv Sena had convinced Shambhu Raje Desai, who runs one of the better managed sugar co-operatives, to switch loyalty and contest against the formidable Prithviraj Chavan of

the Congress. The Chavan family of Karad district has never lost an election

from there. But at the last minute, Desai backed out of contesting against Chavan — a US returned computer engineer. Maratha political strongman Sharad Pawar and former state chief minister S.B. Chavan, who were arch rivals before the state election, have also patched up now to boost the party's electoral

— India Abroad News Service

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MEN in khaki shorts and peaked

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lunging at and blocking each other

with the sticks in what seems a cho-

reographed ritual.

In the dusty heart of India's

plains, members of the Hindu na-

tionalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak

By Clarence Fernandez



ESTABLISHED: 1975

Hopes soar in Cambodia

THE fragile peace process in the strife-torn Cambodia may be in for a breakthrough. A Japan-brokered peace plan has been accepted by both co-premier Hun Sen and the deposed co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh. In response to the Japanese plan, the prince declared a unilateral ceasefire yesterday.

Under the Japanese proposal to end the deadlock, Ranariddh would be tried in absentia, receive a royal pardon at the request of a family member and then return to Cambodia to run in the election slated for July. The plan also requires Ranariddh to cut all ties with the Khmer Rouge guerrillas. The Khmer Rouge rebels have been fighting the government alongside Ranariddh's opposition forces in the north and west.

Though Hun Sen has expressed "100 per cent support" for the Japanese plan, there are a slew of sticking points, including the progress of a court case against the prince. He wants to return home well in time to campaign for the July election. The big question is will Hun Sen potentiate this wish of the prince.

After months of delay, a March 4 court date was set last week on weapons smuggling charges against Ranariddh. Nobody can predict how long will it take to complete the trial. Furthermore, there is a second charge, colluding with Khmer Rouge rebels, which is not expected to begin until more than two weeks later. According to analysts, if the case is delayed, the prince will be arrested as soon as he disembarks from the plane

Hun Sen critics say that his strategy would be to prevent the prince from taking part in the election or resort to some dilatory tactics so that there would be no time left for him to campaign. Japanese insistence that the prince cut all ties with the Khmer Rouge rebels raises a problem with the prince because he has all along been denying that he has any ties with the rebels. According to the prince, ever since the coup d'etat he has never had any links with the rebels. If they are fighting against the government forces, it is not at his behest, he insists.

Even with the Japanese plan, eventual peace hinges on compromises by both sides. Hun Sen should facilitate the return of the prince by going fast with the case against the prince so a royal pardon could be given in time for the poll. The prince, on his part, should be ready to cut all residual ties, if he has any, with the Khmer Rouge rebels and participate in the electoral process.

Other Opinions

Irish talks

THE bomb which rocked a small market town in Northern Ireland on Friday night was an entirely predictable response to the decision by the British and Irish governments to suspend Sinn Fein from peace talks until March 9. No organisation has yet claimed responsibility for the blast at Moira which injured 11 people, including seven police officers from a nearby barracks, but the province's senior police commander has already indicated the various republican extremist groups. Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, was suspended because of the conclusion of intelligence sources both in Belfast and Dublin that its affiliate was responsible for two murders a fortnight ago. The leader of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, had tried to avoid the suspension by force of argument and, indeed, in the courts but having earlier suspended the loyalist Ulster Democratic Party because of murders carried out by its associate, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the two governments which sponsor the peace talks had little op tion but to follow suit with the republicans/ Mr Adams warned of the consequences of suspension and the bombing on Friday will only reinforce the accusations of those whose believe that the republicans are simply reverting to type by resorting to violence. However the bombing and any susbsequent action which the IRA or other republican extremists may pursue only complicate matters further for the two governments and for the chairman of the talks, the veteran US senator George Mitchell who laid down the principle of a rejection of violence as a prerequisite to the participation of any group.

The ineluctable fact is that in Northern Ireland the usual rules of civilised political debate do not apply. For 20 years the province has lived in the shadow of the gun and the bomb and there are those, particularly in the republican movement, who seem determined to pursue their aims through armed struggle alone. Given this scenario, it is impossible to expel indefinitely representatives of hardline republicans — and loyalists for that matter. Sinn Fein's argument is that because it claims to have no control over the decisions of the high command of the IRA it should not be punished by exclusion, however temporary, from the Mitchell talks.

The exact relationship between the IRA and its political affiliate has never been clearly defined for the very reason that to do so would perhaps expose ties which Sinn Fein would rather keep hidden. Because those normal rules do not apply in Northern Ireland they must then be made flexible enough to bring the black sheep into the fold. No one pretends that discussion with the representatives of terrorists is a desirable course to take but it is inevitable for the simple reason that to shun them completely is to invite further violence. However, it is for Mr Adams, which signed up to the Mitchell principles of nonviolence, to ensure that violence and anger are suppressed between now and March 9 when serious talking can begin again. — Khaleej Times

A mini-budget in offing?

THE forceful denial by the finance minister of the reports that the IMF team visiting Pakistan, has recommended a mini-budget and devaluation of the rupee, should normally have set at rest all speculation in this regard. But since the mini-budget was reported to have been recommended in the form of a substantial raise in tariff on energy-related products against the background of the precarious financial position of the public sector energy concerns and the widening budget deficit, speculation persists. The energy concerns are said to owe an aggregate amount of more than 100 billion rupees to each other and to the private sector enterprises and some of them are even said to have stopped repayment of instalments of foreign loans. On top of the list of defaulters is WAPDA followed by the KESC. The two energy giants have been in the grip of this crisis for a long time but no serious efforts have so far been made to pull them out of their straitened circumstances. Their financial situation, though bad at the moment, is not hopeless.

WAPDA is not only a defaulter but also a creditor. While it owes 19 billion rupees, its own receivables are said to have piled up to 30 billion rupees. The situation of the KESC is different in the sense that its outstandings square with

If the arrears of these two organisations are recovered, these and gas and petroleum concerns would automatically turn solvent. Recovery of arrears is not the responsibility of WAPDA and the KESC alone. The government is equally responsible for two reasons. First, it shirks taking decisions which have political implications. The federal government and its departments alone are said to owe over 6 billion rupees to both.

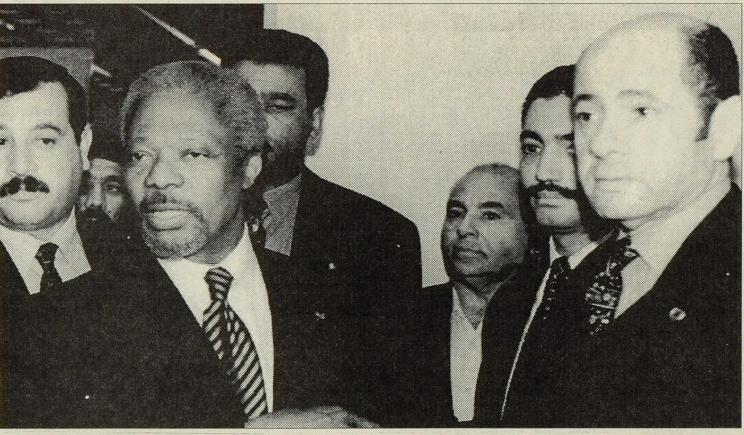
The government shows reduction in the budget deficit by withholding or delaying payments to the suppliers of products and services. Second, other accumulators of arrears have either political clout like well-connected in dustrialists and feudal lords or those who have been allowed to become habituated to free use of utilities, like FATA and PATA. Hence recovery of dues from them, at this stage, has come up against resistance. In these circumstances, the easy target for additional burden of saving these energy concerns from collapse appears to be those who pay their bills regularly and have no influence to cover themselves with.

The speculation of a mini-budget is sustained by reports which suggest that the Ministry of Water and Power has already submitted a summary to the prime minister's secretariat proposing a 10 per cent raise in electricity and gas tariff. The finance minister may technically argue that an increase in electricity and gas charges is not a budgetary measure but in reality it is so because the raise is unrelated to the cost of production and is meant to ease pressure on the budget. It is meant to cover up the government's inefficiency and corruption in its department. In fact, at this time consumers are entitled to a reduction in rates because of the fall in international prices of oil. The finance minister himself had promised when he last raised the rates that electricity tariff would match

The burgeoning deficit in the budget resulting from shortfalls in revenue collection and increases in non-budgeted expenditure — though authorised spendings are being reduced to the minimum - has prompted the IMF to suggest other measures as well to narrow the gap. It has recommended withdrawal of certain fiscal concessions to business and industry. If this happens, it would form part of the mini-budget. If the finance minister thinks a mini-budget is not needed, he should tell the people how he proposes to salvage the energy con-

cerns and narrow the budgetary gap.

As for the speculation about devaluation, it has been touched off by three events occurring simultaneously. First, there was a steep fall in exports during January. Two, the chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau found it compelling to suggest publicly that the rupee be devalued. Third, in recent months, foreign exchange reserves have been dwindling rapidly, so that at present they are perilously close to the one billion dollar basic minimum laid down as a condition by the IMF. - Dawn



ANNAN IN BAGHDAD: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan prior to his meeting with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein yesterday in Baghdad

of years

Why the R-Day parade?

I WAS asked by some newspapermen a question I had asked myself many times before: 'Do we need to celebrate the Republic Day with so much fanfare of military display, folk dances, lighting of public buildings and fire-works? I do not know what it costs but I am sure that if the same money was diverted to development projects, we could raise many schools, colleges and hospitals every year. Instead of

it once in every four or five years? After much pondering over the subject. I have come to the conclusion that whatever the cost (it is bound to be more than a poor country like ours can afford), it is not a waste of money and we should celebrate our Republic Day on the same scale that we have been doing over the last four decades and more I think there are

having it every year, why not have

good reasons for doing so. First, this and Independence Day, August 15, are the only two non-religious celebrations we have on our calendar. All others, including Basant Panchmi (advent of Spring), Bihu, Baisakhi, Onam and some others have acquired religious overtones and are not celebrated by all communities with equal enthusiasm and, therefore, not likely to be acceptable to all

Second, we cannot elevate religious festivals to the status of national level. For one, they are dependent on the vagaries of the solar system and do not fall on the same day of the calendar year that

Hindu festivals though not as wide apart every year as the Muslim, can be a week or more before or after the Roman calendar day of the past year. The choice really boils down to January 26 or August 15. Very rightly we opted for January 26 because it is the nice time of the year than August 15. Chill winter has lost its sting, the searing heat of the summer is a couple of months away, the sarson is still in flower and flowering trees are about to burst into bloom.

And finally, over the years, Republic Day has become the focus of attention of the entire nation. Apart from the lakhs who assemble along the route of the parade, crores of others watch it on their TV sets. I am sure it has the largest viewership of any programme beamed over the television.

It is a beautiful spectacle.

Soldiers and students marching in step to the playing of martial music is to be more thrilling than any ballet on the stage. And this year it was the best I have seen. Although the bandobast remains very much sarkari and commentators let loose a surfeit of florid patriotism, we have to learn to put up with them. Presidents, prime ministers, governors and chief ministers come and go; the people are there for ever. And I know of no other event that knits them closer together than Gantantra Divas extravaganzas on January 26.

Disaster on River Nam Ka Chu

IT would appear that sorrow following defeat is more productive of song and poetry than is euphoria following a victory. Recall our defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. It gave us that tear-jerker song by Lata

A generation unborn, man's nmortality there is the bitterness So violent that the heart revolts

and weeps unceasing, arid, unshed tears The sense of shame, of betrayal unforgivable

Will echo down the years of

too many to be counted

too precious to be valued

The wasted unspent lives, the loss

Never to be redeemed of sacrifice avoidable, insensate that is the guilt we share The valley is silent shrouded in the death's immobility

final and absolute. But the soundless cry from the mountains beats upon our ears Pitiless and undeniable We died,

unsuccoured, helpless We were your soldiers, men of



dignity of battle

Mangeshkar Ai Meyray Vatan kay logo, aankh mein bhar lo paanee. The victory over Pakistan in the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 produced no songs or poetry. This occurred while going through General A.K. Verma's Rivers of Silence: Disaster on River Nam ka chu, 1962 and the Dash to Dhaka Across River Meghna during 1971 (Lancer).

I don't understand anything about military strategy and what exactly brought about a disgraceful defeat at the hands of the Chinese and the spectacular triumph over Pakistan, but I noticed in General Verma's readable narrative that in the debate in the Lok Sabha following the Indo-Chinese war, Nath Pai in his speech lambasting defence minister Krishna Menon's inept handling of India's defence strategy read out a poem on tragedy at Nam ka chu composed by Miss Harji Malik:

As the brutal rock shatters the placid glass Into a thousand irreparable

fragments A bitter grief is hurled at normalcy and peace.

Never will they be quite complete The crack of pain and death will always show

The weeping of wives bereft, of the anguished old

Yet we died like animals, trapped in a cage with no escape Massacred at will, denied the

With the cold burning flame of anger and resolution. With the courage both of the

living and the dead, Avenge our unplayed lives Redeem the unredeemable sacrifice

Nashabandi

In freedom and integrity Let this be your inheritance and our unwritten epitah.

Bharatanatyam with European ballet.

Ravi Shankar with Yehudi Menuhin.

Bollyood concoctions and Western

Jazz. M.F. Hussain painting to music.

It is gimmickery, not art because the

two do not blend. It was tried again

International Film Festival in Delhi.

classical dancing were performed on

one stage, at the same time. It got on

my nerves the same way as does

Bhangra danced to brass bands at

on a national level at the recent

All the major forms of Indian

cocktail Ode to I HAVE seen it before: mix of Jayalalitha Kathak and Flamenco,

THE tigress once again roars She never spent a hundred crores

On the marriage of her foster-son!

It was all in the form of gifts, And, thus, the truth from lies

She is totally corruption-free Therefore, she aligns with BJP - Contributed by Kuldip Sahil, Delhi.

Sangh are going through their daily self-defence exercises. "We have a great task ahead of us. We must be prepared," said a teenage member who gave his name

Punjabi weddings. It was a total

disaster. Even Ustad Amjad Ali

renderings on the sarod sounded

invited me to see her Samanvaya

on Republic Day and told me how

forms of India dancing and music

bluntly, "it may be very patriotic, but will it be beautiful?" She asked

me to see it and decide for myself.

So I went, saw and gave the verdict

in my favour. There is no unity

between a Gujarati garba, Punjabi

Shabad-Keertan, Bhutanese devil

dancing: no unity in diversity but a

dance, Qawaali and Santhal folk

lot of beautiful diversity. Leave

own which refuse to blend.

them alone and don't impose your

own patriotic sentiments on others.

They have distinct flavours of their

a beautiful dancer. She is also very

articulate and at a slap on the table

she will give you a homily on the

of "India's cultural, religious and

quotations from sacred texts in Dr

Karan Singh's style of oratory. It

was very impressive. Before the

curtain in Samanvaya went up, I

loudly inform another friend Jugal

Chowdhary "Sonal is a thinker, you

know; as great a thinker as she is a

dancer". Sonal did not let us down.

that in India's diversity there was a

basic harmonious blend of unity. But what followed proved just the

reverse. All the items were well

anything common between the

heady a cocktail as any ardent

because there was no nasha or

many items performed. It was as

Indian classical dancing.

executed and won applause from

the audience. Sonal proved that she

is still among the headmistresses of

But I for one could not discern

prohibitionist could have concocted

For the nth time we were assured

heard my friend Dr Prem Kirpal

social ethos". She peppers her

introductions with Sanskrit

essential unity in the various forms

Sonal is a beautiful woman and

in one performance I asked her

flat. So when Sonal Mansingh

she had put together different

Khan whose usually soulful

The RSS is a secretive organ isation devoted to remoulding Indian society into a Hindu nation. India is a secular state with a constitution that treats all religions equally

only as Atul.

"People call us a fascist party," said M.G. Vaidya, 75, a member of

the RSS national working committee "But only the state can be fascist," he said in an interview in this central Indian city. "The whole strength of the RSS rests on camaraderie, on its sense of comradeship, that we are

From a small beginning among Hindu upper-caste traders and clerks in Nagpur in 1926, the RSS has spread to more than 40,000 branches throughout India. An estimated four million people — mostly young men — attend its sessions each day, of-

ficials say As India goes through its second round of elections in two years, opinion polls have tipped a lifelong RSS member as the candidate most likely to be the nation's next prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, 73, leads India's main opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an had been widely seen as the

front-runner in the elections that began on February 16 and run in phases till March 7. On Saturday, however, a key ally unexpectedly deserted the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, and the party was dis-

missed from the government of the key northern state. Vajpayee immediately announced

he would fast unto death. Like many BJP officials, Vaj-

payee is also a member of the RSS. which the party claims as its ideological parent. Vajpayee is 101 per cent what

the country needs," said Nitin Gad-kari, a decicated RSS worker and public works minister in the western state of Maharashtra, where Nagpur

"Not just from the point of view of the party, or because I personally wish it, but because he will lead this nation to its rightful destiny," Gad-

The RSS as a group has always stayed out of politics, saying it is

only a cultural organisation. But its trained and disciplined ca-

The BJP is the political arm of the RSS, which has spawned a multitude of organisations collectively called the "Sangh Parivar" or "family", each dedicated to achieving RSS ob-

dres provide India's most vigorous

political canvassers - all of their ef-

forts aimed at the success of Vaj-

Hindu zealots among its Bajrang Dal affiliate in 1992 helped tear down a 400-year-old mosque revered by India's Muslims, who make up 12 per cent of India's 960 million people, sparking nationwide riots between the two communities that left 3,000 dead.

Recently, however, electoral imperatives have prompted the BJP to tone down its anti-Muslim stance.

The RSS says its task will survive beyond the formation of a BJP government. "Any government has nits limitations in transforming society," said Vaidya, who joined the RSS as a 13-year-old boy.

"Obstacles put in the path of the RSS can be removed by the BJP government or any government that does not look to us with an inimical eye," he added. "That is how the BJP has

come (about). Tainted by its links to the men who in 1948 killed India's apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, and

to the campaign to destroy the mosque — the RSS has been outlawed thrice. But nourished by its dogma of

Hindutva or "Hindu-ness", the RSS has survived every attack. Banned by former prime minister Indira Gandhi during the eclipse of

Indian democracy when she called a state of emergency in 1975, the RSS emerged from its pariah status [by fighting the curtailment of civil lib-In recent years its influence has

been more threatening, some analysts 'The intensification and brutal-

isation of Hindu nationalism under the RSS family of organisations constitutes the gravest danger to the future of Indian unity, while those responsible proclaim the latter to be their most sacred trust," American historian Paul Brass wrote in a recent But its supporters say the RSS has

often done good.

Its cadres were among the first relief workers to reach the site of a September 1993 earthquake in Latur in Maharashtra state in which 11,000 people died

"No donations or receipts are apparently maintained, enabling ta unique flexibility, secretiveness and leadership control in matters of finance," five Indian historians and writers said about RSS sources of finance in a 1993 study of the group.

"We're almost copying the activities of the church," Vaidya added. "The RSS itself runs around 7,000 service projects. These include schools, hostels and newsletters."



VAJPAYEE

READERS' FORUM An event to remember

THE Muscat Festival was a great event and the children enjoyed it throughly. Hats off to the Muscat Municipality for organising such a fun-filled event in the loveliest location, that is, Ourum Park.

However, it would have been better had there been a printed schedule of the events with a location map in the form of a brochure. We hope it will be taken care of the next time.

Ramesh Iyer,

Laser pens in cinema hall

RECENTLY I went to Al Nasr Cinema for the 9 to 12 show. During the show, some people were using laser pen to point at the screen.

They were having a bad influence on the children. The theatre management should take necessary action against those who

take laser pens to the movie hall. Ratan Lal,

Give the cadre-based party a chance IT IS quite exasperating when people try to foist their lop-sided thinking on the

Oommen Kuruvilla, in his own right, seems very worried that the rise of the "Saffron Brigade" (Times, February 19) is going to ruin India without any

To counter his arguments, firstly, the Supreme Court of India had ruled that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was not involved in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. BJP would definitely not qualify to be 'his ilk' (the as-

sassin's), irrespective of what Kuruvilla feels. Yes, Nehru was a great visionary, but was his brand of socialism any suc-The economy till 1991 is a clear indicator, along with the illiteracy, misery

and rising poverty of the millions. If not for Sardar Patel, there would have been some more chunks of India broken up. Let's see what else the Congress Party (Indira Congress, now) and its famous family have done for India in the 45 of the 50 years that they have ruled so far. Indira Gandhi did not even pretend to be intellectual. Her only high-

point was the 1971 war. Rest of it was a saga of authoritarianism, corruption, manipulative politics and the emergence of a blatantly shameless brand of sycophancy from her 'chamchas'. Can one forget Barooah and his 'Indira is In-Today the same breed has coined 'Sonia is Congress'. Three cheers to

Meanwhile, the younger son, Sanjay was let loose on the innocent public during the infamous emergency. Rajiv Gandhi added feathers to the crown with his Bofors and the mis-

handling of the Sri Lankan problem which led to his doom. So much for the The one time when Congress was out of the 'family's shadow' we saw some real progress. Narasimha Rao can at least take the credit for opening up the economy, but his embroilment in the 'scam' raj has made him a non-entity

Isn't it time for another, more disciplined, cadre-based and nationalistic party to take up the reins? Any sane Indian, irrespective of caste, creed, religious background, can hope for this.

It may turn out to be much better than the pseudo-secularism preached and practised by all others, whose only 'war cry' is to stop the BJP at any cost I wonder, in this scenario, what is it that makes Oommen Kuruvilla cry hoarse about the emergence of another strong force?

Kuruvilla is so grateful to Sonia (thank God he didn't call her 'madam') for having left her comfortable seclusion and pitching in to revive Congress' Obviously, she wants to make sure that the truth on Bofors remains sup-

If the BJP has ties with AIADMK, hasn't the Congress with Laloo?

pressed, despite her calls to the contrary. Yes, her so-called apologies (Operation Blue Star should not have happened, emergency should not have been imposed, etc. are actually not apologies) and crocodile tears seem to be swaying the gullible public again. She has (or her speech-writers have) completely forgotten the Jain Commission report, which initiated the rug-pulling act from under the last UF government. To top it all, she is not even contesting the elections. One waits to see it

the people have seen through this, or are they voting as "dumb, driven cattle' to quote Mr T.N. Seshan. For now, it points to a hung parliament again, which will gladden the hearts of all pseudo-secularists. I wonder with what face the UF and the Con-

gress will form a tie-up again. What a shame and a farce. N.R. Madhusudhan,

Letters, signed with full name and address, may be sent by mail (Times of Oman, P.O. Box 770, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Oman) or by fax (7713153), e-mail: times@gto.net.om

From Our Archives

February 1983

Oman joins action call to help the Third World

MUSCAT — Oman has joined other developing countries to express concern over the economic recession faced by the Third World nations. The concern was voiced at the fifth ministerial meeting of the Group 77 held in Baghdad last week. Oman was represented by a five-man delegation headed by Ahmed Macki, undersecretary of the Ministry of Com-

merce and Industry The meeting was to prepare for the Unctad meeting due to be held Bel-The international economic situation was reviewed and it was felt that

the economic crisis faced by developing countries seemed to be as grave as the one in 1932 Considering the total of \$600 billion debt of the Third World countries, the conference called for the international economic system to be re-

Delegates felt that the constant decrease in the rate of economic progress and fall in per capita income in the Third World call for an urgent

The ministers expressed concern over a tendency to protectionism by developed countries which has badly affected exports from the Third The conference decided to submit a programme of action at the next

meeting of the Asian Group scheduled to be held in Buenos Aires in April. In resolution on Lebanon and Palestine the conference called on international monetary organisation to grant long term loans to Lebanon to help rebuild her economy.

He also urged the member countries to make loans to Lebanon and alow customs exemptions on goods from that country.

Rights prize to honour Benigno Aquino

MANILA — President Fidel Ramos said yesterday the Philippine government would award an annual human rights prize to honour Benigno Aquino, a politician whose 1983 murder triggered the downfall

of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The award is "to be given to an outstanding citizen of the world in upholding universal human rights," Ramos said in a speech at a ceremony marking the 12th anniversary of a bloodless popular revolt that ended the 20-year Marcos

regime.
The award, to be created by presidential order, would "remind our people of the need for heroes," he added, but gave no other details.

Aguino, the husband of Ramos predecessor Corazon Aquino, was assassinated at Manila airport on August 21, 1983 on his return from US exile to lead the opposition to Marcos rule.

A group of soldiers and policemen are serving life sentences in jail for conspiracy to murder him.

political crisis which reached a climax 12 years ago yesterday when Marcos' defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Ramos, then the armed forces vice chief of staff, barricaded themselves inside a military camp and announced their breakaway from Marcos.

The strongman sent tanks to crush the small band of mutineers.

But the column was stopped in its tracks by hundreds of thousands of ordinary Filipinos who, heeding an appeal by the Roman Catholic Church and armed only with flowers and rosaries, threw themselves in the path of the tanks.

After a three-day standoff, US president Ronald Reagan's rpresident Ronald Reagan's
administration convinced its old
friend and ally Marcos to "cut and cut
cleanly" and provided him transport to exile in Hawaii as a sea of unarmed protesters prepared to storm his Malacanang presidential palace. — AFP

Lupa throws gauntlet at presidential aspirants

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — Urban poor leaders have challenged presidential candidates to spend a night in a squatter community to "see what progress has done to the lives of the urban poor." Leaders of the League of Urban Poor for Action (Lupa) -called on all the presidential aspirants to experience what it was like to live in a shanty under constant threat of demolition to give way to government projects.

'Only if you share a shanty with us will you understand why we would rather face the ire of the demolition crew or risk our lives just to have a home," said Jess del Prado, Over 100 leaders of urban poor

mmunities in Tondo, Navotas, Malabon, Valenzuela, Quezon City and Novaliches earlier convened to close ranks amid what they called "devastating demolitions" in Metro Manila. Del Prado lamented that not one platform of the presidential aspirants reflected a genuine concern for the urban poor. Because of this, he said, "it seems that demolitions will continue." He added: "It is as if we are a phantom population that does not exist, yet urban poor communities are everywhere." Data from the private research group Ibon placed the urban poor population in Metro Manila at 3.5 million in 1996, with about 1.9 million of them living in squatter colonies in 387 areas.

Enrile and Honasan make debut at Edsa celebrations

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — For the first time. Senators Juan Ponce Enrile and Gregorio Honasan joined former president Corazon Aquino and Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin in the official celebration of the 1986 Edsa Revolution. Enrile and Honasan, who along

with President Ramos ignited the four-day people's uprising in 1986, was also joined by former Senator Agapito Aquino in yesterday's 12th nniversary celebration.

The former Marcos defence minister, who is running for president in the May 11 elections, and his chief aide had refused to join previous years' celebrations due to their animosity with Ms Aquino, who had blamed the two for attempts to destabilise her administration.

Unlike in previous celebrations. this year's commemoration will dulminate on February 22. Enrile and Honasan, along with the "original military contingent" that turned their backs on strongman Ferdinand Marcos, have always considered February 22, not February 25, as the

date to commemorate. Organisers had pledged this year's commemoration, the last during Ramos' term, was "austere and free of political colour.

In a statement, the president stressed the need for continuity of government policies as he relinquishes his post on June 30 to ensure that the Philippines continues to prosper

Estrada jumps gun on rivals with advanced 'think tank'

From Cynthia D. Balana

MANILA - Vice-President Joseph Estrada jumped the gun on his presidential rivals yesterday when he presented to the press a group of 30 bankers, businessmen, lawyers and academics whom he described as his business and professional advisers."

The names on his list are mpressive and read like a Who's Who in the Philippines. It is to his credit that he is able to assemble this collection of brains and talents who have now clambered onto his bandwagon.

The presentation of his "think tank" is also a response to the attacks that he has been associated with shady characters, including Chinese friends, and, therefore, his association with the intellectuals and the solid citizens of the republic offers a balanced view of his character.

The presentation is an important political event that should not be gnored. It provides a window into Estrada's approach to and method of decision-making, and his leadership

It gives us an idea of how he is going to run this country if he is elected in May. As such, I consider it in the public interest to examine the implications of his think tank revelation.

So far, Estrada has been avoiding public forums and panel discussions where his rivals have been present

inside his mind or how he would stand up to the gruelling demands of

public scrutiny on the presidency. It is not just enough for his press handlers to let him avoid intellectual confrontation on the grounds that he would make few mistakes if he says

The presidency of this country is like a gold fish in a bowl, open to observation by all who care, and it is irresponsible for his handlers to keep the public guessing whether Estrada has the intellectual capacity to cope with the complex problems facing the

Estrada did the country a big service by revealing his phalanx of advisers. His menagerie is impressive for its size — 30 in all, excluding behind-the-scenes advisers.

But it is precisely the numbers that tell us that his diverse advisers are a veritable recipe for chaos. His advisers are composed of men with divergent, if not clashing, outlooks, ideology and points of view in politics and in the economy. They also represent mutually

antagonistic interest groups. There is no coherent ideological or policy framework among this motley crowd of advisers. The ideological and doctrinal diversity among the advisers indicates that Estrada has no coherent ideological or philosophical framework that can inform and give consistency to his policies. This

pro-poor populist rhetorics that passes for policy. This group is so diverse that it includes people with leftist tendencies, ex-Marxists, autarkic nationalists of the protectionist school, ultrarightists and adherents of unbridled market capitalism.

It is like letting loose in a wildlife sanctuary all the beasts in a jungle. With such an assortment of advisers, the Estrada presidency would be leapfrogging from one ideological and doctrinal tendency to another in a single day, creating mixed signals and causing confusion among those trying to read what the economic direction of his government would be.

Indeed, there are those in the group who don't talk to each other because of their irreconcilable economic outlooks.

These are the people on whom Estrada will depend for advice. Estrada is a college dropout. His mind is not trained to sort out complex issues. Nuanced debate could be boring

and the threshold of absorption is not likely to be high. His capacity for absorption of economic and social information is suspect. Estrada says that at the end of the

day "it is I who will make swift and proper decisions." No doubt, he will make decisions, but the swiftest way to make a decision is to let undigested information flow unimpeded from one ear to the other.



ESTRADA: Taking the initiative

The best minds can make an enormous input on the presidential mind but if that mind is a vacuum, their inputs are wasted.

That's why the number of advisers should not be presented as a guarantee that he can make correct or even intelligent decisions.

What the avalanche of bright people jumping into the Estrada bandwagon indicates is that these people think that because Estrada has a simple mind, they can influence him. In other words, they seek to mind. I wish there's a technology that again there's still the problem whose brains will be transplanted or whose inputs can be understood and accepted at the end of the day

We are better off with a computerised robot like Deep Blue who defeated the Russian chessmaster Gary Kasparov.

Deep Blue was fed enormous information about chess patterns and strategy and was able to analyse and respond intelligently to the moves of Kasparov. So, if it were only possible to launch the candidacy of a robot like Deep Blue for president of the Philippines, we will probably be better served than by a phalanx of advisers whose inputs might be wasted and cancel one another.

The analogy that Ronald Reagan, who was an actor, turned out to be a successful president does not cut ice in Philippine politics.

First, Reagan had an ideological framework (fervent anti-communism) and an economic perspective from which a consistent and coherent body "Reaganomics" flowed.

His perspective was shared by Middle America and kept the Republicans in power in the White House for a long time. Reagan was never confused about his economic tendencies. He was consistent.

Second, Reagan was a great communicator who rivalled the communications skill of Franklin D.

Senate panel lends voice to

Roosevelt who used the fireside chat as a medium of dialogue with the American people.

The presidency of the Philippines, like that of the United States, is a nerve centre for communication and dialogue with the people. It is the bully pulpit that mobilises and

inspires the nation to respond to the president's policy initiatives. By contrast, Estrada has no coherent philosophical and economic framework that will define his policies. His choice of advisers many of whom have clashing

perspectives — betrays the intellectual vacuum. Also, while Reagan is at his best communicating with the public, Estrada avoids debates and exposure

to public forums.

At the rate Estrada ducks intellectual confrontation and appearances in public debates, we will be facing a "mute presidency" under Estrada for the next six years.

It will be a presidency where messages are conveyed through body language. Thirty or more advisers pouring diverse advice into the ears of Estrada will not make him less mute and more articulate.

Think tanks and academics in residence are in fact standard institutions in modern democratic leadership. But the tendencies of think tanks and academics are at least consistent with those of the

BSP in breach of power-limit

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas exceeded its powers when it decided to assume the P5 billion in bad loans of the cash-strapped Orient

Commercial Banking Corp.
This was disclosed yesterday by
Representative Jose Carlos Lacson (Lakas, Negros Occidental), one of the authors of the Bangko Sentral Act, and Representative Joker Arroyo (Ind., Makati City). "The law was not enacted to bail

out failing banks. The Bangko Sentral Act does not give the Bangko Sentral such explicit powers," said Lacson, former chair of the House Committee on Banks and Financial Inter-

A member of the Monetary Board said on Thursday that the BSP and the Philippine Depositors' Insurance Corp. (PDIC) would absorb P5 billion of Orient Bank's losses to clear its balance sheet to enable its owners to sell it free of liabilities.

Lacson and Arroyo, who fought on opposite sides when the Bangko Sentral Act was being deliberated before its enactment in 1993, lamented the special treatment given to Orient Bank. "Why must banks be saved

when their owners mismanage it? Other businesses are not given the same treatment," they said in a joint

The two explain that when a bank is mismanaged, the BSP Charter requires it to place the bank under a conservatorship. If this fails, the bank must be placed under receivership and undergo liquidation.

Arroyo noted that when the oil deregulation law was being discussed, the BSP resisted the setting up of a P2.9-billion buffer fund designed to cushion the effects of rising fuel prices and benefit millions of Fil-"In the case of the Orient Bank, how easily the Bangko Sentral would set aside P5 billion to save it to benefit only its owners. The P5 billion is indirectly, the taxpayers' mon-

Orient Bank is owned by real estate developer Jose Go. It had to declare a bank holiday last week after it was hit by a deluge of withdrawals on speculation that it had been badly affected by the peso devaluation and

that it was up for sale.

The BSP has since talked to at least three big commercial banks for a possible buy-out of the bank. Arroyo said this was the second

time the BSP was bailing out a troubled bank in less than a year. "It's the same case with the Monte

de Piedad. However, in that case, the Bangko Sentral allowed that bank to go under so that it could be sold cheaper," he remarked. In both cases, Arroyo added, the

BSP was negligent as it was supposed to monitor all banks. In Koronadal, South Cotabato, Senator Sergio Osmena III called on the BSP to order all banks to immedi-

ately report their true financial condition in the wake of the Orient Bank's Osmena, the Liberal Party vicepresidential candidate, also lashed out at BSP Governor Gabriel Singson for failing to maintain "transparency in

fidence that came about as a result of the Orient Bank debacle. "In our situation when there is a financial crisis, there is no better confidence-building measure but trans-

the banking sector" that could have

averted any loss in investor con-

parency," Osmena said. He said Singson should immediately order banks to publish their respective financial statements to quash whatever uncertainty there is in the

Estrada urges Sin to keep off politics

From Our Correspondent

MANILA - Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin should stay away from politics because nobody listens to him anyway, a smarting Vice-President Joseph Estrada said yesterday.

Sin, according to the presidential aspirant, should let the people's innate intelligence" determine their choice for president in the May 11 elections instead of telling them who not to vote for.

Estrada's hostile statement has been spurred by Cardinal Sin's new pastoral letter which dissuades voters from choosing a presidential candidate just because he has been leading in popularity surveys, an obvious broadside attack on the vice-president who has been a consistent topnotcher in such polls.

The cardinal's message will be delivered before churchgoers yesterday, the start of the four-day celebration of the 1986 Edsa uprising that led to the downfall of the Marcoses.

"Do not decide according to surveys," says the pastoral letter. "Listen to your heart, listen to your conscience. Do not just march with the popular. Go with the choice of conscience and morality. Listen to the voice of Edsa 1986."

The archbishop warned that many the surveys were intended to programme the mind of the indiscriminating and manipulate public

'Meralco-pay-back' chorus

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The chair of the Senate committee on public affairs added its voice to the government chorus telling the Manila Electric Co. to pay back to its customers excessive profits siphoned by the company in the past few years.

Meralco should immediately refund customers at least P108 million, or 1 per cent of the amount that it had "overbilled" them since 1994 plus the interest, until the courts decide whether or not its profits exceeded the ceiling for public utilities. The chair of the Senate committee

ommendation on Saturday after a joint hearing on the issue with the committee on energy "They should no longer delay the refund and they should also pay the interest," said Senator Ernesto Her-

on public services made the rec-

rera. "That's not their money in the On February 16, the Energy Regulatory Board ordered Meralco to immediately refund customers at least P10.8 billion in excess profits it had earned since February 1994 and roll-back power rates by 16.7 centavos

per kilowatt-hour. But Meralco said it would appeal the ERB decision, which the board partly based on a Commission on Audit report, before the Court of Appeals. A moderate labour group yeserday urged Meralco to declare a

moratorium on disconnections of past due accounts in the wake of the ERB order. In a press statement, the Alliance of Filipino Workers said Meralco customers deserved a respite after they were victimised by overcharging in the last four years.

Labour Representative Gregorio del Prado, AFW chair, said Meralco customers who failed to pay their bills 30 days after the deadline automatically suffer disconnection of electricity 'As a gesture of goodwill, the

least Meralco can do now is put a temporary stop to their usual practice of abruptly disconnecting unpaid accounts," Del Prado said. He said initial computations made

by his labour group showed that a household consuming an average of 195 kilowatt-hours and billed P747.57 monthly by Meralco would be entitled to a refund of P1,628,25 for having been overcharged 16.7 centavos per kwh over the past 50

Del Prado said the amount is equivalent to two months worth of electricity bills.

"Considering the big rebate due its customers, it would be the height of insensitivity on the part of Meralco to insist on disconnecting past due ac-

Citing the figures presented in the Senate hearing by COA representative Nelia Villeza, Herrera said rate base (RORB) of 13 per cent, or 1 per cent above the 12 per cent ceiling set by law. Herrera said this resulted from

Meralco's decision to passing on to

its customers its income tax and including it as part of operating expenses, a practice which the COA "Since the 12 per cent RORB is not the issue, there is still an excess of 1 per cent which Meralco should

now refund," Herrera said. The COA had found that Meralco had been keeping an RORB of 21.04 er cent since 1994 as a result of an 18-centavo per kwh rate increase. Seven percentage points of the 21.04-per cent RORB represented the

income tax payment that was included in Meralco's operating ex-COA said Meralco's RORB

would still be 13.95 per cent even if its income tax were considered part its operating expenses. Aside from the income tax issue,

Meralco is also contesting COA's computations on the total amount of

ERB commissioner Artemio Magabo said the exclusion of income taxes in the operating expenses of public utilities like Meralco had already been established since 1957.

But two former ERB chairs, Rex Tantiongco and Bayani Faylona, came to the defence of Meralco at the

Pagcor defends VIP casino practice

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — "Why would we sue them when they already lost millions? What

is important is they still come back and lose more millions. So said Alice Ll. Reyes, chair of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp., as she defended the practice accorded VIP casino players who issue

cheques to pay their multi-million loses at the Casino Filipino.

Some of the cheques paid by the players at the Casino Filipino had bounced, but Reyes said Pagcor won't file charges against them. 'We're protecting the interest of Pagcor by not suing them," Reyes said. Reyes explained that if they filed charges against VIP players for alleged violation of Batas Pambansa 20 or the Bouncing Cheques Law, these high-

rollers might not come back to the casino. Reyes was reacting to a challenge made by a private casino operator to file charges, which was what the Mimosa Regency Casino at Clarkfield, Pampanga did to former Caloocan Mayor Macario "Boy" Asistio who issued P15 million in bouncing cheques to cover his casino losses last year.

Mimosa Regency filed estafa charges against Asistio at the Angeles City Regional Trial Court, which issued a warrant of arrest against the former mayor. Asistio was recently granted a temporary restraining order by the same court. Reyes neither confirmed nor denied if Asistio, a known player at the Casino Filipino, also issued bouncing cheques to Pagcor. Former tourism secretary Jose Antonio Gonzales, chair and chief executive

officer of the Mondragon Leisure and Resorts Corp. which operates the Mimosa Regency, said the company was protecting the interest of its stockholders when it filed the charges against Asistio.

Gonzales urged Pagcor to do the same, noting that it should protect public interest since it is a government entity. But Reyes invoked the right not to file charges, saying it is in the "best interest of Pagcor. She had earlier claimed Pagcor had collectibles of P200 million from VIP

players who issued post-dated cheques to pay off losses Reyes said a Chinese highroller who owed Pagcor P60 million was able to reduce his obligation to only P17 million. Another highroller, Reyes said, lost P100 million in one night and asked that the P30 million be paid over a certain period since his banks account only had P70 million.

'They already lost millions, so why won't we give some considerations to them?" she said.

Reyes also stressed that its method of recording transactions has the approvand was even suggested by the Commission on Audit. An October 18, 1996 memorandum signed by Cristino Neguiat Jr. head of the Pagcor's finance and treasury division, said it was COA corporate auditor

officials of using the current recording scheme for cheques. Under the system, personnal cheques which were not cleared by the bank were reflected in the win/loss records as a refill or a loss on the tables even if

Fisheries code turned down

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said the proposed law aimed at improving the fisheries sector spells the economic dislocation of at least 1.8 million small-scale fi-

"We have been consistent in our position that the 15-kilometre municipal waters should only be for small fishermen and fishing vessels up to three gross tonnes. The bicameral version is unacceptable,' said Pamalakaya president Rodolfo

De Villa, Enrile included among 'serious' candidates

From Our Correspondent

MANILA - Former defence secretary Renato de Villa and Senator Juan Ponce Enrile are now included in the Commission on Elections' short list of "serious" presidential can-didates, bringing to seven the number of presidential aspirants who are certain of being allowed to run in the May 11 exercise, the Comelec said

melec Chair Bernardo Pardo excluded in his initial list of five strong presidential contenders, were not among the 41 presidential aspirants invited to attend the "clarificatory" hearings for disqualification that the Comelec set

The first five presidential contenders named by Pardo were Speaker Jose de Venecia of the ruling Lakas-

Marcos of the Kilusang Bagong Lip-unan, former lotto czar Manuel "Manoling" Morato of Partido Bansang Marangal, former Cebu Govern-or Emilio "Lito" Osmena of Pro-Muna Development binsiya Initiatives (Promdi), and Santiago Dumlao Jr, of the Kilusan para sa Pambansang Pagpapanibago, along with 37 other lesser known presidential aspirants, would have to attend the hearings along with their lawyers to prove they are not nui-

The list of presidential aspirants still facing problems on their candidacies is contained in a seven-page draft resolution finalised late Thursday after deliberations by the Co-

in the list of official presidential candidates. Pardo, who earlier said he wanted to trim down to five the number of serious presidential candidates for the May 1998 elections, was apparently outvoted during the deliberations. Reporma's move to co-alesce with Lapiang Manggagawa, a Comelec-registered political party, apparently saved his presidential bid. The PDR-LM coalition still has a pending petition for registration with

on Enrile, who he said had run twice for the Senate, a national position and won, proving that he is capable of mounting a national campaign. Gorospe said Enrile was one of

the country's richest politicians, with various business interests, and could mount a campaign even without an

Pardo said the poll body would have to come out soon with the of-ficial list of candidates for the May 11 elections. This list is needed for the printing of the computerised ballot forms to be used in the automated polls in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The four other "serious" presidential aspirants-Marcos, Morato, Osmena and Dumlao must convince the Comelec on Tuesday that they are fit and serious enough in gunning for the presidency

their capability to launch a nationwide campaign, or they would be weeded out along with the others considered as nuisance candidates.

rato and Dumlao. Ms Marcos' main problem in get-

ting into the Comelec list is her conviction for a graft case.

pending her appeal, is already considered final judgment for election

Pardo to quit day before De Villa assumes office ipsa loquitur, meaning "the thing speaks for itself." This can be

Elections Chair Bernardo Pardo will resign from his post only if

"If he wins, the day before he assumes office, I will get out of the Comelec," Pardo, whose term is supposed to end in 2002, said. Pardo was responding to De Villa's call for his resignation after

the Comelec chief excluded the

Reporma standard-bearer from the

list of presidential contenders who were sure of being declared official He also laughed off De Villa's allegation that Malacanang was

behind his earlier pronouncement on the presidential hopefuls. 'That's not true," said Pardo. he just knows he will attract the

President Ramos himself denied Malacanang had anything to do with Pardo's controversial declaration.

standard-bearer, Jose de Venecia. Late on Thursday, however, the Comelec included De Villa as well as Senator Juan Ponce Enrile in its list of "serious" presidential hopefuls who were sure to make it as official candidate in the May

of De Villa's Reporma-Lapiang Manggagawa coalition. and the rest of the Reporma candidates will have to run as

other registered political parties that are fielding candidates in May. Pardo said De Villa "just got list of aspirants who would have to attend the clarificatory hearings set

independent candidates or transfer to

Morato, who has insisted on running even without the Comelec's nod, Pardo said: "He can run in Luneta. "I deny this," Ramos declared, referring to De Villa's "unfounded"

allegation that Malacanang was behind Pardo's statement on limiting the presidential race to only five is unfounded.



DE VILLA: Doubting Thomas

"It's not the end of the world for them," he said. "The Comelec has made it clear it will still hold hearings. It's not a unilateral or dictatorial kind of statement."

had yet to come out. Gorospe called De Villa "rather impulsive" for demanding Pardo's resignation. De Villa has a running

candidates. Enrile and Leyte Representative Imelda Marcos have no running mates. Former Cebu Governor Emilio "Lito" Osmena and Morato have no senatorial candidates. One of Reporma's senatorial candidates, former Comelec commissioner Haydee Yorac, said

Pardo should inhibit himself from all

deliberations concerning the party,

particularly De Villa's candidacy Yorac said Pardo apparently

She said the burden of proving whether candidates could be considered legitimate rested on the aspirants themselves and on those contesting their bids. No one has contested the legitimacy of De Villa's

candidates. Yorac said the Comelec should apply the so-called rule of res

From Our Correspondent

MANILA- A militant group of fisherfolk has rejected as "unacceptable" the final version of the Fisheries Code Congress passed the other night.

sherfolk.

Milagros Romero and Casino Pavilion auditor Fel Engo who advised Pagcor

applied on a number of lesser

known candidates who are "not

really serious" and "do not conduct

Senator Blas Ople went further, saying Pardo should inhibit

himself from all Comelec collegial

deliberations on which candidates

Pardo has until this week to

P50-million damage suit in Cebu,

warned the legal counsel of Lito

Lawyer Winston Garcia said

Osmena's party, the Probinsya

Muna Development Initiatives

Pardo's "baseless" statement

standard-bearer, from the serious

undermined the former governor's

that it has damaged the credibility

of our campaign," Garcia said.

Pardo's "uncalled for" remarks

demoralised Osmena's supporters.

uncalled for opinion of Pardo is

not the official stand of the

Comelec en banc," he said

Another lawyer, Promdi

spokesperson Achilles Canete, said

"We've been telling them the

"His statement was so reckless

excluding Osmena, Promdi

presidential candidates has

bid for the presidency.

rectify his statement or face a

to disqualify.

(Promdi).

From Our Correspondent

MANILA - Commission on former defence secretary Renato de Villa becomes president in the May

'When he says something like that, press. Malacanang is not behind any of this, not in front and not in

One opposition senatorial candidate had alleged Pardo was acting upon the president's order to favour the Lakas-NUCD

Pardo said the Comelec would still verify the petition for registration If the petition is denied, De Villa

lucky" his name was excluded in the by the poll body. Of former lotto czar Manuel

candidates. "That complaint or charge The president advised those

complaining about Pardo's statement to present their side during the Comelec hearings.

Comelec Commissioner Manolo Gorospe said De Villa should not have made such a rash statement against Pardo because the poll body's

official list of presidential aspirants

mate, former Pangasinan Governor Oscar Orbos, and nine senatorial

prejudged the issue of whether or not De Villa must be stricken off the list of presidential candidates without benefit of a public hearing "A judge does not jump the gun,"

candidacy, she pointed out. On the issue of nuisance

yesterday De Villa and Enrile, whom Co-

for February 24.
As such, it's now a "sure seven" for the presidential race.

NUCD-Kampi, Vice-President Joseph Estrada of the opposition Laban ng Makabayang Masang Pilipino, Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago of People's Reform Party, Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim of Liberal Party and Senator Raul Roco of Aksyon Demokratiko. Only Leyte Representative Imelda

sance candidates.

melec en banc Sources said the majority of the commissioners want De Villa, who is running under the new coalition of the Partido para sa Demokratikong Reporma and Lapiang Manggagawa, and Enrile, who is running as an in-dependent candidate, to be included

Pardo also had a change of heart

They would also have to prove

In this hearing, the Comelec will also decide on Senator Santiago's petition for the disqualification of Mo-

Pardo said the Supreme Court's decision, although not yet executory

The hitch to Osmena's bid for the presidency is his Promdi party, which is registered as a regional political party under the party-list system, and not a national political party which could carry candidates for national

RO5m composite pipes project on anvil

By Our Business Reporter

MUSCAT - An RO5 million joint venture project to manufacture composite pipes is coming up in the Sultanate of Oman soon. The high-tech project, which would be the first of its kind in the Sultanate, is being jointly promoted by Trefftec Engineering of Germany and a group of Omani entrepreneurs, at the Sohar In-

According to Sheikh Saif Hashil Al Maskey, the main local promoter of the project, the factory once set up would produce glass reinforced enoxy (GRE) pipes and glass reinforced vinylester (GRV) pipes.

find extensive applications in the oil and gas sector as well as in the sewerage and water distribution projects, chemical factories, etc.

The success of the project mainly depends on the fact that the AGCC countries are net importer of the reinforced thermostat pipes and the requirements in Oman for the GRE and GRV pipes are being currently met through imports, mainly from Europe.
The company has already ac-

quired the state-of-the-art technology. and the machinery has already come

The sophisticated production technology being adopted involves the 'dual helix pattern filament winding

Trefftec of Germany will provide the technical consultancy as well as operations management services for the first five years, according to com-

"The promoters have plans to establish an SAOG company with an equity capital of RO2 million," say the sources at Al Baraka Economic Consultancy, Muscat, which has done the feasibility study for the project.

The remaining capital, RO3 million, is expected to be raised through soft loan and term loans from commercial banks, the sources added.

"The German promoters would contribute 40 per cent of the equity and 40 per cent will be offered to the public," Youcef Fartas, chief exTimes of Oman. The remaining 20 per cent will be contributed by the Omani

According to a market study conducted by Al Baraka, there is good market prospects for the composite pipe products. The company's product mix will also include high quality glass reinforced polyester pipes with vinylester lining and GRE, GRV and GRP fittings such as joints, elbows, flanges, etc. Epoxy and vinylester pipes are in high demand in the oil and gas industry the world over as an alternative for steel flow lines and for

a variety of other applications. The oil and gas companies in Oman and other AGCC countries

MUSCAT - Polaroid has major ex-

pansion plans in Oman, a senior of-ficial representing the Polaroid range

Oman, added that expansion would

and tried-and-tested sunglasses that

we offer is a clear demonstration of

He was speaking at a display of the complete range of the 1998 sun-

glass collection for their dealers at

manager of Capital Store, added that

Polaroid has a heritage going back 50

years in the sunglass business and

nearly 40 years in the Gulf. "It is a

Anish Mathew, senior marketing

"The comprehensive range of new

Harish Borkar, product manager of Polaroid at Capital Store LLC, distributors for Polaroid products in

of products said yesterday.

also include the optical sector.

this intent," he noted.

Taj Restaurant yesterday.

have been using these products for a long time now. The major products coming in the sewerage sector and the water production and distribution sector in Oman will create additional de-

mand for these products. There are very few companies in the world which have acquired the right technology and know-how for producing GRE/GRV pipes.

The new company, according to

H. Koehler, chief executive of Trefftec Engineering, will be in a position to serve the domestic and export markets. Against a targeted annual production of 2,500 tonnes of GRE, GRV pipes, the annual requirement in Oman itself will be around 4,000

Polaroid plans expansion in Oman

BA wants A-I to stop fare war

BOMBAY — The "fare war" triggered off by British Airways (BA) to celebrate India's 50 years of independence seemed to have "boomeranged" with the British carrier now seeking Air-India's (A-I) help to stop it. The British airline on January 19 caught the airlines in the city by surprise with a 40 per cent discount for flights out of India, which led to a virtual scramble by all airlines to announce discounts - a windfall to the passengers. "Things were looking up when BA spoilt the market by announcing discounted tickets putting pressure on the yields," said an A-I of ficial. A-I took strong objection and in retaliation reintroduced the companion-free offer on first and business class tickets. — PTI

Indian jute baron held in Fera case

CALCUTTA - Jute baron Arun Bajoria was arrested by enforcement directorate officials from a private nursing home in Calcutta on Saturday. He was charged with violating the Fera by making undisclosed payments abroad to the tune of Rs4 crore.

Chief judicial magistrate of the Alipore court Gopal Chandra Maity remanded Bajoria to judicial custody in the nursing home, where he is un-dergoing treatment for various ailments, till he could be produced in the appropriate court after consulta-

tions with his physician.

Bajoria (53), who was interrogated by ED officials on Friday, was arrested around noon. He was kept under guard at the nursing home while counsel for the ED, Debu Roychowdhury, petitioned the Sessions Court for permission to shift him to a police jail.

However, Bishtu Charan Ghosh, counsel for Bajoria, submitted that judicial custody does not always mean that an accused has to be in police jail. "It does not matter whether the accused is in jail because whether he is at his house or hospital, it is tantamount to judicial custody. Considering the poor health of my client, the accused should not be placed in jail custody," Ghosh said.

Bajoria's counsel also noted that Ashok Jain, the principal accused in the case, was allowed recently by the Supreme Court to go overseas for medical treatment. Bajoria's counsel also moved an application for bail saying that the jute baron has been already interrogated by the ED on 28 occasions adding up to over 90 hours in the one month or so since he has been in the nursing home. The Su-preme Court turned down Bajoria's bail plea on November 28, 1997. On January 31 this year, he got himself admitted to the nursing home.

- By arrangement with

Foreign currency per



البئتك الوطني العُصماني National Bank of Oman

Head office: P.O. Box 751, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 708894, Fax: 707781, Telex: 3281 NBO ON, Cable: NATBANK Web Site: http://www.nbo.co.om; E-mail: info@nbo.co.om

Exchange rates

Rial Omani per one unit of foreign currency

one Rial Omani Currencies Buying Sterling 0.2612 0.2652 5.27 15.67 D. FL 0.1871 0.1896 0.06287 0.06382 0.000212 0.000219 4566.21 328.73 0.003001 0.003042 Yen 0.03038 N. Kr. 0.05038 0.05138 0.04728 0.2703 S.K. 0.04830 3.65 3.83 0.2742 Can.\$ 0.2567 0.2612 Aus.\$ 0.2207 0.2252 N.Z.\$ Sing. \$ Mal. R 0.2363 4.23 0.0995 HK. \$ 0.0492 0.0501 19.96 Sp. Pes 0.00233 0.00267 374.53 0.01014 96.53 1.83 0.01036 0.546 Jord. D 0.01011 98.91 0.00855 0.00890 0.00605 0.00645 155.04 Fin. M 0.06937 0.07047 14.19 0.730 0.00856 116.82 Gulf currencies 0.1043 0.1054 UAE Dh 9.49 1.027 1.015 0.97 0.1021 0.1032 9.69 0.1063 Rates supplied by National Bank of Oman, Muscat, dated 21/02/98

BritishBank (X) The British Bank of the Middle East

Member HSBC Group Indicative deposit rates for amounts of OMR 100,000/- and above or equivalent thereof:

Indicative deposit rates									
	OMR	USD	DEM	GBP	FRF	CHF	NLG	AUD	
Saving	3.000	4.250	2.120	6.160	2.410	0.000	2.250	3.680	
Call	2.750	3.250	1.120	5.160	1.410	0.000	1.250	2.680	
1 Month	6.250	5.500	3.355	7.035	3.345	0.265	2.935	4.775	
2 Months	6.250	6.030	3.005	7.005	3.725	0.355	2.965	4.425	
3 Months	7.125	6.000	3.035	7.055	3.365	0.395	2.945	4.375	
6 Months	7.500	5.440	2.095	7.055	3.145	0.555	3.045	4.375	
0 Months	7 500	£ 200	2 105	(025	2.005	0.505	2145	4.000	

5.750 3.445 6.875 3.295 0.925

Interest rates on personal loans for amounts above OMR 9,000/- Repayable over 12 months but within 60 months.12% Forward rate against RO for February 25

Interest rates on consumer loans for amounts OMR 9,000/-

and below —Repayable within 1 year Repayable over 12 months but within 60 months



MARKET ROUNDUP

Australian Sheep Omani Cows, Calves and Bulls Fresh Australian Mutton (Sources - United Livestock LLC)

Mackerels

Tuna Fish Prawns

Hamour Sardines Baracuda Cat fish

King fish (Source - Muttrah fish souq)

Evita

Vishwa Parimal

- RO 1.200 per kilo - RO 1.200 per kilo

— RO 1.000 for 6 (big)

- RO 1.000 for 35 (small) - RO 4.000 for one (small) — RO 6.000 for one (big)

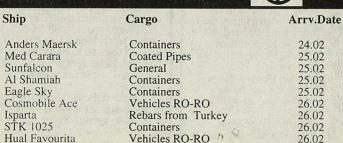
- RO 6.000 per kilo — RO 2.000 for three (small) — RO 1.500 for one (big)

— RO 1.000 for 100 — RO 1.000 for one — Bzs 700 for one

— RO 14.000 for one (big)

26.02

SHIPPING



Steel Pipes from FE

General

Pakistani bank in Britain faces closure

- Another Pakistaniowned bank in Britain faces closure of many of its branches following

losses and allegations of fraud. Following the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, it is the United Bank Ltd. that now faces closure. But the operations of this bank are being cut in stages rather than

through a single move.
The United Bank Ltd., the third largest bank of Pakistan, was founded by Agha Hasan Abedi, the same man who set up the Bank of Credit and International

NAME OF COMPANY

Banks and Investment companies

OMAN NATIONAL HOLDING

NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN

OMAN INTERNATIONAL BANK

DHOFAR INSURANCE 56.25%

GULF MASHROOM COMPANY

NATIONAL SUGAR RINFINING

MARINA BANDER AL-ROWDHA

BOUSHER CHEMICALS

AL JAZEERA SERVICES

SALALAH PORT SERVICES

OMAN CHLORINE 50%

AL AHLIA INSURANCE

BK. OMAN, BAHRAIN & KUWAIT

OMAN & EMIRATES INV. (OM) 50%

OMAN & EMIRATES INV. (UAE) 50%

Insurance

DHOFAR INT. DEV. & INV HOLDING

OMAN UNITED HOLDING

FINANCIAL SERVICE

AL AHLIA PORTFOLIO

OMINVEST

which was closed down by the Bank of England, according to banking sources. The Bank of England made

The United Bank now faces several problems similar to the BCCI, though not on that scale. Worldwide more than 5,000 employees of the bank have been made redundant as one branch after the other is closed down. The Pakistani bank has already closed down six of its 11 branches in Britain. Two more of these branches are due to be closed shortly

The operations of the bank are being whittled down in Britain following the intervention of the Bank

Most scrips show downtrend

traded and 89 per cent of the deals.

closed down 200 baisa at RO7.530.

TRADING CHART

PREV.

CLSG

THE PRICE INDEX - 670.484

11.330

5.950

7.950

9.400

18.460

6.370

9.300

4.680

4.780

4.350

5.650

10.000

THE PRICE INDEX - 498.438

(\$16.602 million) in 740 deals.

RO2.054 million

DAILY SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR MUSCAT SECURITY MARKET AS ON SUNDAY 22-02-1998

TRADED

SHARES

9300

1500

18023

38519

322561

7900

19200

12423

350

1200

MUSCAT — The Banking and Investment Company Sector led the field

on the Muscat Securities Market yesterday with 95 per cent of the volume

Around 323,000 Oman International Bank shares were traded for

The bank's share price closed at RO 6.090, down from RO6.370 at its

About 162,000 Dhofar International Development and Investment Co.

Altogether shares of 53 companies were traded. six companies saw ris-

A total of 1.215 million shares changed hands for RO6.385 million

The general price index closed at 476.13 points, down 2.69 per cent on

LOW

PRICE

DIFF. (-21.335

11.050

5.850

7.780

9.000

18,100

7.400

6.060

8.880

4.520

4.550

4.300

5.550

9.700

DIFF. (-12.909

shares changed hands for RO1.206 million and the company's share price

es in their share prices. Eight were unchanged and 39 fell.

the 489.27 points recorded at Saturday's close. — ONA

HIGH

PRICE

11.200

5.850

7.810

9.150

18.350

6.290

9.000

4.600

4.750

4.350

5.550

9.700

Losses of the bank have added up to more than £100 million (six billion rupees) in recent months, the sources said. Most of the losses have been written off as bad loans, they said.

But a group of former employees of the bank in Oldham, near Manchester, have gone to an industrial tribunal to present evidence of fraud The employees are protesting unfair

CLOSE

PRICE

11.180

5.850

7.810

9.150

18.100

7.530

6.090

8.880

4.520

4.650

4.300

5.550

HANGE (2.525 %)

DIFF.

- 0.150

0.100

0.140

0.250

0.360

0.200

- 0.280

0.420

- 0.160

- 0.130

- 0.050

- 0.100

HANGE (3.084 %)

dismissal by the management. - India Abroad News Service

heritage and expertise that we are The full range of sunglasses, Core collection for adults and kids, for which Polaroid is well known for, and also two new high quality brands, which would address the high end of

the market for the first time were dis-The first range comes under the brand name 'Xoor', a high quality range of Italian-designed sunglasses. This is a highly elegant product,

nology together with the features of the polarising lens. "The excellent optical properties



Anish Mathew, senior marketing manager of Capital Store, left; Steve Smith, regional manager of Polaroid, centre; and Harish Borkar, product manager for Polaroid of Capital Store, after introducing the new Polaroid range of sunglasses.

of Xoor ensure clear and distortionfree vision," Mathew added.

boasting the latest plastic lens tech-Polaroid also displayed its new 'Furore' collection, an exclusive brand

of Italian made designer sunglasses,

aimed at the more fashion-conscious.

polarising filter from Polaroid with

The range features the original

Indian inflation rises again

NEW DELHI — After a week's respite, India's annual rate of inflation once again started moving northward, rising marginally to 5.42 per cent for the week ended Feb-

ruary 7.

The inflation, based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), rose by 0.13 percentage points to 5.42 per cent (provisional) from 5.29 per cent (p) the week before and 7.83 per cent in the corresponding week last year.

The fall, despite a marginal decline in the index for all commodities during the week, was due to squaring off of 0.20 percentage fall in inflation during the corresponding week last year. The index for all commodities (base: 1981-82=100) during the week stood at 338.4 (p) compared to 338.5 (p) in the previous week.

Inflation based on final index stood at 4.3 per cent for the week ended December 13 (the latest available), as against 3.9 per cent based on the provisional index.

The final index for all commodities for the week was 333.7 compared to the index of 332.5 on the provisional index. Provisional WPI figures, released by the Industry Ministry, come after a lag of two weeks, while final figthe third week on a trot after skyrocketing for most of De- (-8 per cent). — PTI

cember and January. The increase in food items, due to unusual behaviour of the south-west monsoon and severe cold wave in the north, had triggered off the increase in inflation after touching an 11-year low

As against inflation based on WPI, the rate of increase in price rise based on consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW), which is representative of the retail prices, stood at 6.3 per cent in December compared to 4.9 per cent in the previous month.

Among the major components of WPI, the rate of increase in prices during the year were cereals (-0.63 per cent), pulses (11.95 per cent), vegetables (7.71 per cent), oil seeds (9.52 per cent), mineral oils (11.85 per cent), electricity (8.03 per cent), dairy products (3.90 per cent), grain mill products (-3.31 per cent), sugar, khandsari gur (22.95 per cent), edible oils (-0.73 per cent), oil cakes (-5.09 per cent), textiles (3.35 per cent), fertilisers (6.12 per cent), cement (-5.43 per cent), iron and steel (3.53 per

During the week, items which witnessed major price fluctuations were lime (36 per cent), khandsari (7 per ures come after eight weeks. The latest week saw the pric-cent), maida and masur (6 per cent each), steatite (-22 per es of primary and manufactured food items improving for cent) and electric wires and rubber insulated other cables

Euro battle not lost despite UK opposition

pose the new single European currency but euro supporters here have not yet lost the battle, according to the latest surveys that show the gap between "pro" and "con" has narrowed considerably.

A poll published this week in London showed 44 per cent of Britons now favour the idea of the euro, which will be launched on January 1 in a first phase involving mainly banks, while 47 per cent are still

But the difference between the two sides had been trimmed to only three percentage points, against 11 per centage points last July, according to the survey of 904 people by the main British polling institute MORI.

The poll also showed that seven out of 10 Britons now favour greater cooperation between their country and continental Europe.

"Since the election there is evidence of a remarkable shift in public opinion across Britain," said Prime Minister Tony Blair late last month. His Labour party ousted the very Euro-sceptic Conservatives in general elections last May.
"For the first time in many years,

there is a growing consensus in Britain in favour of constructive engagement with Europe," he said.

If Blair choses to push Britain along the path towards the single currency, he will have to hold a referendum which is seen as politically

But "hostility to EMU (the European Monetary Union) is abating," said Adam Sinclair, a senior executive with MORI. "Nothing has suddenly changed.

But there are indications that, over

time, people are getting more used to Countries hoping to qualify for next year's launch of the euro are supposed to have a budget deficit of not more than three per cent of gross do-mestic product (GDP). They will be

Anxiety in the run-up to this has not affected Britain, however, since Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown have excluded British membership of a single

the present parliament in 2002 - the year when the actual introduction of euro notes and coins into the public's pockets takes place.

But despite their prudence in entering the single currency, Blair and Brown have suggested that Britain's economy could actually draw some benefit from joining.

for one, has been urging Britain to rapidly join the single currency, warning this week that an economically divided Europe could not withstand in-ternational competition. "Wall Street will get used to the idea that the euro

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl,

more positive approach has probably brought about the change seen in the public surveys, according to the European Movement, a cross-party organisation that promotes European construction. This group sees a "correlation"

between Labour's victory last May and the public's slight warming towards the euro. During a recent opinion poll, canvassers for the movement said: "We have found that people were much more positive than they used to be." - AFI

is the world's other great currency," Kohl said. This tilt in London away

from Euro-scepticism and towards a

How many euros is that?

LE MANS (France) — How many euros is that?

Already the question is being asked in several countries in the European Union, which is preparing for the launch of the single euro currency on January 1. In France about 50 products are in preparation to help people convert

prices. But research by the French Finance Ministry has found only one converter that is made entirely in Europe, with input from Poland. It is called the "Eurette" and is made by a company employing 24 people here, Fimor, which says it has received promises of orders for 20 milion of the devices, which will convert a local currency into euros and vice

"Using the Eurette should be intuitive and fun, this is why it will have no instruction booklet," said Paule Bernard, a commercial director at Fimor. The parts are to be imported mainly from Poland and the device is to be assembled by a new, entirely automatic assembly line in this eastern French city from March 1999 at a cost of production close to that in South

A multi-currency version is planned by 2001, before local currencies of countries participating in the euro zone are entirely replaced by euro notes and coins in the first six months of 2002. Fimor has specialised in such plastified products for more than 20 years. It says it already has orders for 20 million Eurettes and plans to sell them to banks, companies and public services at a price of 8.15 to 10.75 French francs.

How many euros is that? The answer, and therefore final definition of the product, will not be known until the exchange rate of the euro against the currencies it will replace is determined when it comes into existence for financial transactions. as opposed to transactions in cash, at midnight on December 31.

To obtain a good approximation, take the the rate of a currency considered likely to be in the zone, against the ECU, since the rate of the ECU against the euro has already been fixed at one to one. The participating currencies are to be selected during the first weekend

in May and their exchange rates, bilaterally one against the other, set at the The answer then is 1.23290 to 1.62622 euros, expressed to six signifcant figures, as required by the EU conversion regulation. — AFP

MUSCAT INSURANCE 60% 2227 5.570 5.470 5.400 5.400 - 0.170 THE PRICE INDEX = 280.315 DIFF. (-3.104 Industry HANGE (1.095 %) **OMAN CHROMITE 50%** 2466 1.750 1.800 + 0.050 1.800 1.750 MUSCAT IND'L & COOKING GAS 2.620 2.620 2.600 2.620 98 NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES 7000 10.800 10.800 10.800 10.800 DHOFAR CATTLEFEED 3800 - 0.150 4.300 4.300 4.100 4.150 OMAN FLOUR MILLS 2000 5.950 5.750 5.750 5.750 - 0.200 **OMAN CEMENT** 6596 3.300 3.300 3.300 3.300 THE PRICE INDEX - 200,021 Services DIFF. (-3.300 HANGE (1.623 %) PORT SERVICES CORPORATION 430 3.900 3.830 3.830 - 0.070 3.830 OMAN FISHERIES 5900 2.400 2.380 2.420 2.400 - 0.020 RENAISSANCE SERVICES 14000 2.730 2.650 2.600 2.650 - 0.080 PARALLEL MARKET OMAN SECURITIES PORTFOLIO 2750 10.750 10.600 10.500 10.500 - 0.250 BK. MUSCAT AL AHLI AL OMANI 8.700 8.600 8.600 8.600 0.100 MUSCAT FINANCE 7750 4.100 4.100 4.050 4.100 THE ORYX JOINT INV. FUND. 128474 2.100 2.150 2.080 2.090 - 0.010 **GULF INVESTMENTS SERVICES** 4915 8.900 8.800 8.800 8.800 0.100 1.450 MUSCAT INDEX FUND JIA 400 1.490 1.450 1.450 0.040 10024 MAJAN JOINT INV. ACCOUNT 2.440 2.400 2.370 2.370 0.070 AL SHALMAN SECURITIES 13631 9.800 9.970 9.700 9.960 + 0.160 25650 ALLIANCE HOUSING BANK 2.220 2.240 2.200 2.210 - 0.010 THE FIRST MAZOON FUND 14900 1.240 1.200 1.180 1.180 0.060 NATIONAL SECURITIES 103907 4.570 4.450 4.400 4.450 - 0.120 GLOBAL FINANCIAL INV. 20881 3.800 3.750 3.680 3.720 - 0.080 COMMERCIAL BANK OF OMAN 15578 4.160 4.160 4.140 4.160 AL MAWARID SECURITIES 50% 126510 3.430 3.420 3.260 3.420 - 0.010 AL BATINAH DEV. & INV. HOLDING 50 38364 1.590 1.590 1.530 1.550 - 0.040 1.200 UNITED FINANCE 9968 1.150 1.200 1.200 + 0.050 4638 2.500 2.500 NATIONAL IND. INVESTMENT 2.600 2.600 - 0.100 1000 1.750 1.750 1.750 AL SALAN FOOD INDUSTRY 1.800 - 0.050 AL KHALEEJ POLYPROPYLENE 1000 1.400 1.330 1.330 1.330 0.070 GULF PLASTIC IND. 260 1.450 1.450 1.450 1.450 ---OMAN FIPER OPTECS 5062 1.490 1.490 1.490 1.490 2.960 2.900 2.900 2.900 AI-AHLIA CONVERTING IND. 50% 100 0.060 OMAN EUROPE FOODS IND. 2291 1.090 1.090 1.090 1.090

NO OF BONDS TRADING VOLUME 6385217 1274944 TRADED SHARES NO OF CONTRACTS 740 MARKET INDEX 1-13.14 / 2.69 % 476.13

7000

284

18991

12708

634

3600

9660

1.190

1.700

1.220

1.150

1.180

5.400

2.430

1.200

1.700

1.180

1.200

1.130

5.340

2.470

1.200

1.620

1.180

1.200

1.130

5.130

2.400

1.200

1.620

1.180

1.200

1.130

5.130

2.470

+ 0.010

0.080

0.040

+ 0.050

- 0.050

- 0.270

+ 0.040

CBI case against top CCI officials

Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a case against the chairman and managing director (CMD) of the state-owned Cement Corporation of India (CCI), Anand Darbari, for alleged irregularities in purchase of coal from private parties, the Industry Ministry has informed the Delhi High Court.

A chargesheet has also been issued to him for initiating departmental action for major penalty as serious irregularities in awarding contracts were found, standing counsel Meera Bhatia told Justice K. Ramamoorthy in reply to a petition by Darbari.

The petition was recently filed by CCI CMD challenging his indictment by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC).

CVC noticed gross irregularities in award of contracts to private parties for procurement of coal and also found formation of a cartel, Bhatia said.

The iregularities were also noticed by CVC in the emergency import of spares which is still lying at the port, she said.

Adtranz seeking Indian partner for loco mechanicals

NEW DELHI — Adtranz India. subsidiary of locomotive major Abb-Daimler Benz transport, has initiated talks with Cimmco, a Birla company, and state-owned Bharat Earth Movers Ltd (BEML) to develop mechanicals for locomotives in India.

We are talking to Cimmco and BEML and we will be able to zero in on one by the end of the year, president and managing director of Adtranz India, Viren Srivastava

The move is part of Adtranz's plans to manufacture rolling stock in the country, which could come in handy if the company lands the Rs60 billion Delhi Mass Rapid Transport System (MRTS) project.

Srivastava said the discussions with the two companies were at a very preliminary stage and the company had not firmed up its plans on the nature of the tie-up.

My objective is that the partner should be reliable and cost-effective. To fulfil my objective, I will take any

route, he said.
Adtranz has its facilities at its Vadodara plant to manufacture the propulsion (drives) systems of three-phase locomotives and is planning to create facilities, including testing for new products of three-phase locomotives during this

Sita World Travels bags award

NEW DELHI - Sita World Travels, a leading private sector Indian tourism promotion company, has been awarded by the Sri Lankan government for promoting tourism in the south Asian region. The Dharmasiri Senenayake award was presented to the Indian company by the Sri Lankan minister for tourism and civil aviation at a recently held function in Colombo. The function was organised in the Sri Lankan capital to celebrate the golden Jubile of the island-republic's indepedence, according to a press release from Sita travels. Receiving the award, the chiarman of the company, Inder Sharma, said south Asian countries should make combined efforts to promote tourism in the region which is increasingly becoming a popular destination for tourists, the release

Tobacco firm discussed marijuana lacing

LONDON — Britain's biggest tobacco company discussed lacing its cigarettes with marijuana so it could cash in if the drug was legalised, a newspaper has reported.

British American Tobacco (BAT) considered "exploiting" cannabis by adding "near-subliminal levels of the drug", according to The Observer newspaper. It said recently uncovered internal documents showed that BAT was preparing itself for the future possible legalisation of the drug.

Cigarette companies had already registered brand names with links to the drug, like Acapulco Gold and

Red Leb, short for Red Lebanese. The document "considers the main threats to the smoking habit... and draws attention to the undoubted opportunities which exist

in the development of future products".
It added: "In the illicit use of martjuana, relatively large doses of the active principal are involved.

If the use of such drugs was legalised, one avenue for exploitation would be the augmentation of cigarettes with near subliminal levels of the drug." The anti-smoking group Action on Smoking and Health criticised the

firm's discussions ASH director Clive Bates told the paper: "The fact that they wanted to use 'near-subliminal' levels of cannabis smacks of mind

The company told The Observer that the future use of drugs in cigarettes was not company policy. — PTI, AFP

Car wars — Round next?

"The pity of war, the pity war distilled." - Wilfred Owen.(Strange

FOR quite sometime now, Japan's stagnant economy has been in the news. Ahead of the last weekend meeting of the G-7 finance ministers and central bank governors, in London (G-7 countries are: Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the USA.) Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party released its fourth stimulus package since October 1997. This was another renewed attempt to revive a dormant economy. The package elicited rather sharp reactions from Japan watchers for the "little done, the vast undone" approach. One economist, Fred Bergsten, opined that it is " a deliberate con game. They put out an inadequate package, but immediately say there's going to be another package."

The Japanese economy has now been in recession for nearly seven years.

The response to this prolonged agony is perhaps a Keynesian prescription of a fiscal stimulus. (Whatever happened to the Chicago School and the Monetarism?) However, the December 1997 announcement of \$15.8 billion income tax cuts made by the Japanese prime minister has been found to be too little to push the economy back to the rails.

Domestic demand is still in shortage and the Japanese corporates have attempted to overcome this by a recourse to export driven strategies. This is an area where they have an abundance of core competence and

the Japanese have run up huge trade surpluses, particularly versus the USA. The Americans, challenged by the Japanese usurping their market shares, have wailed that the Japanese have been restrictive in the import of American cars. The resultant friction has taken the name of car wars. (The truth is that in several markets in Asia, Japanese cars have an edge over American cars and this has nothing to do with the restrictive Japanese

controls. USA needs to introspect a bit more.) Despite all talk of the need to open up more, in January 1998, Japan's trade surplus rose to \$3.02 billion, — corresponding figures for previous January was a deficit of \$194 million; the surplus against USA had risen by 66 per cent (\$3.91 billion). The falling currencies of Asia, however, managed to force Japan into it's first trade deficit in 8 years (\$271 million).

cent) and the corollary depreciation of the yen has pushed up exports by nearly 9 per cent. By way of geo-political background, it may be pertinent to point out that with the demise of the Cold War, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the marginally warmer relations between USA and China, Japan may not be of such strategic significance as earlier to the Americans.

The innovative prowess of the Japanese entrepreneur (innovation is the commercial application of invention or technology) on the other hand, has indeed made that country a competitor to the Americans. The dominant philosophy for the US has been that what is good for the General Motors is good for America. If the US economy slows down (one sincerely hopes it does not because it is presently the power-house in the world economy), then USA may like to revert to car bashing economics to ensure that their corporates do

Where did the Japanese go wrong? A few months ago, Alan Greenspan of the Federal Reserve cautioned on the "irrational exuberance" of the asse markets. He seems to have been drawing a leaf out of the Japanese books. Easy capital availability (Japanese companies raised some \$638 billion on the stock market between 1985 and 1990) became a feature of the economy. Interest rates were low - official discount was at a low of 2.5 per cent by 1987. Liquidity was plenty. Consumer spending rose nearly 7 fold between 1981 and 1991. Property prices zoomed - In 1990, Japan's total property was valued at ¥2000 trillion, or 5 times the size of its GNP. Japan's banks took advantage by granting real estate loans and collateralising property. By end June 1991 ¥116 trillion had been reportedly lent to property and construction sectors. Many bankers saw security in land.

Funds borrowed for overdraft facilities rose from 2 per cent to 19 per cent between 1981 and 1991. In overdraft facilities, monitoring end-use of funds is quite difficult

Non-banks, many of whose accounting practices were opaque by international standards, joined the bubble-boom — finance companies were at times used as conduits to overcome official restrictions on lending against real estate. Then Newtonian Laws caught up with Japan, whatever goes up has to

from its partners.

Friday.

valued".

In their closing statement, the G7

said that the outlook was "weak" and

called for "continued action to

strengthen the financial system and

regulatory reforms of the financial

and other sectors so as to increase

Rubin told a press conference that

Japan must act "clearly and de-cisively" to strengthen its financial

sector and either cut taxes or boost

spending, both of which were absent

from a reform package unveiled on

Hikaru Matsunaga told reporters that

'I did not make a commitment for

defended the reform package saying it had not been "appropriately

Meanwhile, the G7 finance chiefs

stressed they would have to work to-

gether to keep the world economy on

an even keel, within the IMF frame-

However, Finance Minister

additional measures." He

US Treasury Secretary Robert

MONEY TALKS

BY DR JAYARAM NAYAR

come down — it happens with recurring certainty (Great Crash, 1929; October 1987; Bombay Crash of 1992), but investors always assume a oneway move up. Nikkei lost 48 per cent from its December 1989 high by October 1990.

The wealth losses are estimated at ¥300 trillion. Real estate suffered; credit by banks suffered; in falling markets, asset markets move in tandem. Banks have been caught up with huge chunks of non-performing assets, requiring massive provisions which in turn have affected the bottomlines adversely. Japanese banks have also been affected by shrinking capital on account of the falling capital market and have been struggling to keep to the Bank for International Settlement (BIS) norms on capital adequacy. The market seeing a weakening of Japanese financial institutions have also factored in an extra premium for Japanese borrowers — seen as a relative riskier lending — thus adding on to the costs of business.

Japanese experiments with Monetary Policy also show that it is not able to do so well as expected: the official discount rate has been so low as 0.5 per cent; but this has not fuelled growth. Monetary Policy by itself may not be sufficient to stimulate growth; the old prescription of coordinated action between fiscal and monetary policy is still the best formula. The need to plug contractionary leakage in the system through compensatory pump-priming (higher dose of spending) to offset shortfalls in aggregate demand may be the needed response. The USA is presently quieter in its criticism of Japan only because of America's near full-employment economy; the moment that slows down, saber rattling is likely to start and the car wars will be out in the streets again. At ¥127 to a dollar, (as on last Friday) the US may like to see a strong but not a stronger dollar.

The market expects Japan to lead Asia. Will Japan finally deliver? Hopefully, by previous history, yes. The theme of today's globalisation is coordinated action amidst competition. Wars even for car parking spaces, only add to economic miseries. Coordinated G-7 action may alleviate the agonies of stagnation. Competetive advantages is what the world trade is all

Japan rejects G7 call to kick-start economy

LONDON — Japanese Finance Minister Hikaru Matsunaga rejected calls from his G7 counterparts here at the weekend for Japan to do more to kick-start its moribund economy and help Asia recover from its economic crisis.

At the end of Saturday's meeting

of the Group of Seven (G7) finance ministers and central bankers in London, Matsunaga said there were no plans to introduce extra fiscal measures after the new economic reform package on Friday, saying Tokyo was doing more than it was being given credit for.

But its G7 partners gave strong support to US warnings that Japan must increase spending and cut taxes to pull its economy into shape and boost domestic growth.

US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, who held bilateral talks with Matsunaga before the G7 session, bluntly urged Japan to act "clearly and decisively" to strengthen its financial sector and boost domestic demand-led growth. But a reform package unveiled

on Friday made no mention either of increased spending or permanent tax cuts that could help kick-start domestic growth, Rubin told a press conference after the G7 meeting

The final G7 communique made it clear the other G7 members shared Rubin's concern, calling for continued action to strengthen the financial system" along with reforms to increase economic openness.

It also stressed the need to 'avoid excessive depreciation" of currencies "where this could exacerbate large external imbalances, a clear reference to the recent weakness of the yen and Japan's massive trade surplus with the United States, which shows no sign shrinking.

But a specific call for further fiscal stimulus this year was sourced to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), because Japan refused the idea of this being expressed as a G7 view, a European source said.

Stung by the surge in its trade deficit, the United States has prodded Japan to absorb more exports - Asian and US - reform its ailing banking sector and to deregulate its economy

In recent weeks, US administration officials in speech after speech have made little secret of their exasperation with Japan and the failure of its leadership to stimulate growth and help revive Asia's toting economies.

But Matsunaga has made it clear that while he welcomes a spurt in domestic demand, he is unwilling to increase spending to achieve it, a message that was met with exasperation on Saturday by

his G7 colleagues. French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn said that United States, Germany, France, Canada and Italy all agreed that Japan must do more to revive its own economy, allowing

"We all agree with the IMF that there is a case for measures to enable Japan to resume the rates of growth it has not experienced for a

it to function as a locomotive for

Strauss-Kahn said the Japanese economy contracted in 1997 and that Japan must find its role again as

G7 seeks to reassure Private sector under pressure markets on Asia crisis

LONDON — The private sector will be obliged to help meet the cost of resolving financial crisis in the future as a key element of global financial reform put forward by key world financial leaders meeting here.

Economic experts, and suffering Asian economies, have complained that while international financial institutions have pumped public money into the region to help resolve the current financial crisis, the private investors who helped spark the meltdown have escaped relatively unscathed. Group of Seven finance ministers and central bank governors meeting here

on Saturday said that this must change, however, setting private sector involvement at the heart of any reform of the global international financial system to better cope with such crisis in the future. "In the interest of the longer term proper functioning of the financial mar-

kets, it is essential for the private sector to play its role in resolving crises," the G7 said in a lengthy final statement from Saturday's meeting here. It was more specific in an annexe to the statement on the need for reform of

the global financial regulatory system, saying "we encourage positive consideration of new mechanisms to ensure an orderly involvement of the private sector in the resolution of financial crisis. The statement said measures must be taken to ensure that the private sector

"share both the profits and losses" of their activities in an "appropriate" manner, adding that "it is clear that the private sector's judgement has been inadequate in a number of instances. This was a clear reference to the fact that foreign investors continued to

provide short-term capital to countries such as South Korea even after it became clear that there were problems, and then pulled out when the system began to crumble, exacerbating the problem. Details of just how such burden-sharing will work have yet to be work out,

and the whole issue is "enormously complex," US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said after the G7 meeting. But the one thing that was clear was the unanimous conviction that there must be "far more effective burden-sharing by the private sector" in future, he

German Finance Minister Theo Waigel meanwhile told reporters that ef-

forts to halt the Asian meltdown might have had "more success" and more rapidly" if the private sector had been involved in the rescue packages from the start, as Germany had wanted. France is saying that one way of achieving greater private sector involvement would be a more cautious approach to market opening by emerging

economies, with mechanisms to encourage long-term investment rather than short-term inflows of the kind that helped bring the Asian financial crisis to a Senior International Monetary Fund officials have suggested that one way of making the private sector contribute to the cost of resolving any future crisis

would be for them to be obliged to take out some sort of "insurance" against losses that would be paid to the victims of a market collapse. But while there has been much talk of making the private sector pay,

Saturday's G7 statement was the first time such an influential world forum has forcefully put its weight behind this idea as an integral part of reform of the global financial watchdog system. It remains to be seen how the private sector will react to this insistence that

it help foot the bill for countries' financial problems.

But it is already clear that the real challenge for the governments proposing

the move is to find ways to make the private sector pay without discouraging the "smooth and effective functioning of an open world financial market which, as the G7 statement said, "is of great benefit to all." — AFP

growth in the battered Asian region. long time," the French minister said. an "engine for growth." - AFP

SULTANATE OF OMAN MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY TENDER INVITATION

Muscat Municipality invites suitably qualified and experienced companies / consultants in computer field to submit tenders for the following:

Consultancy Services for Geographical Information System of Muscat Municipality (PRE/98/012)

Please arrange to collect tender documents for the above from our Quantity Surveying Department (Tel. 795391). The charge levied on this tender is RO. 20/- (Rials Omani Twenty only).

The Form of Tender (in small envelope) under wax sealed cover and remainder of the Tender documents (in large envelope) shall be submitted to Quantity Surveying Department, Directorate General of Technical Affairs, Muscat Municipality, Room No. D2-060, Darsait, by 10 am onSaturday, March 7, 1998. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being PRESIDENT
MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

All eyes on Suharto amid peg speculation

meeting here. "We believe that where

countries pursue the necessary re-

forms, the prospects of a return of

confidence to global investors and a

resumption of vigorous growth in the

medium term are good," the state-

long one for such gatherings, run-

ning to six pages including a two-

page annexe with detailed proposals for ways for the IMF to elaborate a

new global code of conduct to help

was not a reason for emerging econ-

nancial markets in emerging economies to foreign firms will make a

significant contribution to their fi-

nancial stability," the statement said.

direct reference to Indonesia, but G7

The final communique made no

But it insisted that the Asian crisis

any future economic

to refuse to open their

believe that opening fi-

The statement was an unusually

JAKARTA — World markets are watching as Indonesian President Suharto mulls a planned currency peg, amid mounting speculation it is just another move in the political chess-game he has been winning

LONDON — Key world financial

leaders meeting here at the weekend

sought to reassure the financial mar-

kets that the Asian crisis was man-

ageable, but warned the region that

pushing ahead with economic reform

was the only way to restore

bank governors also put their weight behind the International

Monetary Fund as the global police-man for financial markets, but

urged sweeping reforms to forestall

And they stressed the need for Japan to take further measures to

kick-start its economy, not only for

its own sake, but also as the engine

"As long as the affected Asian countries follow through with re-

form, and the rest of the world re-

sponds appropriately, the overall ef-

fect of the Asian crisis on world

growth in 1988 should be manageable," the G7 financial leaders

ageable," the G7 financial leaders chiefs did not pull their punches in said in a statement after a one-day comments after the meeting, urging

for future Asian economic growth.

future crises

G7 finance ministers and central

here for more than 30 years. The proposed currency board system sent the already battered rupiah see-sawing, before stability returned on Friday on the realisation the veteran leader would make his position clear when he wanted and that attempts to apply reason to forecasts of

his decision were futile. Mixed signals from officials in recent days have done nothing to clarify whether the government will go ahead with the peg in the face of

mounting international opposition.
US economist Steve Hanke from Johns Hopkins University, the main proponent of the peg, who is advising Suharto on the matter, insisted it would be implemented and warned the country would otherwise be "dead" in four months.

But the strongest indications from officials are it will be delayed in a face-saving act of deference to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other critics.

'Suharto's not made any public comment on this, but he's had his officials out there saying it had to be done and had to be done quickly," said the chief researcher at a major

western corporation here. "So he can say they need more time to study it and, eventually, it will effectively be shelved.

"But no-one really knows. You can't read Suharto unless he wants to be read. He might announce it is going to be implemented tomorrow.

'The guy's not stupid. He's sounded everyone out and he will take a reasoned decision."

Analysts point to Suharto's 32year reign over Indonesia as evidence of his strategic abilities, not withstanding his presiding over the devastating economic crisis currently

gripping the country. He's a master tactician," said the research head of a foreign investment house here.

"Everything he does is for a reason and I worry that we are looking at the currency board system too simplistically. "The uncertainty which everyone is so concerned about as this drags on has actually served a very good purpose for Suharto. The rupiah is relatively stable because there is widespread speculation the

proposal will go ahead.
"If they weren't talking about a currency board system, the rupiah would be subject only to other forces. And as there is no good news at all here at the moment, it could only take the rupiah down." The researcher added that stability in the currency

also served the political purpose of keeping an even keel until after next month's presidential selection. Suharto is expected to be returned

President Suharto to stick to the re-

forms required by the IMF as a con-

dition to a \$43-billion rescue

for trying to rescue his economy by

pegging the rupiah currency to the US

dollar, British Chancellor of the

Exchequer Gordon Brown told

reporters.

The G7 stated "our support for the IMF view that it is not the ap-

propriate time for a currency board to

be established" in Indonesia, Brown

said. "We were of the view that the

Indonesian government must implement the IMF programme."

German Finance Minister Theo

Waigel told reporters that Indonesia

could recover if IMF reforms were

vate financial sector to take part in

rescue packages, saying that "perhaps"

we would have had more success and

more rapidly if that had been done" in

Japan also heard tough words

He stressed the need for the pri-

strictly applied"

Suharto should give up his plans

to office for a seventh consecutive five-year term by a 1,000-member electoral college dominated by his loyalists. Another analyst at a foreign brokerage said there was also an element of directing public anger at the economic crisis onto the IMF and foreign governments by refusing to cave in to their opposition to the

"They roused the anti-Chinese sentiment," he said, referring to recent riots across the country which have damaged or destroyed hundreds of businesses owned by the ethnic Chinese minority. Now they can have another go at

the IMF and the US, playing the nationalist card - Who are they to interfere in our internal affairs?' "It's a strategy of ensuring the

government for the crisis.' Observers in Jakarta are generally agreed that the peg plan would prove disastrous for the country, but say even if it lasted only a few days there

Indonesians blame anyone but their

would still be benefits for Suharto. 'The rupiah goes from around 9,000 (to the dollar) to a peg of say 5,000, which is what they have hinted at," the western corporation's research chief added. — AFP

Indonesia told to take IMF medicine

strong pressure from the Group of Seven (G7) leading industrial nations over the weekend to carry out reforms stipulated under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic rescue package. Although the final communique issued after a one-day summit of G7 financial leaders here on Saturday made no specific mention of the economic turmoil in Indonesia several finance ministers took a tough line in press conferences after the meeting. US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said there had been "extensive discussions" on Indonesia and "there was a unanimous view amongst all seven of us" that Jakarta must carry

out "effective reform."

He pointedly praised South Korea and Thailand for implementing "on a sustained basis" reforms aimed at restoring their battered economies and said that Indonesia must implement the IMF progamme in such a way that

the markets believe in it. The "crucial step" for Indonesia now is "sustained adherence to the IMF programme," Rubin said, but he warned that there would have to be "wrenching changes" if the country was to emerge from the crisis.

Other G7 finance ministers also gave their unqualified support to the IMF, which wants Indon-President Suharto to implement tough reforms in exchange for a \$43 billion rescue package. — AFP

Singapore firm planning cruise packages

NEW DELHI - Attracted by the popularity of Goa as an international tourist destination, a Singapore-based company is planning cruise packages from the state as more and more shipping lines target the Indian

'We are looking at Goa and are thinking of starting a five-day cruise package from the state," Aloysius Lee, president of the Singapore-based Sun Cruises, said. Lee, who led a three- member group to India earlier this month, held discussions with shipping agents in Bombay and Goa.

The Goa cruise will be a five-day package that will include visits to Cochin, the Maldives and Sri Lanka among other sites, he said. The group is planning to station a 1,000-passenger cruise-liner in Goa "What we are aiming to do is to cater not only to the domestic

market, but bring in international tourists also. Initially I feel only 20 per cent of our passengers will be from the domestic market while the rest will all be international tourists," Lee said. Launched in Singapore last November, Sun Cruises is also

targeting the Indian traveller for its existing cruise packages in Singapore. The package is slated for launch later this week. On offer are packages including a weekend trip to a six-day tour covering exotic locations like Bintan and Medan in Indonesia and

Malacca, Penang and Tioman in Malaysia.

We are not looking just at holidayers but also at business travellers who have a weekend to spare while in Singapore and don't want to spend time just shopping," said Chris Bailey, the company's vice-president for sales and marketing.

Currently, most of Sun's passengers are from Europe, said Bailey Though the cruise industry in India is young, it has a tremendous potential, he said. India as a cruise market is yet to take off, a fact that is endorsed by the low number of outbound cruisers — 5,000 last year. However, the fact that the market has been built from a base that was non-existent two years ago is indicative of the high potential in the sector

Among the other cruise companies already vying for the Indian traveller are the US-based Royal Caribbean International, one of the world's largest cruise operators, Cunard Lines, Attika and Star Cruises. Liners offer rates that range from \$100 per day to \$1,000 per day.

"I think the tastes of the Indian traveller are also changing and they are increasingly looking at such kind of packages," said Ritu Saigal, the corporate vice-president of the SOTC KUONI Travel Corp., that is promoting the Sun Cruises package in India. Last year, she said, her company handled over 3,000 outbound

travellers who had opted for a variety of cruise pakcages. Apart from exotic sight-seeing tours, Sun Cruises offers a variety of entertainment opportunities on the ship - from a beauty centre and souvenir shop to sports facilities and cinema theatres. Other attractions include a karaoke lounge, a videogames arcade, water sports, mini golf, rifle shooting, and a special programme for children including activities like storytelling, treasure hunts and face painting.

And for all those concerned about the food served on board - the company has hired an Indian chef and serves both vegetarian and non-vegetarian Indian cuisine. The company is also looking at hiring crew from India. - India Abroad News Service

Exhibitors from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh however said they had mar-

But most European customers remained wary of placing large orders.

There is a very cautious approach by our customers...high unemployment

in Germany is a major reason for the restrained consumer behaviour cou-

pled with an overall economic slowdown," explained Surieet Singh Kharb-

handa an Indian businessman who owns the Frankfurt-based Surject Re-

ena Handelsgesellschaft and is a distributor of a variety of imported

consumer goods ranging from gift articles to fashion jewellery to silk prod-

Kharbanda, who has set up a large distribution network in Europe, sources his products in a number of Asian countries, including China,

India, Taiwan and Hong Kong. "Indian suppliers will lose their business in

Europe if they do not pay attention to quality, finish and packaging, timely deliveries and professionalism," he told IANS at the show.

east Asia and China, whose products were not only of better quality but

were offered at much lower prices than those of the subcontinent. "Chinese

suppliers are also well organised," he added.

This combined with Vietnam's de-

weakness was undesirable helped

strengthen the yen again. The dollar

quickly soared to ¥128 levels after

the economic package was unveiled

Comprising de-regulation measures

and a plan to re-evaluate land assets

proved to be a damp squib. The dol-

the week and rose to ¥127.75 at the

ain's public debt at a record £10.38

billion against a forecast £6.8 billion

helped support the pound at the be-ginning of the week. The pound re-

settlement report from the Confedera-

Stronger-than-expected retail

sales data pushed the pound up fur-

ther. The pound slipped a little to-

ward the end of the week when the

Bank Of England parliamentary tes-

timonies on monetary policies in-

dicated that the interest rates would

not be hiked so soon after all. The

midweek and ended the week at \$1.

pound rose from \$1.6382 to \$1.6395

TRENDS

The world awaits a war on the Ira-

qi front. Yes, Kofi Annan has gone

on a diplomatic mission to Iraq. Yes,

President Clinton says he is in favour

of a diplomatic solution and that mil-

itary aggression is only the last resort.

American citizens in hazardous areas

have been cautioned to leave and oth-

ers whose presence are required provided suitable protection.

There is a massive stockpile of

armed forces and warfare equipment.

Will the Iraqi leader heed the call of

diplomacy or will he take his country

the latter. Like the American citizens

probably taking the same precautions

Iraq and in turn to the oil exporting

capacity of the country. Oil amongst

the prime energy sources in the world

has been systematically harnessed the

world over. Alternative forms of en-

ergy like solar energy, wind power or

hydro-energy are in comparison ex-

tremely expensive and cumbersome

not only to tap but to redirect to the

Nuclear energy is still in its in-

fancy and the same problem of chan-

neling and distributing this energy

energy source. Consider for a mo-

leaves oil as the undisputed reliable

This brings us to the sanctions on

for those living in hazardous areas

Pointers seem to hold in favour of

into yet another battle.

would be advisable

consumer

mained strong after a positive pay

tion of British Industry.

lar was at ¥125.87 at the beginning of

An unexpected repayment of Brit-

held by companies the package

Kharbanda said that south Asians faced a "huge challenge" from south-

inally benefitted in terms of orders received at the show because of the

epreciation of their currencies in relation to the US dollar.

Indians play important role in New York diamond business

NEW YORK — More often than not when an American consumer buys diamonds, the purchase involves stones cut in India and wholesaled through a growing number of New York firms owned by diamond dealers of Indian

The one block 47th street market between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Manhattan comprises more than 2,500 businesses, virtually all related to the diamond and jewellery in-

dustry.
Of this, Indians own about 250 businesses. Although their numbers are small compared with the Jewish, Chinese and Japanese dealers, Indians account for more than 25 per cent of the wholesale diamond trade on the block, according to market es-

Although most Indian traders deal in small diamonds or colourstones, they handled more than \$700 million worth of business of the \$3.5 billion wholesale trade on 47th street last year, according to market estimates.

"Ten years ago, Indians in the di-amond business here were the underdogs nobody on 47th street wanted to do business with us," said Kailash Rawat, president of the Indian Diamond and Colourstone Association (IDCA), an umbrella organisation representing more than 300 Indian dealers on the block. "But now we have 25 per cent of the wholesale market," he told IANS.

The 47th street business district traces its roots to the pre-World War II era when diamond dealers, most of whom were said to be orthodox Jews, started to move in. In the last two decades, the market has grown to be

a major global centre for diamond processing and distribution.

Eli Haas, president of the 2,000-member Diamond Dealers' Club (DDC, of which about 100 members are Indians), said "DDC members handle 98 per cent of the \$5 billion in rough diamonds that annually enter the US".

With a secure trading floor of 25,000 square feet, the DDC is the largest facility on the block. Most of its members are Jews, who, unlike the Indians, are perched at the higher end of the market and deal mainly in large diamonds and colourstones.

Haas felt Indian traders had done "exceedingly well" at the lower end of the market. "They depend primari-ly on the well developed cutting and polishing industry in India to source diamonds. It costs comparatively less and therefore they have an edge," he

Last year, more than two-thirds of total loose diamond caratage imported into the US came directly from India, according to John C. Ferraro, senior vice president of Fleet Bank. described as a major financier of Indian diamond merchants on 47th street. Many more Indian diamonds arrived set in jewellery via international marketing centres such as Hong Kong.

He felt diamonds had been popularised by Indians here while retaining their special symbolism. Rawat said diamonds on 47th street were popular because of their affordibility and Indians had a role to play. "India doesn't cut a stone which costs one million dollars," he said, "but probably a few hundreds of thousands (of

Although traders acknowledge there is cut-throat competition among the dealers here, animosity has taken a backseat at least for now. Estimates are unavailable on how business may have been affected on 47th street since other global centres like Mumbai, Tel Aviv and Antwerp have emerged. These centres are reported to be producing higher quality diamonds for far less than it costs on 47th street. Israeli manufacturers, for example, have cornered the market on laser technology that cuts large stones faster and more accurately than human hands. It costs \$40 per carat to produce a diamond there, versus \$90 on 47th street, according to market estimates.

As a result, traders from different communities are determined to regroup and put the sparkle back into their industry

The IDCA, Rawat said, was working with the DDC to polish their business practices by inviting bankers and technology experts to make presentations at the club's headquaters. To win back buyers, they have designated special weeks for their visits and implemented a programme to make sure buyers can get all of their orders filled in New York and not

Product fairs, at which modern computerised equipment is demonstrated, are yet another means by which the DDC and IDCA has tried to assist members by helping them get over the fear of technology. Even as laser cutting and faceting becomes common elsewhere, many on 47th street, as one trader described, cling

to the belief that "only a fool will en trust the production of a \$65,000 diamond to a machine.

All merchants' association on the street are working closely with the city's Economic Development Corporation and Manhattan borough president's office for a \$1.2 million facelift of 47th street which was launched by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in November last year.

Rawat said Indians were specially competing with Israelis in the lower segment of the market. While India had the advantage of low wages, Is rael was offsetting this by mechanising its polishing and cutting opera-

According to figures recently re-ported by the American Diamond Industry Association, 58.51 per cent of polished diamonds imported into the US last year came from India, and 20.22 per cent by from Israel, measured by carats or weight. But when the diamond imports were measured by value, Israel accounted for 35.74 per cent and India only 27.69 per

Rawat acknowledged that for volume of Indian businesses to grow in value, dealers here will have to target the higher end of the market. This, in turn, will mean that their affiliates in India will need to start processing large and higher quality diamonds.

"We simply cannot be dealing only in small diamonds," he said, add ing "newer investments will have to flow to improve infrastructure of diamond processing industry in India. I is critical both for the industry and its representatives around the world."

S. Asians strike best deals in perfumes on Broadway

NEW YORK — Some of the best deals on the world's best-known perfumes are struck on a small stretch of Broadway in midtown Manhattan

In this bazaar, consisting of clusters of discount stores, the central players increasingly are Indians and Pakistanis. As one trader put it, the desis (as south Asians are known) have transformed what was until recently a sidewalk trade.

Estimates of the number of south Asian-owned stores and wholesale dealers and the size of the market vary widely. Some people think that close to 100 stores are operated by south Asians, with the number grow-

On estimates of the market size opinion is more divergent. One retailer reckoned the business generated \$120 million in revenue a year. A wholesaler in Long Island, who did not wish to be identified, put the fig-

ure at \$250 million Buyers apparently have no fears about the products they purchase at these stores. The authenticity of the perfumes and colognes are rarely in

The best of perfumes and colognes are sold at discounts that vary from 25 to 70 per cent of the original recommended price at department stores or other such outlets. Even in the case of new products, discounts can range up to 10 per cent, according to one trader.

South Asians, notably Indians, entered the discount perfume business in the early 1980s, according to trade sources. Most started by selling on the sidewalks in what were known as Asian markets, notably on Canal Street, before graduating to set up shop mostly in and around Broad-

The business is unusual in many ways. It is known as a "gray market," a term that denotes an unauthorised but legal trade. It is unauthorised because no designer perfume maker endorses it.

The stores mostly do not receive official supplies from any of the designer perfume makers. Such strong brands as Calvin Klein and Christian Dior zealously guard their exclusivity and market their products only through premier outlets such as Macy's or Bloomingdale's.

If some traders are to believed, those companies also keep a strict watch over the gray market and attempt to control it.

How do discount stores acquire the same products and sell them at prices much cheaper than department stores such as Macy's? Herein lies the resourcefulness of the businessmen. But because acquiring stocks involves a complicated chain of suppliers, people in the trade are mostly secretive. fearful of giving away their sources.

A parallel market exists for imitation perfumes, but it is said to be minuscule in comparison.

Kris Lalwani, owner of Kris Cosmetics and one of the first Indians in the business, said. "The business is so big that nobody wants to spoil it by oringing in fake stuff."

The modus operandi for getting original designer products, in the absence of direct supplies from the manufacturers, is usually by imports. In addition to marketing their products through exclusive department stores in the United States, the manufacturers sell to dealers in several other countries. They also supply duty-free outlets all over the world

Although the manufacturers can strictly monitor supplies in the US, they cannot do so with overseas dealers. So a fraction of the overseas supplies finds its way into the gray mar-

The businesses that bring this merchandise into the country do so legally, paying the required duties. Of the need to cover the tracks so that no

supply can be traced back to the overseas dealer who has "diverted" his stocks. If a manufacturer can track the product back to such a dealer, lies to the gray market can be cut

mained ahead.

Traders say supplies may come from several different sources and countries, notably in Europe and the Gulf countries, but also Hong Kong. "Dealers in these countries have excess supplies," pointed out Lalwani.

off. In this cat-and-mouse game, the

discount traders have mostly re-

However, the market is crowded and tough, with cut-throat competition and the south Asians are still "small fish" compared to the big businessmen who control the more profitable wholesale trade. "I face this spectacle of employees working in my store for only a month or so, then wanting to start their own trade," said

Enticed by the prospect of big profits, many do, but few actually succeed, he added. However, the result has been increased competition. prompting a trader to comment sar-"We are now playing on pennies." If that is hard on the stores, it is great for the buyer.

"Customers are smart now and play one store against the other," said another trader.

"They know how to beat down the price." Some traders say they are pushed so much by competition that they sometimes sell at cost price in the hope of retaining customers

A fallout from the increased competition is the delinquency rate. According to Lalwani, there are "bad and good fish in the big pond." He "three or four instances" of traders who could not meet payments and fled. They mostly get credit for up to 60 days on stocks, but in the face of stiff competition, they cut prices to such an extent that the business becomes unprofitable

- India Abroad News Service

points for the week closing at STOCK MARKETS New York - D.IIA Blue-chip stocks set record highs last week but ended the week slowed by profit-taking and apprehension over Iraq. Trading

— India Abroad News Service

NRIs not happy with bank services, says study

BANGALORE - Non-resident Indians (NRIs) are extremely dissatisfied with the service offered by many banks in India, according to recent survey conducted by ICICI

Revealing this here on Saturday. ICICI Bank's executive vice-president A. G. Prabhu said that the NRI community was particularly dissatisfied with the delays — commonly four to six weeks — encountered in obtaining product and account, related information

He further said that ICICI Bank has decided to use the Net to sharply improve the level of service offered by it to NRI customers. The bank has recently installed "Infinity", an Internet bank service based on BankAway which has been developed by Infosys Technologies. Besides being able to access their accounts through the Internet, customers can also download account statements, secure e-mail. cheque books and stop-payment requests apart from getting a host of

Prabhu said the RBI should look into areas like E-commerce and EDI since the scope of these can improve international business for the Indian banking sector in particular. Stating the example of ICICI Bank and how the Net has helped improved its international business, Prabhu said that ICICI Bank opened its website as early as February 1996, and financial information about the bank and product details are available at the site.

Moreover detailed information about the various investment options available and the intricate regulatory framework governing the investment is also provided for. By guaranteeing a response time of 24 hours for all email enquiries, the bank has been able to offer a dramatic reduction in communication time with its customers. he added. — By arrangement with

S. Asian exporters get taste of fierce competition FRANKFURT — South Asian exporters got a taste of the fierce competi-

tion they are likely to face from southeast Asian countries where prices of products have sharply declined because of depreciation of their currencies against the US dollar.

Ambiente '98 — Frankfurt's Spring Show held from February 14 to 18 and touted by the organisers as the "greatest consumer goods' show on earth" - began under a cloud of economic gloom. There was very cautious buying by trade visitors whose restraint was dictated by the high unemployment and a general economic slowdown in a number of countries of Europe, particularly Germany

The 93 exhibitors from India and others from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka got a close glimpse of what the coming months hold out for them as some exporters from southeast Asian nations recorded whopping increases in orders due to a depreciation in the values of their currencies against the US dollar. As a result the prices of their wares have plummeted

"I have been able to book 40 per cent more orders this time," commented Kok Chean-See, a Malaysian Chinese whose company's booth was in the same hall as the Indian participants.

The Malaysian currency, ringgit, although not so badly battered as the Thai baht or the Indonesian rupiah, has helped Malaysian suppliers gain an edge over the Indian counterparts.

failed to live up to expectations.

The Dow ended the week at

the FTSE ended the week at

8,413.94 up by 43.33 points while

5,751.6 up by 169.3 points for the

week. Japan's Nikkei lost 34.77

began on Tuesday after the Pres-

Merger mania, firm Asian markets,

big gains in Europe and falling in-

the 8,400mark, but the Dow ended

terest rates pushed the Dow over

The Dow chalked another

record close on Wednesday clos-

bout of profit-taking on Thursday,

tempered the bull-run and the Dow lost 75.48 points to close at

The Dow closed on Friday at

8,413.94 up 38.36 points as profit-

slowed down marketplayers. An

The yield of this benchmark

taking and caution over Iraq

average of 2.38 billion shares

changed hands over the shor-

bonds was in the 5.86 per cent

range an increase from the pre-

vious week. The bonds fell be-

cause of a decline in January's in-

capital from the bond market to

stocks. However profit-taking on

Wall Street and renewed fears of

the war saw the bond market re-

cover. The yield of the 30 Year

at the end of the week.

London - FTSE 100

Treasury Bond was 5.88 per cent

Rumours that Barclays Bank

was in a take over bid for NatWest

Bank saw the FTSE surge to an all

time high, however the index end-

ed the day at 5,619.9 up by 37.6

points. Talks of acquisitions and

tinued to dominate the London

record up by 89 6 at 5 709

mergers in the financial sector con-

market and the FTSE rose to a new

The FTSE rose to its second

consecutive high up by 13.9 points

to 5,723.4 on Wednesday powered

by a strong Wall Street and bril-

liant performance in bank shares.

profit-taking pushed the FTSE

Thursday.

the previous week

down by 4.9 points to 5,718.5 on

Takeover bid speculation

oushed the FTSE to its new record

high of 5,751.6 up by 33.1 points

week higher by 169.3 points from

Monday and Tuesday were nu-

on Friday. The FTSE ended the

merically quirky for the Nikkei

with 15.49 points lost on Monday

Tokyo - Nikkei 225

Early losses on Wall Street and

dustrial production and transfers of

tenedweek of trading.

ing up 53 points at 8,451.06. A

the day up by 28.4 points at

ident's Day holiday on Monday.

Last week saw the FTSE and the Dow break new records in Money MATTERS quick succession while the Nikkei put in a poor show after the muchhyped economic stimulus package

> BY HERSH CHADHA and 15.19 points gained on Tuesday. controversial plans to set up a cur-Tuesday's gains were in bank shares rency board renewed Asian fears. on hopes that the banking sector would be assisted by the government cision to devalue its currency by alin its new economic package. Tradmost 5per cent dealt another blow to ing was subdued on Wednesday and the ven. However, comments by the the Nikkei lost 176.82 points to close Finance Ministry that excessive yen

Traders continued to wait on Thursday resulting in little activity on the stock market with the Nikkei closing up by just 2.59 points to 16,616.48.

at 16,613.89 as traders chose to wait

for the package to be unveiled on Fri-

The long-awaited economic package when actually released was uninspiring and failed to have a strong impact on the markets with the Nik kei closing up by 139.76 points at 16,756.24 a loss of 34.77 points for

CURRENCIES

As expected the much awaited Japanese economic reform package fell short of expectations. In reaction market players sold the yen which saw a reversal in its gains over the past few weeks.

The Iraq crisis played its role in the forex markets last week. The greenback surged when President Clinton said that he was in favour of a diplomatic solution and that military aggression would be the last re

However its gains were shortlived when Bundesbank council member Ernst Welteke said that the current dollar-mark exchange rate was at a fair value and that German interest rates need not be discussed The dollar was further hampered by January's Producer Price Index that fell 0.7per cent its biggest drop since August 1993. The dollar was subsequently marginally boosted when Germany's IFO business climate index fell 99.3 in January from 99.6.

Towards the end of the week trading remained subdued with the threat of the US showdown with Iraq becoming a possibility. Added to this traders awaited the G7 meet at the month -end where the rising trade deficit now on the increase due to Asian pressures would be a prime topic for discussion.

The dollar was at DM 1.8166 at the beginning of the week and ended the week at DM 1.8173.

The dollar started the week at ¥126 levels on growing expectations that the Japanese economic stimulus plan would be concentrated on land liquidity and stock buying. U.S trade official William Daley's remarks that he hoped Japan would recover in time for the May G7 meet as well as falling stocks and bonds helped the greenback move higher.

Uncertainties over Indonesia's

ment that a viable alternative source was easily available. Entire systems starting from cars to electric-power-generating units would have to be redesigned,

perhaps rebuilt. Oil prices are at an all time low. Oil reserves in America have been filled to capacity, the El Nino weather phenomena caused warm climate conditions thus bringing down the demand, the Asian crisis led to lessening in demand in that region and the Opec quota increase flooded the market

- India Abroad News Service

Now, Iraq exports will soon hit the oil supply adding to the glut. Therefore it is expected that a price increase will be effected only towards the third quarter of 1998, with a slow reversal in the

current situation. Interestingly oil is the economic base of several nations and especially in the Middle East several countries have put together programmes to move away from their dependence on oil into other areas

like trade and manufacturing. However it is important to note that the driving factor in a capitalist environment is diversification — the very essence

The Asian crisis seems to have stemmed the growth of countries in that region and has affected Japan adversely. More problems plague Japan starting with the un-veiling of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's much hyped about economic stimulus package. The package fell drastically short of expectations featuring only deregulation measures and a plan to re-evaluate land assets. Added to this Japan's rising trade surplus is a matter of grave concern.

The trade surplus soared to 381.5 trillion yen in January.
Pressure will be mounted on Japan at the G7 meet this month to boost its weak domestic demand. The crisis in Asia will not be tided over unless major industrial nations boost their economies.

Indonesia is still reeling under the Asian aftermath. The riots, ethnic in nature, have in no way aided the beleaguered nation. Infact it is the business community that has been undermined by these riots. Since the spending power has been drastically reduced prices have hit rock-bottom and the most valuable commodity in Indonesia today is the American dol-

Among other news the Dow reached new records again. It is highly likely that the Dow will. reach the magic 10,000 figure by the year 2000. Another extreme prediction is another Great Depression - likely to occur in the distant 2015. Watch this space for more analysis on these comments.

The information set forth herein has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, but we cannot guarantee its accuracy or completeness. Neither the information or any opinion expressed constitutes a solicitation by us of the purchase or sale of any securities

clined against the pound sterling, detusche mark (DM) and Japanese

yen. The rupee lost fairly heavy

ground against the forward dollar

with premiums rising sharply on re-

newed hectic paying pressure in the

the board spurted on persistent paying

ing pressure, as importers rushed to

cover their forward exposures

while exporters held on to their ex-

ised forward dollar prmeium jumped to 17.20 per cent from

13.34 per cent on the first trading

day and the 6-month shot up to

16.06 per cent from 12.94 per cent.

ed the week higher at 278-273

The benchmark July dollar end-

port earnings. The 3-month annual -

Forward dollar premiums across

absence of RBI intervention.

Equities attract sharp rally at initial stages, later encounter selling pressure

BOMBAY — Equities attracted a sharp rally at the initial stages, but later encountered selling pressure, trimming the gains on the stock market during the week that left behind an optimism of a fresh upsurge with a gain of over 150 points in the Sensex in the settlement ahead

Though Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and local institutions picked up a few select heavy weighted scrips, both were also engaged in sales in some of indexbased shares, restricting the Sensex's downward movement.

The market's resistance to dip below the 3384 level was seen by a section of operators as a bullish signal. They were of the opinion that the Sensex might gain about 160 to 170 points during the next settlement period as players were expected to create long positions before the elections results start coming out on March 3.

The activity was mostly centred to around index-based scrips and shares of multinational companies.

The week's other features were the announcement of encouraging performance by Guj Ambuja Cement with a volume growth of 39 per cent despite stiff competition and an open offer by Sterlite Industries Ltd to acquire a minimum 10 per cent stake in Indian Aluminimum Company at Rs90 a share. The offer was later raised to 20 per cent on the advice of the Securities and Exchange Board of

India (Sebi) The Lakme scrip was hit hard due to its new found status of a (A) group with effect from Febshell company following the pro- ruary 23, taking the total specified

posed acquisition by Hind Lever

Backed by the early rally, the BSE sensitive index rose sharply by over 76 points to 3449.77, but later reversed its track, losing partly to end the week at 3417.30 as against last weekend close of 3373.53, showing a net gain of 43.77 points. The BSE-100 index advanced by 22.75 points to close the week at from previous weekend close of 1449.23.

The BSE-200 and the Dollex were quoted up at 326.58 and 139.88 at the weekend compared with last weekend close of 320.93 and 137.71, respectively

The turnover on the BSE during the week improved sharply to Rs4727.08 crore from the last week turnover of Rs3591.79 crore.

On the National Stock Exchange

(NSE), equities recovered smartly on fresh purchases by foreign funds well as local institutions. The NSE-50 index rose by 19.10 points to end the week at 993.65 from last weekend close of 974.55. The dollar NSE-50 and Midcap index spurted by 10.50 and 4.50 points to 884.25 and 1106 from previous weekend close of 873.75 and 1065.50, respectively

The volume of business on the NSE, which was closed on Monday, was fractionally down at Rs4855.80 crore from the last week turnover of Rs4984.11 crore.

The stock exchange, Bombay (BSE) has decided to shift 50 equity shares from non-specified securities (B1) group to specified securities

scrips to 150.
Following prices prevailed last weekend and at the close of this week. Index-based shares: ACC 1248.25 1240, Arvind Mills 55.60 51.25, Bajaj Auto 510.50 541.75, Bhel 281.40 286.90, BSES 171.60 182.70, Colgate 238.50 242, GE Ship 39.85 39.40, Glaxo 332 367.75, Grasim 270 276, Guj Ambuja Cement 236.60 243.10, HPCL 420.50 413.75, Hindalco 621.75 607, Hind Lever 1501.25 1526.25, ICICI 79.55 80.25, IDBI 77.35 76.95, Ind Hotel 487.50 514, IPCL 54.40 53.05, ITC 614.75 622.50, L&T 198 200, Mah & Mah 212.40 229.20, MTNL 230.50 241.90, Nestle 312.70 328.75, Ranbaxy 702.25 691.25, Reliance Ind 151.50 149.80, SBI (New) 241.30 241.40, Steel Authority 7.40 7.35, Tata Chem 123.60 122.90, Tata Power 102 105.90, Telco 234.10 231.90 and Tisco 122.30 120.70

Other scrips: ABB 369.25 382.25, Andhra Valley 70.15 70.80, Apollo Tyre 66.25 65.75, Ashok Leyland 31.75 32.65, Asian Paint 286 290, Atlas Copco 151.40 157.80, Ballarpur 24.60 24.85, Bharat Forge 59.50 57.25, BPCL 336.25 364.50, Bom Dyeing 76.95 BPL 106 110, Britania 382.75 402.75, Burrough Welcome 302.50 322.25, Cadbury 246.40 256.10, Castrol 632.25 664.25, Ceat 20.10 18 and Century 55.70 55 25

Crompton Greaves 27.75 28.90, Dabur India 199.20 198.20, Dr Reddy's Lab 332.50 333.75, EI Hotel 299.50 324.25, Esab India 96.90 100, Escorts 67.30 64, Essar Steel 15.60 15.80, Excel 115 110.90, Fiware Poly 14.60 14.40, Garware Wall 18.25 18.20, German Remedis 278.50 287.50, Gui Alkali 56.60 55. GNFC 20.25 20.60, GSFC 83 83.5, Hero Honda 707.25 Unch, Hotel Leela 61 61.90, Hind Motor 10.70 10.55, HDFC 2709 2727.75, Ind Rayon 139.40 141.70, Indogulf Fert 31.60 31.70, ITCL 28.95 29.15, ITC Bhadra 25 25.90, Lakme 252 189.10, MRF 1831 1840, Nagar Fert 14 14.05, Oriental Bank 63.75 64.40, Parke Davis 239.40 241.50, Pfizer 428 453.50, Ponds India 1065.75 1042.25, Proctor & Gam-

WEEKLY **MARKET** REVIEW

ble 507.25 571, Raymond 57.10 57.50. Reckitt & Colman 362 368.75, Rel Capital 55.80 55.35, Sesa Goa 247 288.10, Siemens 158.90 153.30, SKF Bearing 1000.25 1024, Smithkline Co 354.75 381.75. Smithkline Pharma 567.25 594.50, SPIC 21.60 26.60, Sterlite 163.40 173.10, Supreme Ind 141.80 149.60, TPL 15.55 15.10, Tata Hydro 73.25 73.80, Tata Tea 410 418. Thermax 148.70 147. United Phsop 79.25 77.70, Video-con Int 29.90 24.25, Voltas 23.95 20.65 and Wartsila 114.50 122.30.

Bullion: Prices of both silver and gold declined on the bullion seas advices and sluggish arrivals.

market during the week ended February 21 on lack of seasonal buying coupled with weak overseas ad-

Prices of ready silver of .999 fineness opened better at Rs8855 and shot up to Rs9000 on higher overseas advices coupled with poor arrivals. Later, on fresh inflow of stocks and fall in the international prices, it reacted to close at Rs8850, showing fall of Rs60 over the last week's close of Rs8830. Prices of raw silver of .916 fineness and tenderable silver also moved in a similar way and closed at Rs8660 and Rs8775 respectively from the last week's close of Rs8715 and Rs8835.

Standard gold prices started better at Rs4000, but soon lost seasonsupport and fell to close at Rs3970, revealing a fall of Rs25 from the last week's close of Rs3995. 22-carat gold was nominally quoted weak at Rs3670 from Rs 3695. Ten-tola gold bar of .999 fineness commenced higher at Rs46,800 and later declined on poor demand and ended at Rs46,500, showing a fall of Rs200 over the last week's close of Rs46,700.

Oils, Oilseeds: Prices of groundnut oil declined steeply on the oilseeds market during the week ended February 21 on weak Gujarat advices coupled with poor local de-

and castorseed also ended notably weak on poor industrial and export demand However, imported palm oil prices zoomed up on heavy over-

Elsewhere, prices of castor oil

In the edible section, groundnut oil prices opened weak at Rs376 and continued to fall and closed at Rs371, showing a steep fall of Rs7 over the last week's level of Rs377 Groundnut bold prices declined by Rs10 to close at Rs1940. Imported palm oil prices opened firm at Rs317 and shot up further to close at Rs324, revealing a smart rally of Rs10 over the last close of Rs 314.

In the non-edible section, castor oil commercial resumed steady at Rs279 and later fell to close at Rs271, disclosing a fall of Rs9 over the last week's close of Rs279. Prices of linseed Madras dropped sharply by Rs43 to end at Rs1200 from Rs1243. Linseed oil eased by Rs5 to Rs325 from Rs330 while, prices of linseed bold held steady at

In the futures section, castorseed March contract fell by Rs15 to end at Rs1211 from Rs1226 and June contact lost by Rs21 at Rs1250.50 as against the last close of Rs1271.50. The rupee continued to weaken

against the US greenback, breached the psychological important \$8.90 level and ended the week sharply lower at Rs38.93/95 per dollar in otherwise quiet range-bound trade at the Interbank foreign exchange (Forex) market. The Indian currency depreciated

by around 17 paise from its previous weekend finish of Rs38.76/ 77 following steady dollar demand by corporates, led by the State Bank of India (SBI) and import covering.

Rupee-dollar outright spot dealings remained dull and uneventful for most of the week with operators adopting a wait-and-watch attitude till a new government is sworn in. The rupee came under renewed pressure owing to moderate corporate dollar buying, particularly from the SBI, but activity was generally on a low key with narrow movements, dealers said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) did not intervene in the forex trade and allowed market forces to determine the exchange rate, they

"RBI made several forays in the forex market with its spot-dollar purchases and on Friday stepped up its dollar buy bids. Seeing the RBI active, other banks also joined the dollar buying bandwagon creating a chain reaction wherein the rupee received a further setback," a forex dealer commented

Meanwhile, RBI fixed the reference rate for the five consecutive sessions at Rs38.83, Rs38.88 Rs38.86, Rs38.87and Rs38.91 per dollar respectively

"RBI's actions normally dictates the rupee-dollar value. The market expectation is that the RBI will sell dollars at the behest of the apex bank if the rupee pierces through the next key resistance level of Rs39-dollar or the RBI will be compelled to inter-

Hence will before going too long on dollars and further pressurise the rupee,

vene.

banks

think

another

paise premium from 230-231 paise on Monday and the August dollars firmed up to 319-315 paise premium from 263-260. Further forward dollar premiums on the last trading day of the, week were (in paise): cash/Tom 1-1/4-3/4, cash/spot 1-3/4-1-1/4, spot/

Feb 2-1, spot/Mch 60-56, spot/Apl 127-124, spot/May 178-174, spot/ June 228-223, spot/Sep 361-356, spot/Oct 405-395, spot/Nov 448-438, spot/Dec 488-478 and spot/Jan 530/515.

Following Interbank Forex rates prevailed last weekend and this weekend (in rupee per unit - buyer/seller): Last weekend This weekend 38.93/95 63.75/77 38.76/77 63.50/53

US Dollar Pound Sterling Deutsche Mar(DM) 21.31/33 Japanese Yen(100) 30.95/98

21.41/43 30.65/67



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Jinx hits China's SAYONARA NAGANO bid for gold

NAGANO — Four chokes, three injuries and a wipe-out combined to scupper China's hopes of breaking their gold medal duck at the Winter Olympics.

The silver lining, in the form of six second-placed finishes, did not ease the

hurt felt by the delegation at missing out on gold.

A triumph for China would have helped lift the depression hanging over sport in the world's most populous nation after the drug controversies at the World Swimming Championships in January.

It would also have given China more credibility in the winter sports arena

which they entered at the 1980 Lake Placid Games. The gold medal jinx struck the so-called Chinese Flying Corps at the freestyle skiing.

Ji Xiaoou had to pull out of the aerials final with a knee injury and 1996 Asian Winter Games gold medallist Guo Dandan lessened the degree of dif-ficulty of her second jump because of a twisted ankle. She was second after the first jump but fell back on the second and was placed seventh overall.

Twenty-year-old Xu Nannan, who won the elimination round and finished with the silver medal, revealed afterwards that she had beaten the pain barrier to compete. "I've dislocated both my shoulders recently and I aggravated the injuries during training," said the former gymnast. "I felt the pressure today but I knew I had to do my best for my country and I did. It is a great achievement for China to have three competitors in the final. Unfortunately two of the girls were more badly injured than me."

The Chinese choked in the thrilling short track speed skating competition. Li Jiajun celebrated what he thought was victory in the 1000 metres too soon and was pipped by world champion Kim Dong-sung. Li lost the gold by .135

The Chinese's women's 3,000 metres relay squad also took just silver despite beating the old world record. They clocked 4:16.383 and were .123 of a second in arrears. "We have made great efforts to attain this position," said Chinese world champion Yang Yang. "We have slipped up similarly before at the end of races and trained intensively to fight this tendency. We knew that

the Koreans were about to overtake us but could not do anything about it. "It is our collective dream to win a gold medal and we will strive hard to achieve it in the remaining races." Yang never had the chance to show her style. She was disqualified at the quarterfinal stage of the 500 metres and compatriot Wang Chunlu, also a member of the silver medal relay team, was sent crashing to the ice in the final by world record holder Isabelle Charest of Canada. She failed to finish and missed out on the bronze although Yang Yang, no relation to the world champion, skated in for a silver medal

That Yang also took silver in the 1000 metres after world champion Yang was again disqualified after a photo finish with Chun Lee-kyung. Asked if she felt the team were jinxed, Yang said: "I do not think so - maybe just unlucky." And what happened in the very next race? Yes, China's An Yulong was relegated to silver medal position in the 500 metres. — AFP

Best organised, says Samaranch

Antonio Samaranch got himself out of a diplomatic corner yesterday by describing the Nagano Winter Games as the best organised in Olympic history. Everyone was waiting to see whether the 77-year-old International Olympic Committee (IOC) president would use his "best ever Games" phrase at the Nagano closing cer-emony in front of Emperor Akihito.

He uses the term at nearly every Olympics. But he could not use it in Nagano as the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics are considered by everyone as the best winter event in history.

Even if Nagano has had no major problem, it would have been an insult to the Norwegians toosay Japan's Olympics had been the best, IOC observers said. Using every bit of his diplomatic guile, Samaranch, a former Spanish ambassador to Moscow, found the solution.

"Congratulations Nagano and Japan. You have presented to the world the best organisation in the history of the Olympic Winter Games," he announced at the closing ceremony. Samaranch had to change the wording of his speech for the Atlanta Summer Games in 1996 — they were only "exceptional" - because of a list of disasters that stretched from transport to saturation commercialisation. The Nagano Olympic Organising Committee (NAOC) has had a welter of problems hurled at it but fought through nearly every one.

Bad weather forced multiple postponements in the men's and women's downhill skiing and hundreds of extra buses had to be called in to ferry officials and journalists to venues.

But the organisers came through without any major international incidents despite Canadian snowboarder Ross Rebagliati failing a drug test for cannabis, which is illegal in Japan, and the defeated American ice hockey team vandalising their rooms.

There was even an earthquake on Saturday, which caused more shock

"We have all admired the beauty of the Games and the values they represent for youth, and appreciate the talent and efforts of all the athletes and the Japanese cultural traditions,' said Samaranch in his speech.

"We hope that the observance of the Olympic truce during the Nagano Olympic Winter Games has served the purpose of seraching for peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the con-

flicts we are facing today."

The IOC lobbied strongly for the
United States to hold back from military action against Iraq during the two week games. "The Olympic Games demonstrate that friendship, solidarity and cooperation among all peoples are possible if there is good-

will," Samaranch added. NAOC director general Makoto Kobayashi said earlier the Games had been "more wonderful" than Japan had expected. We have been making effort to make them the biggest Games as well as the best Games in history," Kobayashi said.

Seventy-two National Olympic Committee and 2,300 competitors took part in the Nagano Games, making them the largest Winter Olympics in history. "I believe the Games have turned out to be more wonderful than expected," Kobayashi added. — AFP

NAGANO — Japan, its people beaming with collective pride after staging a hugely successful Winter Games and watching their athletes collect a record five gold medals, bid sayonara to the Olympics yes-

The renowned reserve of the Japanese gave way to uninhibited singing and dancing as the curtain came down on 16 days of competition when 2,450 winter athletes from 72 countries strived on snow and ice for 68 gold medals. More than 1.2 million spectators flocked to the events. As the Olympic flame flickered and died, thousands of athletes, spectators, musicians and vol-unteers formed a circle at the Minami Nagano Sports Park and jived to the sound of Japanese pop group

Agharta. Tiny Tara Lipinski, America's figure skating gold medallist, sat on the shoulders of a teammate and Chinese freestyle skier Xu Nannan showed off her silver medal. The closing ceremony for the 18th Winter Olympics, hosted by comedian Kin'ichi Hagimoto in a circus ringmaster's top hat and tails, contrasted

hugely to the stuffy opening event. Anxiety of the organisers over the gigantic logistical task of hostthe Games throughout this mountainous region was replaced satisfaction at a Japanese sporting success story to ease the current economic pain and the athletes let their hair down with the pressure of competition behind them

Apart from the fickle weather which caused disruption to the glamour Alpine skiing events and some traffic snarl-ups brought about by huge numbers of spectators heading to the ski jump venue, the Games went like clockwork.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch, who declined to bestow on the trouble-plagued 1996 Atlanta Olympics the normal accolade of the "best games ever", commended Nagano for organising a magnificent Olympics.

"Congratulations Nagano. Congratulations Japan. You presented to the world the best organisation in the history of the Olympic Winter Games," he said to roars of approval from the crowd. "Arigato Nagano. Sayonara Nippon.

After the athletes made their way into the stadium, which lies in the shadow of the Japanese Alps where the majority of the Olympic events were staged, bonfires burst into flame to open the "Our Hometown" presentation. Spectators were given glimpse of traditional festivals of Nagano Prefecture as local people praised the athletes for their efforts during the Olympics.

More than 150 drummers added their musical appreciation to the competitors and as the sound reached a deafening crescendo a lion dance, with its traditional good luck message, took centre stage.

The people of Nagano having said sayonara to the Games there

was a cheery "howdy" from 2002 venue, Salt Lake City in the United

With the Olympic flag ceremoniously passed from Tasuku Tsukada, Mayor of Nagano City, to Samaranch and on to Mayor of Salt Lake City, Deedee Corradini, a wild west ene was recreated in the arena.

Horseback riders and a frontier stage coach dashed into the stadium as a group of children from Utah appeared on the giant screen shouting "See You in 2002".

Following a hand-held display of firecrackers, the night sky was illuminated for 11 breathtaking minutes with 5,000 fireworks symbolising the four seasons - cherry blossoms for spring, sunflowers for summer, chrysanthemums for autumn and snow for winter.

Fittingly, the final firework to erupt over the stadium was a snowflower, the emblem of the Nagano Games. Then the party began. As Agharta performed the theme song for the Nagano Games, Let's Make A Circle and Dance, athletes linked arms with spectators and volunteers to boggie the night away.

The Japanese crowd, including Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, focused on their gold medal heroes and heroines. There were more tears from emotional ski jumper Masahiko Harada who banished the ghost of Lillehammer with his victory in the team event alongside Takanobu Okabe, Hiroya Saito and large hill winner Kazuvoshi Funaki

Tae Satoya, who carried a picture of her dead father and coach when winning the freestyle skiing moguls, beamed with pride and Hiroyasu Shimizu, dubbed the 'Bullet Train" after his win in the 500 metres speed skating competition, smilingly acknowledged the roars of approval from the spectators.

In the end there was a new beginning for the Olympic movement, after the travails of the Atlanta Games, and Japanese sport.
MEDALS TALLY

	G	S	B	T
Germany	12	9	8	29
Norway	10	10	5	25
Russia	9	6	3	18
Canada	6	5	4	15
United States	6	3	4	13
Netherlands	5	4	2	11
Japan	5	1	4	10
Austria	3	5	9	17
South Korea	3 3 2 2	1	2 2	6
Italy	2	6		10
Finland	2	4	6	12
Switzerland	2	2	3	12 7 8 3
France	2	1	5	8
Czech Republic	1	1	1	3
Bulgaria	1	0	0	1
China	0	6	2	8 3
Sweden	0	2	1	
Denmark	0	1	0	1
Ukraine	0	1	0	1
Belarus	0	0	2	2 2
Kazakhstan	0	0	2	2
Australia	0	0	11	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Great Britain	0	0	1	1
Total	69	68	68	205
			1	ED



STAR CAST: Tara Lipinski of United States rides into Olympic closing ceremony. - Reuters

The legendary Alpine stars

NAGANO — A 25-year-old former bricklayer and a millionaire's daughter struck Alpine gold and ensured the Nagano Olympics earned its place in the straight Winter Games. book of 'great sporting moments'.

Hermann "The Monster" Maier arrived in Japan as the man to beat. In the World Cup he had run up ten wins, threatening to destroy the total number of points in the chase for the World Cup overall title

But despite his dominance this was the Olympics, a different pressure, til he got to Nagano. where the chance of glory comes only once every four years. Maier revelled in it.

Even one of the most horrifying accidents ever seen in a downhill could not shake the Austrian.

The burly Maier spun into the air just 18 seconds into the dowwhill, delayed for nearly a week because of the weather, and cartwheeled before crashing shoulder first onto the rock-hard piste.

He careered across the snow and ripped through the two lines of safety netting before somersaulting into heavy snow 15 metres off the course. For a normal human being that would have been it — 'sayonara' and back

home to Europe. However, three days later a battered and bruised but determined Maier crushed the best of the rest of the world to take his first Olympic gold when he

"Now I know why they say Maier is an extra-terrestrial," remarked joint silver medallist Didier Cuche of Switzerland.

If anyone was foolish enough to have doubts, Maier quickly dispelled them by going out and taking the giant slalom, finishing more than half a second ahead of silver medallist winner team-mate Stefan Eberharter. His performance was one of the most commanding ever seen at an Olympics. Matching Maier's two gold haul was Germany's Katja Seizinger. Sh

might have been born with a silver spoon in her mouth but it was sheer brilliance and not an accident of birth that saw the 25-year-old become the first person to ever successfully defend their Olympic downhill record. While Maier has dominated the men's World Cup this season, Seizinger is firmly in control in the women's competition.

Earlier this season she won six consecutive World Cup races, collecting three downhill and three super-giant wins, to equal the record set by Jean-When she followed the downhill with victory in the combined — her first

ever win in the event — the legend was confirmed. The display by Maier and Seizinger completely overshadowed the re-Picabo Street, coming back after injury, surprised everyone, including her-

self by winning the Super-G. Italy's ski queen Deborah Compagnoni went into the Olympic record

straight Winter Games. No woman Alpine skiier has ever managed such an Olympic run. The 27-year-old Compagnoni won her first gold, the Super-G in Albert-

ville in 1992, and took the giant two years later in Lillehammer. Norway's Hans-Petter Buraas had never won a major slalom in his life, un

With his hair dyed punk red, the newest member of the Norway team was more than a second faster than his nearest rival and team-mate Ole Christian Furuseth by the end of the second run.

Now the 22-year-old has to prove that he can stay at the top. But while Buraas was celebrating Alberto Tomba never even got to finish

the race as he went for his fourth gold in four successive Olympics. The 31-year-old La Bomba, languishing in 17th spot, was still suffering

from his fall in the giant slalom earlier in the week, and with no hope of a nedal pulled out of the second run. It was a sad end to Tomba's Olympic career.

The Italian has put Alpine skiing on the sports pages with his blazing runs and playboy life style but his Japanese jinx had struck again. He has never managed to win a race in the land of the rising sur

The men's combined went to Austria's Mario Reiter, making his Olympic While Reiter was underlining Austria's domination in the men's battle for

titles Hilde Gerg was helping Germany's women's team dominate. But it took the race of her life to win the slalom. The 22-year-old soldier made up more than half a second on first run lead-

Compagnoni to win the title. The Austrian charge was interupted in the Games' blue ribband event, the downill, by a 31-year-old French custom's officer. Jean-Luc Cretier, who has never won a major downhill in his life, stunned

everyone when he gave France their first downhill title for 30 years, when Jean-Claude Killy won in Grenoble in 1968. But while Cretier became a hero in France, the race will be remembered Maier's spectacular crash. All-told, Maier's Austrians won eight out of 15

men's Alpine medals while the German women won six out of 15. Nagano's Alpine programme will also be remembered for the weather that at one time threatened to wreck the show.

Too much snow, too little snow, too much wind, swirling fog, brilliant sunshine — the Japanese elements delivered everything during the two weeks.

The first run of the men's slalom was even struck by an earthquake. But nothing was going to deny Maier and Seizinger or any of the other six gold medallists. The Winter Games' unbroken record of never having to lose an event because of the weather remained intact. — AFP

Afridi's Test claim gets popular support

PESHAWAR — The world's fastest scorer of a one-day century may have got love and fame, but has yet to be given his maiden Test cap. With an increasing popularity graph, the Pakistan Cricket Board is under pressure to include the powerful striker of the ball in the senior Test side.

The recently held Bangladesh Independence Cup epitomised Afridi's fan following to the hilt. With placards that read Afridi, please marry me, and "I love you Afridi," no one doubted as to where the centre of attention lay. People made the most of television engagements to put their affection through with considerable

Afridi's heroic deeds have always been tinged with a sense of urgency, immaturity too, but fans back home think otherwise. "Afridi always looks in a hurry, which is not a good sign because this tendency on his part causes a lot of shock to me," says a fan of Afridi, adding that all his favourite player does is thrash the bowlers. Effectively tagged as a one-day specialist, much to his dismay, another fan of his says: "No doubt, Afridi plays only a few balls but he dis-turbs the line and length of bowlers, who then take some time to recover

In a career spanning hardly eighteen months, Afridi, as the popular catchword goes, has played 54 oneday internationals but never considered for a Test. "A breath of fresh air" was how he was described as by ry. "He is as hyperactive as a four-year toddler on a cricket field."

Predictably dropped for the origoing South African tour, Afridi with impressive figures to show for in the one-day arena, has been waiting for the selectors' nod. "I have been deemed a failure without even a single Test selection", is how he protests at every encounter he has with news

His off-the-field activities have landed the explosive batsman in the juror's box more than once. But his volatile batsmanship has blessed him perpetual charm with the general public, which keeps voicing concern for a much-awaited Test picking.

When contacted to comment or the recent development, Shahid Afridi said, "I don't know why I was dropped from the team for the recent tours. In home cricket, I have dis-played my best performance and I hope that selectors would give me 'a

chance in the Test matches as well!" Afridi has been named to represent Pakistan A team against the touring Indian counterparts for the Peshawar Test despite a first match failure in the same series. With mb immediate selection possible in the near future, barring one-dayers, Shahid Afridi needs to show something extraordinary, not in relevance to that non-fictional knock of 102 off a mere 40 balls with 11 sixes and five fours.

Another such effort would certainly seal his fate. — Internews

Denmark reign as Sweden recover

SANDEFJORD (Norway) — Sweden made a fine recovery to qualify for the men's Thomas Cup world team finals in Hong Kong when they came back both from a disastrous defeat against the Netherlands on Friday and a 1-2 deficit against England on Saturday.

The English looked clear favourites to inflict a second defeat in two days upon the European second seeds when they were in the lead after the three singles. But Sweden won the two doubles to snatch victory and book their trip to the finals, scheduled for may, along with Denmark and the Netherlands. The three slots for the women's Uber Cup went to Denmark, England and the Dutch after the Swedish women were beaten 3-2 in Saturday's third place game. In the men's event, the long-lasting partnership of Peter Axelsson and Par-Gunnar Jonsson, which once clinched the European Championships for the Swedes, was split, just for this match, and the reconstituted pairs worked superbly.

Axelsson took responsibility for the younger Henrik Andersson, especially when an ankle injury threatened to slow him down in the second game, and they came up with a crucial win over the former European champions Chris Hunt and Simon Archer by 15-3, 15-13. After that there was no doubt that Jonsson's partnership with the erstwhile singles player Jens Olsson, comprising the two oldest in the Swedish squad, would be too experienced and skilful in the decider for Julian Robertson and Ian Pearson. They took it 15-8, 15-7. Sweden's other win came from Henrik Bengtsson in straight games against Colin Haughton in the second singles, and they go through to the finals along with Denmark and the Netherlands. The Danes had little difficulty in beating the Dutch 5-0 in the zone final, a result which will decide seedings in Hong Kong. Indeed, the zone top seeds achieved it without the services both of their in-

jured world champion Peter Rasmussen, who went home on Wednesday, but also those of world number two Peter Gade Christensen, whom they preferred to rest. In the Uber Cup, Denmark's 5-0 win over England was the fifth successive whitewash handed out in five days and overall results emphasised the country's superiority in both the men's and women's game. The failure of the Swedish women to make it to Hong Kong can be ex-

plained largely by an injury on Friday to leading player Marina Andrievskaya who damaged cruciate ligaments in her right leg. The former Soviet player, who had been taking part in her first Uber Cup campaign, will be out of action for six months and maybe a year. — Reuters

HAPPY MOMENTS: Jaromir Jagr, left, of the Czech Republic and an unidentified teammate laugh during a practice session at the Big Hat in Nagano on the eve of the Olympic hockey final between the Czechs and Russia. - AFP

O'Malley's chance to top Order of Merit

SYDNEY — Peter O'Malley has a chance of overhauling leader Andrew Coltart to finish top of the Australasian Order of Merit (OOM) after his nine-stroke win in the Canon Challenge golf tournament at Terrey Hills here vesterday.

O'Malley's prospects were given a further boost with Coltart's announcement that he would be playing in the Gulf rather than teeing off in the season-ending Tour Championship at Royal Canberra, which

starts on March 5.
Scotland's Coltart will contest the Dubai Desert Classic on the European tour next week and an event in Qatar the following week, with

possible US-led military strike against Iraq. Even if the Qatar tournament,

Championship, is called off, Coltart sure. said yesterday he would return to Scotland despite the chance it would

Coltart has earnings of \$211,790 this season ahead of O'Malley on \$158,960, with \$64,200 going to the winner in Canberra. "I guess he realises there aren't

too many people that can pass him," Australia's O'Malley said after his handsome win over local professional Paul Gow yesterday.

years and I was hoping to do better this year.
"Winning the Order of Merit

The 32-year-old O'Malley, who

O'Malley, who won the 1992 Scottish Open and 1995 New Zealand Open, beat Gow, who made a double-bogey six on the final hole to card a 74 and a four-round total of eight under 280.

Australian Masters runner-up Mathew Goggin, Queenslander Ken Druce and Wayne Smith of Western Australia, all on seven under 281.

Topping the OOM offers exemptions to major international tournaments.

The first three on the OOM earn berths in the British Open at Royal Birkdale in Southport next July while the winner also stands a chance of getting into the US PGA, the NEC World Series, the Memorial Tournament, the Sprint International

Coltart, who has time to play in Canberra if he changes his mind, said he would monitor the results from wherever he was in the world.

"I'd be disappointed for myself if I came second because it would be great to have the Order of Merit on my resume," he said. "It's a great confidence booster and it's great for deals with sponsors and things like

week it will be a hell of an effort and good on him, I've given it my best

"Even if Qatar's not on, I'm heading in the direction of home so I might as well keep going and take the time off because I've played a lot

next two weeks." Coltart shot to the top of the

OOM list with victory in the Australian PGA last November at the New South Wales course here and has been there ever since. At Tucson, Arizona David Du-

val stayed hot with a four-under-par 68 to grab a seven-stroke lead after the third round of the \$2 million Tucson Classic.

Duval, who nearly tied the course record with a 62 on Friday, recorded his worst round of the tournament but still moved to 204 under 196, well in front of det fending British Open champion and

first-round leader Justin Leonard; who carded a 68. — AFP

usually in the final centimetres of the race. And the fans thought they were seeing double as ill-fortune cast its heavy cloak around two medal hopes with the same name. World champion Yang Yang — version A — was distinguishable only by the number on her helmet as she lined up against Yang Yang — version S. But their fates were mirrored as the stars, who are even the same height, both missed out on the ultimate prize. It appeared a jinx was hanging over the team as Yang Yang A broke the world record in the 1,000 metres heats but then got herself disqualified in the final for cutting across race winner Chun Lee-Kyung of South Korea, who

the honours and the medals.

ceived medal status at Albertville in 1992.

scored a repeat triumph. Yang Yang S was unable to hang onto her early lead so she duly took the silver, China's fifth in six races. Similarly in the 500m, Wang Chunlu was brought down during the final and could only look on aghast as Canada's Annie Perreault swiped a famous if lucky victory But for fractions of a second, the Chinese could have been floating on air with golds on each occasion. But it wasn't to be. And the Koreans added insult

Korea dominate

NAGANO - Short track, with its roller derby "everyman for himself" reputation, was bound to create a few surprises at Nagano, with pure luck often

the name of the game. But close analysis shows the outcome of the races here

wasn't such a lottery after all, with the same countries consistently scooping

three golds to take their total to nine in just three Games since the sport re-

In the Year of the Tiger, the roar of the Chinese dragon was somewhat muted as the Middle Kingdom once again failed to bag its first Winter Games

gold. It wasn't for want of trying, but somewhere the Yin and Yang went awry

Yet some managed to woo the favours of Lady Luck with more success than others. She shone most brightly on the South Koreans, who wrapped up

track events

to injury when B final winner Chun bagged an unlikely bronze when neither Wang or nor Canadian world record holder Isabelle Charest finished the race. the Korea-China faceoff was the most fascinating duel on offer at the White Ring arena, there was plenty more on the menu to enjoy as Japanese

teenager Takafumi Nishitani arrived like a bolt from the blue, seizing the moment to win his first major tournament by snatching the men's 500m. The home fans were in ecstasy as the 19-year-old claimed the hosts' fifth gold medal in Nagano - their first in short-track.

A touch of hair gel, a new pair of trousers, and hey presto — an Olympic well that was Nishitani's explanation. Needless to say, it was China, through An Yulong, who finished second on the podium. Elsewhere, Canada kept up their keen rivalry with the United States, who failed to shine as the talismanic 'Turner Burner' was extinguished, skating legend Cathy Turner retiring for good after failing to medal in the 3,000 metres women's relay. Turner won the 500 metres at Albertville and Lillehammer after previously saying she was quitting. This time it's for real.

Despite Charest's trials and tribulations, the Canadians, with Perreault's gold and the men's relay triumph, achieved their overriding goal after their best ever total Games haul of six golds, five silvers and four bronze.

For the first time ever, they beat the US team overall — by the two bronze medals scooped by Bedard in the men's 1,000m and the women's relay quartet.

in Sapporo 26 years ago, when they brought home a solitary silver. — AFP

It was a far cry from Canada's showing at the last Japanese-hosted Games

the Qatar tournament contingent on a

give O'Malley to sneak ahead.

'To win it (OOM) would be great, I've finished fifth the last two

which coincides with the Tour would open a few doors, that's for

held a six-stroke lead going into the final 18 holes, was ahead by 10 strokes at one stage in the last round before finishing with a one under 71 for a 17-under 271 to win his first tournament on home soil.

In joint third were last week's

and the Japan Open.

"If Peter wins this week and next

of golf in the last 12 months "I'm more than delighted with how it's turned out down here irrespective of what Peter does in the

OAS trounce Tarmac

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT — Oman Aviation defeated a depleted Tarmac CT by five wickets in a C Division League match of the Oman Cricket Club played at the Oman Automobile Club Ground II.

Batting first, nine-man Tarmac team were bowled out for 137 in 23.5 overs. Liyakat Ali (36: 1 four), Kaushal Vinod (26: 1 six, 2 fours) and skipper Junaid Ahmed (24: 2 fours) were the main contributors with the

Ravi Gopinath and Roshan Perera claimed two wickets each to share the bowling honours. In reply, Oman Aviation scored the requisite runs losing five wickets in the process in just 16.1 overs. Roshan Perera top scored with 30 (2 fours) runs, while Ravi Gopinath (28.3 fours), Pradeep Lalchandan (28 not out; 4 fours) and Mahmood Baig (23: 4 fours) chipped in with useful

In a D Division match played at the adjacent ground, Maooz Ansari sparkled with a solid century (115: 14 fours) to steer Riam Signs past Gulf Auto by six wickets. Earlier Gulf Auto piled on 236 for six with Mohammed Ashfaque stroking an elegant 85, which came off 40 deliveries and had four sixes and nine fours. Others to be among the scores were Salman Ahmed (69 not out: 3 sixes, 4 fours) and Nasir Shabbir (50: 1 six, 3 fours). Among the wickets were M. Irfan and Maooz Ansari

who shared four wickets. Requiring over nine runs per over, Riam Signs, with Maooz leading the way and other batsmen Habib Ahmed (43: 1 four), Arif Gill (27: 4 fours) and M. Irfan (23: 1 six, I four) chipping in with decent scores, reached the target with four balls and six wickets to spare.

In another D Division match played at OAC I, Al Kahf defeated Omasco by six wickets. After restricting Omasco, who are yet to register a victory in the league, to a paltry score of 169, Al Kahf completed formalities For Omasco, opener David Aurora chipped in with an useful 75, which included nine hits to the fence, and Shafqat Ejaz (32: 1 six, 2 fours) and Suhail Iqbal (21: 3 fours) helped boost the total. Arif Jamal of Al Kahf bowled well to claim three wickets, while S.J. Vijay, Satish Chandra and Rizvi Imran scalped two wickets

Al Kahf lost Rajender Singh with two runs on the board, but recovered to reach the target with 2.4 overs to spare. Nat Santamaria (86: 9 boundaries) and R. Praveen (35: 1 six, 3 fours) did all the hardwork for Al Kahf.

Inchcape Engineering registered an easy 68-run victory over SFO in an F Division match played at the University grounds. Electing to field, SFO were given a torrid time by openers Martin (109: 6 fours) and Clifford Lazarus (61: 6 fours). They were associated in a 149-run partnership. Richard was the pick of the bowlers claiming two wickets. SFO in reply were bowled out for 147 in 23 overs.

Sunil D'Souza (48: 2 fours) top scored, while the other contributor was Moin Ansari (30: 3 fours).

In another match of the same division played at the OAS grounds, Zubair CT scored a comfortable win over Combank CT to stay in contention for top honours. Batting first, Zubair reached 223 for 5 in 25 overs thanks to a solid unbeaten 110 from R. Prakash, which included eight boundaries and an equally useful 60 (1 six, 6 fours) from Bharath Mohan. The bowling honours were shared by Mohammed Mehmood and N. Zafar, who claimed two Combank in their turn were bowled out for 188 in 24.

overs. Mohammed Mehmood batted well and was unlucky to miss his century by two runs. His 98 included ten hits to the fence. The other batsman to make a contribution was

MHD defeated Muscat Braves by 29 runs in another F Division match. Batting first MHD reached 156 for six

Madny triumphs |

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT - It was an action packed opening day at the Gulf For-um Hotel the hosts of the fifth Annual Tawoos Open Tennis Tourna-

However, the best match of the day turned out to be between Madny Al Bakry and T. Guillen.

Madny, playing scintillating tennis, met a tough customer in Guillen, but managed to survive a marathon battle which lasted nearly 150 minutes. According to the tennis pro Peter Metcalfe, it was a special brand of slow high ball tennis that saved the day for Madny, who after losing the first tie-break set prevailed 6-7, 6-2,

The eighth-seeded Madny will now play the winner of the tie be-tween Michel Van Oorschot and Richard Keech in the second round.

In the under-14 category, hardhitting Zaheer Ali defeated Hussain Al Lamki, who too has tough strokes in his kitty, 6-1, 6-2 to enter the quarterfinals. Fourth-seeded Zaheer now plays Hamed Al Rumhy, who beat Nader Al Hamzy 7-5, 4-6, 6-2.

Nader's brother Naif made a fine omeback in the junior under-12 singles beating Frank Gielen 2-6, 6-4, 6after being a set and 3-1 down.
Today's fixtures: S. Al Zedjali vs

F. Ali (4.30pm); A. Hameed vs N. Alcantara; S. Abubaker vs M. Mengullo (6.30pm); J. Martin vs A. Dawalibi; A. Sabar vs T.Khan (7.30pm); S. Al Hashmi vs F. Romero (9pm).

Marlboro lends support to Omani ace Hamed

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT - Marlboro and motorsports have gone hand in hand for quite some time. The company's new inclusion into the team is Oman's ace rally driver and the 1997 Group N Middle East champion Hamed Al

Hamed has already been sponsored by Assarain group of companies, Zubair and Bank Muscat Al Ahli Al Omani and this induction into the Marlboro team has come as a shot in the arm for the sport. This will boost Hamed's participation in the forthcoming FIA Team's Cup, a part

of the World Rally Championship.

Hamed will begin his assault on the Cup next month at the Portugal Rally, which is the third round of the World Rally Championship. Marlboro announced the details of the sponsorship recently at Dubai and Hamed is the new entrant to their fold from the Arabian Gulf.

Group A Middle East champion Mohammed Sulayem and Saudi Arabian ace Abdullah Bakhashab have held the Marlboro flag to high esteem and with Hamed joining the fray, the company is set to take rallying into greater heights in this part of the



HAMED: Big boost

Abdullah Bakhashab is already trying his might in the World Championship which began with the Monte Carlo round in January and Hamed will be joing him from the Portugal

was to test his machine in Norway after he won the Snowman Rally in Scotland recently. But according to latest information, he has decided to cancel his practice in Norway and

Hamed's results in the Scottish Rally were a pleasant surprise for him, his sponsors and all those involved in the rally, as it was for the first time he was participating in such a rally under difficult weather condi-

The Norway plans were shunned because the weather there was warm and Hamed wanted to practice under cold and rough conditions, similar to those in the Portugal Rally. Hamed is expected to return from Scotland in the first week of March and will be announcing his detailed programmes for the season in a major press conference in Muscat on March 9.

Saqib Saleem (31: 1 six, 3 fours). Madagoda bowled well to claim three wickets, while R.

Ravindran accounted for two wickets. and later restricted Muscat Braves to 127 in 23.5 overs. round taking part in rally for the spe-cail teams in the Group N section. Meanhwile, Hamed Al Wahaibi

continue his sessions in Scotland.

With Marlboro's support and

Hamed's fantastic start to the season, the champion driver from the Sultante is all set to make waves in the world circuit, before he finally decides to take a plunge in the World Rally Championship proper, likely next Oman Open Darts from February 26

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT- The 12th Oman Open Darts Singles Championship conducted by Oman Darts Club will be held at the Majan Hotel on Ferbruary 26 and 27.

The event sponsored by Majan Hotel will consist of Main Championship of the sponsored by Majan Hotel will consist of Main Championship of the sponsored by Majan Hotel will consist of Main Championship of the sponsored by Majan Hotel will consist of Main Championship of the sponsored by Majan Hotel will consist of Main Championship of the sponsored by Majan Hotel will be sponsored by the sponsored by Majan Hotel will be sponsored by the sponsore

pionship, Omani Championship, Ladies Championship and main first round losers plate.

The tournament will be played on a knockout basis. Main tournament matches will be best of 7 legs 501. Omani tournament matches will be best of 5 legs 501 while ladies tournament matches will be 3 legs 301. Main plate will be best of 3 legs 501. All these rules will be followed till the final.

Trophies and prizes will be awarded to the winner, runner-up, third and fourth positions, highest finish and highest score of all the events. There are also two cash prizes of RO500 for 9 darts 501/6 dart 301 finish and RO250 for 170 finish (60, 60, bull).

The entry deadline will be on February 26 and further information can be had from Adbul Shaheed, the chairman of the Oman Darts

Croft bowls himself into Test contention

GEORGETOWN — Glamorgan off-spinner Robert Croft bowled himself into Test contention when he snapped up six wickets for 50 runs as England dismissed Guyana for 184 on the first day of the threeday tour match here.

England openers Mike Atherton and Mark Butcher then put on nine for no loss in reply by close of

Only a spirited last wicket stand of 49 between Vishal Nagamootoo (55) and Colin Stuart (11) boosted Güyana's total. They had been hovering on 135 for nine when the two came together.

Croft claimed later that news of England's overwhelming 60-26 over Wales in Saturday's Five Nations rugby union clash at Twickenham kept filtering through to the field... and that his teammates had

teased him about it. "It's amazing how suddenly 15 cricketers from real rugby hot-beds like Chelsea suddenly start supporting the oval ball game," he

"Alec Stewart in particular gave me quite a bit of stick, telling me England were 30-12 up at half-time. The final score at Twickenham is a bit difficult to swallow, and a disappointing result for the Welsh lads, but of course we can still win the Five Nations Championship because we haven't played France yet. Perhaps hearing how the score was going, put a bit of anger into my bowling — especially with my first

wicket from a quicker ball. "I'm glad to have got onto the field again, and pleased to have taken wickets because it's been a frustrating time not playing. And at least my performance will give the

C. Lambert c Atherton

K. Semple lbw b Croft

S. Chanderpaul c Russell

T. Dowlin c Cowan b Croft

N. McGarrell c Ramprakash

R. King c Atherton b Tufnell

R. Sarwan b Croft

V. Naganmootoo

M. Naganmootoo

C. Stuart not out

c Russell b Croft

N. de Groot c Russell b Croft

b Silverwood

b Hollioake

b Croft

Welsh newspapers a bit of good

Croft bowled unchanged for 26 overs after lunch and took five for 39 during that spell. Despite his success, Croft admitted that he would be surprised if England's selectors changed their side for the Fourth Test, even though once again he and Phil Tufnell proved how well they bowl in tandem in their first outing together in a first class match since the Christchurch Test 11 months

"I'll leave any speculation about the Test team to the media," he said, adding: "The 11 lads who played in the last Test in Trinidad performed superbly well and I just feel pleased that I am part of the squad."

England would be particularly tempted to include Croft if they thought the Bourda pitch was going to be responsive to spin, because the West Indies batting line-up contains a good number of left handers.

Croft said he was particularly pleased with the way he bowled at Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Guyana's skipper and the West Indies number six, even though it was Adam Hollioake who claimed his wicket just before lunch.

Yorkshire fast bowler Chris Silverwood also impressed with two wickets in his first appearance of the tour, while slow left armer Tufnell had no luck at all and had only the wicket of tail-ender Reon King to show for some hard toil too in the hot blustery conditions.

England, fresh from levelling the six-Test series with the West Indies at 1-1 after their tense victory in Port of Spain on Tuesday, play the vital fourth Test here from Friday.

Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-50, 3-67,

4-84, 5-91, 6-114, 7-118, 8-122,

Silverwood 15.2-1-45-2, Butcher

4-2-7-0, Tufnell 19-5-42-1, Croft

33-14-50-6, Ramprakash 1-1-0-0,

Total for 0 wkts (2 overs) Bowling: King 1-0-7-0, Stuart

Bowling: Cowan 10-3-18-0,

184

SCOREBOARD

Total (87.2 overs)

Hollioake 5-1-13-1.

M. Butcher not out

Extras (w2)

1-0-2-0. — AFP

England first innings

Atherton not out

RUSSIAN WINS: Anatoly Alexandrov, right, dodges a jab by Frenchman Djamel Lifa in a European super featherweight championship match in Paris. — AFP

Rahilou retains world title

PARIS — Khalid Rahilou rallied from a slow start and an early knockdown to score a 12-round points decision over fellow Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Mendy and retain the WBA junior-welterweight title.

Rahilou pounded Mendy from the midway point on after being decked by a big right hand in the third round. Rahilou, making his second title defence, sent Mendy to the canvas with a booming straight right in the ninth round and looked to be on the brink of stopping the challenger on several

Mendy, the former WBC lightweight champion, rode out the storm and bravely finished the final round on top. The judges scored the bout 115-111, 115-112 and 114-113 in favour of Rahilou, who improved his record to

Mendy, 34, saw his record drop to 50 wins against seven losses, two draws and one no contest. It was probably the last hurrah for Senegal-born Mendy, whose professional career stretches back to 1983

Rahilou, 31, a former European champion, won the belt by beating American Frankie Randall on an 11th-round stoppage 13 months ago. His second defence proved a hard one all the way, with Mendy's awkward southpaw style and fast hands giving him an early points advantage. From the midway point, however, Rahilou was in control, switching his

attacks between head and body. At the end of the ninth, 10th and 11th rounds Mendy looked out on his feet. Saturday's fight at the Palais Omnisports in Bercy was only the fourth

world title bout in history featuring two French boxers. In an outrageous decision on the undercard, unbeaten prospect Nourdine Mouchi, who was both outboxed and outfought, was given a unanimous 10-round points decision over veteran Abdou Mongi to win the French

Mouchi, now 8-0, twice had points deducted for spitting out his

gumshield, which was dislodged six times in all.

The tallying of the scoresheets took an eternity and the announcement vas greeted with a barrage of booing from the crowd. Mongi dropped to 23-13-2 while his cornermen yelled: "It's a scandal."

In Belfast, Ulsterman Mark Winters comprehensively outpointed Londoner Bernard Paul to retain his British light-welterweight title here. Winters took command from the first bell and referee Mickey Vann's 117-113 verdict reflected the unbeaten champion's domination.

On the undercard, hard-hitting Commonwealth cruiserweight champion Darren Corbett laboured to a ten-round points win over Belgian Dirk

Wallyn had previously been knocked out in 90 seconds by former European champion Sheffield's Johnny Nelson but frustrated Corbett and surprisingly soaked up some of his heavy clubbing blows.

Corbett is lined up to face Manchester's WBO cruiserweight champion Russian Anatoly Alexandrov became the new European junior-lightweight champion when he unanimously outpointed French

titleholder Diamel Lifa over twelve rounds. In Buenos Aires, German-based Cuban Juan Carlos Gomez scored a animous points decision over Marcelo Dominguez of Argentina at Mar del Plata on Saturday night to win the WBC cruiserweight title.

All three judges scored for 24-year-old Gomez: 116-112, 115-113 and 116-112 again. Unbeaten Gomez (86kg), who held the WBC International title, improved his record to 23-0 while Dominguez (86.2kg) dropped to 22 wins, two losses and one draw.

Nana Yaw Konadu of Ghana retained his WBA bantamweight title on Saturday night with a second-round KO win over Venezuelan challenger Habran Torres at Mar del Plata. - AFP

Mobiline survive scare

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — Mobiline erected a 21-point bulge after three quarters but coach Tommy Manotoc was still edgy. He knew Gordon's Gin would bounce back and try to steal the win last night.

Manotoc was right. Gordon's did come back, but Mobiline survived to hack out a scary 90-83 victory in the McDonald's PBA All-Filipino Cup at the Astrodome. The Phone Pals had to endure a lot of body-banging defense, a fourth quarter barrage and the dreaded Gordon's fans before clinching their third win

"I knew Gordon's were going to come back," said Manotoc. "I was already telling my coaching staff to think of a play in the last 20 seconds. We may have to win the game on a play. We already had three plays - we were ready for a last second shot or a last second defense." It never reached that point though. After Bong Alvarez knocked in his 18th point to push Gordon's within 83-

85 in the last 1:06, the Gin Boars just ran out of steam.
Fouls by Gordon's Marlou Aquino and Bal David in the ensuing plays sent Eric Reyes and Andy Seigle to the free throw line to stave off the Gin Boars' uprising. The win avenged Mobiline's 93-69 loss to Gordon's on February 3. It

did not, however, diminish Manotoc's respect for Gordon's. "Gordon's are still one of the best teams in the land and when they decide to play defense and offense in six minutes they can wipe out any lead. But I'd like

to give credit to our boys for not really folding up," he said.

The victory boosted the morale of Mobiline, a team which used to be the "It's a good win, it's a very good confidence win for us. And I told them if we play like that, we play with the same intensity and the fighting heart there's

no team there that we cannot beat," Manotoc added. The scores:

Mobiline 90-Cariaso 21, Seigle 18, Teng 12, Espinosa 12, Solis 12, Reyes 0, Castelo 3, Capacio 2.

Gordon's 83-Alvarez 18, Aquino 18, Hizon 11, Locsin 10, Cheng 8, David 6, Jarencio 6, Ong 4, Bolado 2, Jaworski Jr. 0.

Quarters: 30-24, 49-44, 75-55, 90-83.

Karpov due in Manila today

From Our Correspondent

MANILA - World chess champion Anatoly Karpov of Russia returns to Manila for the first time in 20 years today for a four-day visit that includes a quick trip to Baguio City, where he beat Switzerland's Viktor Korchnoi in a memorable 93-day series in 1978.

The 46-year-old Karpov kept his title only last month in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he outsteadied India's Viswanathan Anand under a new format

"Karpov has been looking forward to this trip," said Fide honorary lifetime president Florencio Campomanes. "He has had many pleasant memories of our country and it's very timely that he's coming this year when the Philippines is celebrating its centennial."

Campomanes added that the country's national hero, Dr Jose P. Rizal, was himself a chess player. "In fact, there is a postal stamp showing Dr Rizal playing against Blumentritt," Campomanes pointed out.

Karpov won the world title in 1975 and held it until 1985. He regained the crown in 1993 by beating Jan Timman of the Netherlands in Jakarta and then retained it against American Gata Kamsky in 1996 in Elisda, Kalmikya, Russia and recently against Anand.

Karpov's arrival comes a day after

the Fide presidential board meeting at the Manila Hotel. Pedro Borrera of El Salvador and Andrei Selivanov of Russia arrived yesterday for the meeting, which is being hosted by the Philippines through arrangements made by Campomanes.

The other Fide officials who are scheduled to arrive are vicepresidents P.T. Ummer Koya of India and Georgios Makroupoulos of Greece, secretary-general Nouredine Tabbane of Tunisia, Qatar's Khalifa Mohammed Al Hitnit, Lakhdar Mazouz, Arabad Chess Union president L. Jaafari and executive director Em-

manuel Omuku of Nigeria. The presidential board meeting is set to start at 9am. Through the efforts of Campomanes, the Philippines has hosted several big international events-the World Chess Championship in 1978 in Baguio, the Asian Interzonals in 1990, the World Women's Championship between China's Xie Jun and Russia's Maya Chiburdanidze in 1991 and the highly successful World Chess Olympiad in

Campomanes also staged the Marlboro Chess Classics for ten vears in the sixties and seventies and

the King's Challenge in 1976. With its hosting of the Fide pres-ntial board meeting, the Philippines has proved once again that it is one of Asia's top sporting

Underdogs reach semis

OUAGADOUGOU — Outsiders Burkina Faso and Democratic Republic of Congo reached the semifinals of the African Nations Cup as the underdog triumphed this week-

Burkina Faso beat World Cup finalists Tunisia 8-7 on penalties following a 1-1 scoreline after extratime in Ouagadougou on Saturday, and DR Congo beat Cameroon, who have also qualified for France '98, 1-0 on Friday

Burkina Faso now face Egypt, who beat Ivory Coast 5-4 on penalties following a 0-0 draw Saturday night, in the semifinal in Bobo-Dioulasso on Wednesday (2000

DR Congo meet the winners of Sunday's last quarterfinal between Morocco and South Africa (1600 GMT), in Wednesday's first semifinal at Ouagadougou's 4th August Stadium (1600 GMT).

Nine-man DR Congo knocked World Cup finalists Cameroon out of the tournament when Congo striker Mbuilua Tondelua headed home in the first half in a match where defenders Esele Bakasu and Mundaba Kisombe were sent off after the break for second bookable offences. - AFP

England too good for Wales, France overpower Scotland

LONDON — England ripped up the record books to win their first match in eight outings and crush Wales 60-26 in a pulsating Five Nations Championship encounter at Twick-

England ran in eight tries and fly-half Paul Grayson kicked nine out of 10 efforts on goal as they equalled their highest-ever points tally, matching the 60 they produced against Japan 11 years ago. Wales had rocked England with

two early tries before Clive Wood-

ward's side hit back with an amazing

10-minute blitz before half-time when they ran in four tries to race into a 34-12 interval lead. David Rees (2), Neil Back, Kyran Bracken, Lawrence Dallaglio, Austin Healey, Will Greenwood and substitute Matt Dawson were England's try scorers while fly-half

Grayson kicked two penalties and seven conversions. The handsome victory meant England avoided the ignominy of equalling their worst ever sequence of eight matches without a win which they endured back in 1971/

In reply, Wales scored tries

winger Gareth Thomas and Scott Gibbs, while Neil Jenkins landed three conversions. It was Wales's worst defeat in the Five Nations and could spark calls for beleaguered coach Kevin Bowring's resigna-

But Bowring came out fighting after seeing his side taken apart in ruthless fashion by an England side stung by heavy criticism after the 24-17 defeat to France in Paris two weeks' ago. France stayed on course for a second successive Grand Slam after overcoming their Murrayfield jinx to crush Scotland 51-16 in a one-sided Five Nations Champion-

ship encounter. Tournament favourites France followed up their impressive 24-17 win over England in Paris two weeks ago to record only their second win in the Scottish capital since

Jim Telfer, Scotland's director of rugby, admitted his side had been given a lesson in the finer arts of the game and accepted that the Scots never had a chance of avoiding their ninth defeat in 12 outings. 'Man for man that's probably the

cent years," said Telfer.

'They're all extremely good ball players. They are playing the kind of rugby we want to aspire to."

France romped to victory courtesy of two tries from flanker Marc Lievremont, two from winger Philippe Bernat-Salles and one apiece from prop Christian Califano, scrum-half Philippe Carbonneau and Thomas Castaignede

Christophe Lamaison struck two conversions and one penalty and flyhalf Castaignede three conversions and one penalty In reply, Scotland scored a try

through veteran winger Tony Stang-

er which was converted by Craig

Chalmers, who also slotted three Scotland, buoyed by victory in Dublin in their Five Nations opener, had no answer to the pace and power of the French and Telfer admitted that Scotland currently lack the talent to compete at the highest

Telfer warned: "There is no magic wand. Apart from a couple of injuries we had the best possible players on the pitch." -AFP

Rosset makes it to final

ANTWERP — Defending champion

Marc Rosset of Switzerland will play Britain's big-serving Greg Rusedski in the final of the \$1 million European Community Championship yesterday after defeating Patrick Rafter of Australia 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2). Rusedski defeated Slovakian Kar-

ol Kucera 6-4, 6-3 in the other semifinal. Rosset was helped on his way when Rafter suffered a groin injury and needed treatment off court before the start of the second set. 'The left groin went on me on the second point of first tiebreaker," said

the Aussie. "It felt like a pinch and then I felt it catch when moving laterally. The trainer gave me a leg support and it eased up after a while."

The fifth-seeded Rusedski, a fi nalist in Split a fortnight ago, started cautiously but eventually ran out an

easy winner against Kucera com-

pleting his victory with an ace. He won the set after 31 minutes when Kucera sliced a backhand return wide, saved a pair of break points in the first game of the second, and never looked back after surging 3-1 clear. "I raised my game and made him work harder," claimed Rusedski. "He came in on good form, at ter all he's beaten Sampras and Korda this year. I was pleased that I fought through. I competed well, but I felt I struck the ball better on Friday

By Our Sports Reporter MUSCAT — The opening pitch of

the first three-day MSL-Yellow Pages International Co-Ed Softball Tournament has been scheduled for February 25 at the Muscat Softball League in Ghala.

Oman residents of different nationalities will compete under their own country's flag for prizes and national pride. Entered into the competition are three American teams, three Canadian, two British, one Filipino and two Globetrotters, comprising those nationalities unable to

raise a team individually - including Australian, Samoan, French, Indian and Dutch As a co-ed competition each team

Softball tourney from Feb. 25

The final will be held on Friday,

distribution ceremony In all there are eleven teams participating and on Wednesday they

mum of two women at any time, both batting and fielding. Levels of experience and expertise will vary, but the competition will be hard fought

of ten players must include a mini-

February 27, followed by the prize

proper starts on Thursday afternoon. The final on Friday is fixed for a 3pm

The Muscat Softball League is organising such a big tournament for the first time ever, since the opening of the two new fields and the erection of floodlights, allowing night games. The organisers hope that Muscat will be in a position to host invitational tournaments including other Gulf

The venue is situated on the Exhibition Centre road opposite to the

Chang advances to St Jude final

will play each other once to decide

MEMPHIS — Second-seed Michael Chang of the United States advanced to his second straight St Jude final here, holding off third seed Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil 7-6 (9/7), 7-6 (7/

Chang, the defending champion, is seeking his first ATP Tour title of the year on his 26th birthday when he meets the winner of the second semifinal between top-seed Marcelo Rios of Chile and fourth-seed Mark Philippoussis of Australia

Chang saved eight of nine break points during the nearly two-hour

match with the reigning French Open champion, improving his 1998 record Chang is coming off a semifinal loss to eventual champion Andre Agassi in San Jose, California, last

He won five ATP Tour titles in 1997, but ended the year on a sour note, dropping seven of his last eight matches. Chang will be gunning for his 32nd career singles title.

Rios, a finalist at the Australian Open, defeated unseeded South African Grant Stafford in straight sets in the quarterfinals on Friday. The 22-

vear-old Rios, ranked seventh in the world, lost to Czech Petr Korda in straight sets at Melbourne as he tried to become the first Chilean to win a Grand Slam title. Rios, 14-2 this season, is looking to reach his ATP Tour-leading third final of the year. Philippoussis, who won three ti-

tles on as many different surfaces last season, outdueled fifth seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden to reach the semifinals of this event for the second time in three years.

Rios has won both career meetings with Philippoussis. - AFP

TIMES SPORT

Monday, February 23, 1998

Ethiopian sets record in HK

HONG KONG — Ethiopian distance runner Belay Wolashe won the Hong Kong International Marathon in two hours 13 minutes and nine seconds yesterday, finishing well inside the previous record set by Chinese runner Zhu Shuchun. The 25-year-old Ethiopian beat Kenyan Mubarak Hussein, who finished second in 2:13.52 while Tanzanian Onesmo Ludago was third in 2:14.16. — AFP



The 28-year-old Victorian, told reporters here after the visitors' first day's nets: "I have played for seven seasons and during that period played only two Tests against India and none of them here in India.

'I am looking forward to play my first Test on your spin-friendly wickets. I am also looking forward to the battle with Tendulkar. From the Australian's point of view he is the batsman to watch (in the Indian line-up)," he said.

Warne, who became only the second spinner in Test history after West Indian Lance Gibbs to reach the landmark of 300 Test wickets during the course of the three-Test series at home against South Africa recently, said he would like to see the Indian batsmen come after him. 'I hope they come after me. It

offers the best chance (for me) to get wickets. I hope they try to hit me for a six every ball, he said.

About the sore shoulder which

it was getting better after some rest and work-outs with physio.

"I'm coming off my best season in Australia. After a hard grind over the last 18 months some niggles are going to be there. On any tour I try and get adjusted to the conditions as soon as I can", said Warne who had to miss the one-off Test played by Australia in India last season in

Warne vehemently argued with a scribe's point of view that he was not as successful on the Indian subcontinent as he had been elsewhere in the world in Tests.

"I took eight wickets in a Test in Pakistan. I was successful in Sri Lanka too when we played a Test series there. Kindly check your facts", he said.

The Victorian, who has led many a batsman to his doom with his trademark flippers, said both fellow-leggie Stuart McGill and off-spinner Gavin Robertson would with him good support in the slow. give him good support in the slow bowling department.

"Gavin bowled very well in the four One-day internationals in New Zealand prior to coming here. McGill is also bowling very well",

"It will be good to take nine Agreeing that the absence of

strike bowler Glenn McGrath, catches in the series and complete 150. I still need to play seven Tests whom he described as the world's best fast bowler, due to injury, was more, three here, three in Pakistan a big blow, Warne felt the Aussies (in September-October) and one in Australia to join Steve and Ian," the have come here with four good Australian captain said. quicks who are very keen to do a About his personal form, Taylor

Earlier, Taylor expressed confidence that all his 15 players who had gone through a long, lean patch prior to regaining his would be fit by before the first touch on the last Ashes series in England — said he was batting as "The injured players are close to well as he had over the last five (full fitness). I expect (vice-

captain) Steve (Waugh) and Mike "I'm concentrating well and (Kasprowicz) to be fit for the secplaying long innings. Indian wickond three-day match if not for the ets are good to batters. We have first. I hope by the time of the first played lot of one-day cricket here if Test all 15 would be fully fit", the not many first class games. The 33-year-old New South Welshman conditions and grounds are not new to us", he said. told reporters after the team's first

Taylor, bidding to become the first Aussie to lead his team to a Test win in India in nearly thirty years, said there was no parellel between their last visit to India (for a one-off Test and Titan Cup oneday competition) and this tour.

"Our preparations were not very good when we came here last. One first class game before the one-off Test was not very good. This time we are playing Test matches in three very good centres", he pointed out. — PTI



TENDULKAR: Never shy to accept one

Taylor vows to end long win drought in India

captain Mark Taylor said yesterday his world-beating team was confident of ending a 28-year victory drought in India despite their rivals' impressive home record.

WARNE: Courageous challenge

This Indian tour is one of our biggest challenges," Taylor, 33, said soon after his 15-man squad flew in for a three-Test series and a one-day

Australia, rated the unofficial champions of Test cricket after nine successive series wins, have not won a Test match in India since Bill Lawry's tourists triumphed 3-1 in 1969-70.

But Taylor, whose team was thrashed by seven wickets in a oneoff Test in India two years ago, is

Reminded that India had not lost a series at home since 1987, the Australian captain said: "We have been doing lots of things that we have not done before. India are a much bigger propostion at home. I enjoy challenges and that's why I am here. There is no shortage of

be his team's inexperience of Indian conditions, and the lack of bowling firepower in the absence of the injured pace duo, Glenn McGrath and

Only vice-captain Steve Waugh and coach Geoff Marsh have played a full series in India before — during the 1986 tour which produced only the second tied Test in history.

Seven of the 15 tourists have never played a Test against India, while four - fast bowlers Adam Dale and Paul Wilson, batsman Darren Lehmann and off-spinner Gavin Robertson — have no Test experience.
"We've played a lot of one-day

cricket in India, but unfortunately few Tests," Taylor said. "Australia won the World Cup here in 1987 and all our matches in the 1996 edition, except the final, were in India. So we've done pretty well on that score and I hope we can carry that in the Test matches as

Australia's fortunes will revolve around celebrated leg-spinner Shane Warne, for whom the Indian tour could be the ultimate challenge despite a staggering haul of 303 wickets in 64 Tests.

It was against India that Warne ade a forgettable Test debut at Sydney in 1991, returning figures of 1-150. He played one more Test in that

"It's a pity Shane has played only two Tests against India, but that's an indication how little we've played each other," Taylor said. "Shane is the greatest spinner in the game now so those early years really don't mat-

ter. He is raring to go this time.' Taylor brushed aside speculation that Warne, who missed the recent one-day series in New Zealand because of a troublesome shoulder, may not be fully fit for the first Test which starts in Madras on March 6.

'No one in international cricket is 100 per cent fit. He has a few niggling injuries, but is fit enough to do Taylor said he would have liked

to have McGrath and Gillespie to support Warne but stressed Australia were not "on the back foot" without 'We were without McGrath for

most of the South Africa series, and still won. I think (Michael) Kasprovicz is improving fast and Paul Reiffel has been there for a long time. We have a decent attack." The Australians open their sev-

en-week tour with a three-day match against Sachin Tendulkar's Bombay, the current Ranji Trophy champions, at the Brabourne Stadium from to-

Pepsi goes to court against BCCI

BOMBAY — International soft drinks giant Pepsi has filed a case in the Bombay high court against the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) regarding title sponsorship of the April 1-14 triangular one-day series to be held in India.

According to BCCI secretary Jay want Lele, the suit was filed on Friday and is coming up for hearing to

Lele refused to disclose further details about the suit but as per sources the multinational has sought a stay on the board's decision to open the sponsorship bidding for the series and also arbitration to end the

India, Australia and Zimbabwe are the participants in the tri-nation series which culminates with the final at Delhi.

Pepsi had sponsored the last multi-nation tournament organised by the BCCI, the four-nation Independence Cup, in May, 1997. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and New Zealand were the competing teams.

Pepsi has claimed that previously BCCI used to grant one-day sponsorship to the company which sponsors lest series. Pepsi is the sponsor of the coming India-Australia three-Test series which precedes the tri-

Aaqib seeks better treatment of cricketers

Wrong media projection ruining players' careers

RAWALPINDI — Test discard pace bowler Aaqib Javed has called for better media projection of players and better assessment of their worth by the cricket authorities in Pakistan.

day of nets at the Brabourne Sta-

Waugh and pace bowler Kas-prowicz flew in from Australia car-

rying hamstring injuries.
The left-handed opener, seven

short of joining teammates Steve Waugh and Ian Healy in the 100-

Test club and needing nine more catches to complete 150 catches,

said he would be happy to achieve

the latter feat in the three-Test se-

dium here.

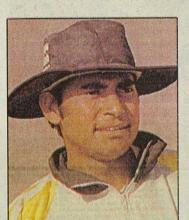
ries with India.

"Instead of creating doubts in the minds of people, Pakistan cricket should clear up its mess to avoid further embarrassment," the Pakistan A team captain said here The players too, he added,

need to curb irrational behaviour as it caused complications of all

"The PCB should formulate guidelines for the players on how to go about representing the country. Boards in Australia, England and South Africa have paid professionals to conduct lessons for their players on human approach towards a problem," he said.

Aagib emphasised the role of the media in creating a spirit of nationalism among the paying public. Quoting an example he said, "the majority of England's



AAQIB: Unlucky

players are merely media hyped. Even minor achievements by them are projected as something out of the ordinary. The case in Asia is entirely different."

"I have lost count of the number of players whose careers fizzled out before time simply because of wrong projections in the press.

peared for Pakistan in a Test against Sri Lanka in 1995, said. Shahid Afridi was sadly the biggest loser on this account in re-"My own case is a prime ex-

ample. All my effective domestic performances are considered secondary when the selection time comes," Javed said.

The pacer has been dumped from the national team on a num-ber of occasions since his Test de-

Acts of favouritism, I feel, should end that figure significantly in Pakistan's selection procedures for 'A' teams and other outfits," he added

Javed has been retained captain for the second A Test starting February 24 against India at Pe-

The touring India A team has meanwhile left for Peshawar for the match after completing a three-dayer against a Rawalpindi team. — Internews

Hanif tipped to be new chief selector

ISLAMABAD — Former Test captain and legendary bat Hanif Mohammad has been reportedly offered the chief selector's post by the Pakistan Cricket Board, it was learnt here yesterday.
"The board has contacted the eldest of the legendary Mohammad brothers for a post that will be vacat-

ed by chief selector Salim Altaf, a former Test bowler of the seventies,' an official of the PCB said. Altaf, who is an employee of the

Pakistan International Airlines, has been transferred to Frankfurt by his office. He leaves next month. The official said Hanif Mo

hammad, who served in the same capacity in the early eighties, has requested for some time before finalising a decision. The present selection committee will remain operational till the end of the season.

Salim Altaf will head all the selections made for the sides that play India in "A" Tests and one-dayers, confirmed the official. Another former star Test batsman, Zaheer Abbas, along with Shafiq Papa, completes the committee trio.

Rumours of Ramiz Raja being in contention for the post of the chief selector too have aroused considerable interest in cricketing circles. — Internews

Kiwis win battle of wooden spoonists

spare New Zealand defeated Zimbabwe by 10 wickets here yesterday in the first of two cricket inter-

nationals. Zimbabwe had been rated one slot higher than last ranked New Zealand on the world Test ratings but the easy win hands back the wooden spoon to the Africans.

The win on the Basin Reserve is the Black Cap's third Test win in succession on home soil, following on from the 2-0 series win over Sri Lanka last year. When Zimbabwe were dismissed

in their second innings for 250, New Zealand required 20 to win and openers Bryan Young and Matt Horne knocked off the runs in 3.5 overs.

The win was New Zealand's first over Zimbabwe since 1992 and broke the stalemate between the two sides. The last two series, in Zimbabwe last year and in New Zealand in 1996, were drawn 0-0. All-rounder Chris Cairns set up

New Zealand's win with two heady

lier in the day he had knocked the stuffing out of the Zimbabwe batting when he dismissed Murray Goodwin and Paul Strang in the space of three

Then late in the day with the prospect of Zimbabwe taking the game into the fifth and final day, Cairns broke a record eighth wicket partnership between Alistair Campbell and Heath Streak.

Campbell, who made 56, and Streak, who remained unbeaten on 43, had put on 94 for the eighth wicket, bettering the existing mark of 79 set in 1996 by Strang and Eddo Brandes, when Cairns bounced out

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming turned to Cairns after Simon Doull and Shayne O'Connor had made little impact with the second

Cairns switched to bowling around the wicket to the left-handed Campbell and the ploy worked when the Zimbabwe captain top-edged an

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attempted hook shot to Matt Horne at deep square leg.

Fleming was a relieved man when Campbell skied the ball into the deep. 'Cairns bowled a great line. We got a little bit impatient trying to win the game and for a while there it threatened to get away from us," Fleming "We came in at tea and everyone

was buzzing — we'd got four wickets in an hour and basically the hard work had been done." Campbell had visions of taking

the game into the final day until he fell to Cairns. "Streaky and I wanted to get

through to stumps seven down because rain was forecast for tomorrow," Campbell said. "Cairns bowled a really good spell to me. He bowled into the foot

holes and one came back and one

went away so it was pretty hard to

know what to leave and what not to leave," Campbell said. Zimbabwe made a bold bid to save the Test in the first session with

danger. They lost only one wicket in the first session when nightwatchman Andy Whittall ran himself out for 12.

Goodwin and Guy Whittall added 45 for the fourth wicket until underutilised medium-pacer Dion Nash claimed the wicket of Whittall. Whit-

tall slashed a ball to Nathan Astle at second gully where he held a good

Goodwin brought up his half century in 174 minutes but he had the misfortune to watch another partner come and go when Andy Flower went cheaply again.

SCOREBOARD

Zimbabwe first innings 180 New Zealand first innings 411 Zimbabwe second innings G. Rennie lbw b Doull. G. Flower c and b Vettori
A. Whittall run out M. Goodwin c Fleming b Cairns G. Whittall c Astle b Nash. A. Flower c O'Connor b Vettori Strang b Cairns A. Huckle lbw b Vettori. Extras (lb14, b6) ...

110, 5-125, 6-155, 7-155, 8-249, 9-249, 10-250. Bowling: Cairns 24.3-4-56-4, O'Connor 14-3-39-0, Doull 13-1-47-1, Vettori 41-18-73-3, Nash 9-6-10-1, McMillan 5-1-5-0.

New Zealand second innings B. Young not out... Extras (lb1) Total (overs 3.5) Bowling: Streak 2-0-13-0, Huckle 1.5 Result: New Zealand won by 10 wick

Man of the match: Craig McMillar (New Zealand). — AFP



KNOCKED DOWN: The referee restrains Frenchman Khalid Rahilou, right, after he floored compatriot Jean-Baptiste Mendy at Paris-Bercy Stadium in a WBA super-lightweight championship. Rahilou kept his title on points in twelve rounds. - AFP

Raman Lamba goes into coma,

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Oman to take part in Youth Olympic

MUSCAT — The Sultanate will participate in the Youth International Olympic Games which is due to be held in Moscow from March 11 to 19 with 140 countries taking part.

The tournament includes twelve Olympic Games. They are basketball, soccer, handball, judo, swimming, tennis, track and field events, table tennis, volleyball, badminton, gymnastics and wres-

The Sultanate will participate in five games - soccer, volleyball, handball, swimming and track and field events.

Oman's participation comes within its preparations for the forthcoming Asian Games which will be held in Thailand from December 6

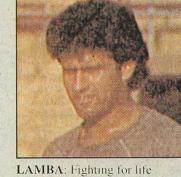
condition termed 'very grave' DHAKA — Former Indian opener Raman Lamba's condition last night was described as 'very grave' as he

slipped into 'deep coma' after an emergency brain surgery here, doctors attending on him said. The 38-year-old Delhi batsman, who was operated on the left side of the brain in the afternoon for the se-

vere head injuries he suffered on Friday while fielding, was kept on ventilator support, professor Rashiduddin Ahmed, neuro surgery department head at the Institute of Postgraduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR),

The operation was done for internal decompression but there has not been any sign of improvement in his condition after the surgery. Lamba's condition remains very grave," Rashiduddin who performed the operation

Dr B. Prakash of the Apollo Hospital in New Delhi flew in here and



had consultations with Rashiduddin on the treatment. Rashiduddin said Lamba had sustained injuries in the left side of the brain. He had a series of convulsions since Saturday which made his condition worse. The small contused area of the brain had enlarged following the convulsions and

respiratory disturbance had occurred due to inhalation of vomitous materi-The condition of Lamba, who re-

mained unconscious on Saturday, had further deteriorated overnight and there was repeated convulsions. He was on life support system to clear the lungs of fluid that had accumulated due to vomiting. Lamba's wife, who arrived here from New Delhi on Saturday was seen crying in-consolably at the hospital as his condition turned very critical last night.

The veteran opener, who was playing for Abahani Krira Chakra gainst Mohammedan Sporting Club in the Dhaka Premier League on Friday was fielding at forward shortleg without a helmet when a full-blooded pull by Mehrab Hossain struck him on his head. He was initially taken to a city clinic and shifted to the ICU of IPGMR yesterday after his condition

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