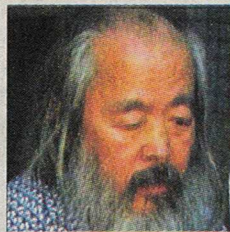


ASIA
PAGE 5

Japan cult guru is arrested



PHILIPPINES
PAGE 7

Mayon volcano erupts



AMERICAS
PAGE 16

Millionaire marriage off the air



SPORTS
PAGE 19

Speculation rife after Sachin quit captaincy



LEISURE

Just what do those food labels really mean?



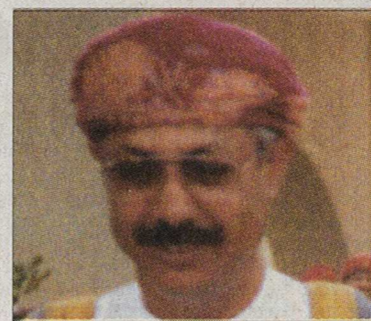
Sayyid Fahd receives Korean ambassador

His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, deputy prime minister for the Council of Ministers, received in his office yesterday Lee Yeong-hyeon, South Korean ambassador to the Sultanate, who came to bid him farewell at the end of his term of duty in the Sultanate. The two discussed bilateral relations and ways of boosting them, as well as other matters of common concern. Sayyid Fahd expressed the Omani government's appreciation for the ambassador's fruitful efforts during his stay in the Sultanate and wished him success in his future career.

— ONA — Photo by Mohammed Al Rashid

Times turns 25

Rowas: We take pride in Times' successful journey



MUSCAT — The spotlight is on the *Times of Oman* as it celebrates its 25th anniversary today. Greetings and congratulations poured in from all quarters, including ministers and ambassadors.

Congratulating the *Times*, Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al Rowas, minister of information, said: "As the *Times of Oman* celebrates its silver jubilee, we all take pride in the successful journey it took to reach where it is today."

The media should bridge the gap, mend the differences and blend the social fabric of society together, Rowas added. He also exhorted the *Times* and all Omani media to seek "even more improvement in the technical side and in the quality of the work; in vision and professionalism within a framework of objective freedom".

Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, minister of national economy, noted that "in the last 25 years, the *Times* has played an important role in disseminating international and domestic news to its readers in Oman and (now) overseas (through the Internet)."

While Oman has undergone rapid development and enjoyed a period of considerable prosperity, the *Times* has "played its part in communicating the many achievements of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, his government and people", Macki said.

Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the editor-in-chief of the *Times of Oman*, shared on this occasion the actual story behind how he conceived the idea of an English newspaper and what had inspired him to do it. He unveils the full story in the special silver jubilee supplement that is issued free along with the daily today.

John B. Craig, US ambassador, noted that after "one year as the American ambassador, I have come to rely on the *Times* for accurate reporting of international and national news, news analysis, cultural exposes and readers' comments".

In his congratulatory note to the *Times*, Sir Ivan Callan, British ambassador, said: "May the next 25 (years) see as many positive developments and as much expansion as the last."

Satnam Jit Singh, Indian ambassador, also extended his congratulations to the *Times* and noted that "the newspaper has

assiduously striven through the 25 years of its existence to arrive at its present accomplished form of an eagerly awaited daily".

As the Indian ambassador, he found it "gratifying to open the *Times* each morning and find extensive news coverage of political, economic and human interest relating to the Indian subcontinent, along with other important international news."

In his note, Karam Elahi, Pakistan ambassador, called the *Times* the "pioneer of English-language journalism in Oman".

"Expatriates form a substantial part of the readership of English newspapers of the country and a balanced and objective coverage of the news and views impacting on their respective countries remains a necessity and a challenge," Elahi said.

N. Murat Ersavci, Turkish ambassador, extended his "heartfelt congratulations" to the *Times of Oman* on the occasion. He said: "We will continue to enjoy its vibrant, rich local and international coverage."



The Silver Jubilee Supplement is issued free with today's edition

Cables of greetings

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to President Janet Jagan of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on his country's independence anniversary.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to Haji Hassnal Bolkiah, Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, on his country's national day.

In his cable, His Majesty wished the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam good health and happiness and his people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Two drug smugglers killed in ROP firing

MUSCAT — Royal Oman Police has busted a huge smuggling operation of narcotics.

An official source at the ROP public relation department stated that on receiving reliable information about the smuggling operations of a huge quantity of narcotics to the Sultanate by a specialised international gang, the ROP devised a plan and arrested criminals at the beach of Majees region in Sohar on February 21.

The source added: "When the gang arrived at the location, the ROP was in waiting and surrounded the criminals. However, the smugglers ignored the ROP command to lay down arms and started to shoot at the policemen. In the ensuing crossfire, two smugglers were killed and three injured. No policemen were hurt."

With the direct and able support of the Royal Navy of Oman, the injured were transferred to hospital for treatment and the narcotics seized along with the boat used for smuggling.

The smugglers holding Iranian nationality will be referred to the court of justice.

The ROP extended its sincere thanks to all those who helped it to control crimes in general, and narcotics smuggling, in particular. — ONA

Nigeria riots

KADUNA — Religious riots that have left over 20 people dead and scores of buildings and cars destroyed in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna resumed yesterday despite a strict curfew.

More than 1,000 armed paramilitary police and troops were drafted into northern Nigeria's second largest city and police chiefs claimed to have quelled the rioting that began on Monday over demands for the introduction of Islamic Sharia law. But an AFP reporter who drove into Kaduna yesterday said that from the outskirts to the centre of the city, bands of youths armed with clubs, machetes and axes were roaming the streets as smouldering cars were erected as barricades across major thoroughfares. — AFP

Barak trying to have me killed: Arafat

JERUSALEM — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has accused Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak of trying to get him killed by Palestinian extremists by forcing him to make concessions in the peace process, a newspaper reported yesterday.

"Because of him (Barak), Palestinian extremists may try to assassinate me," the top-selling Hebrew newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* quoted Arafat as telling the EU envoy for the Middle East, Miguel Angel Moratinos.

"Barak tried to liquidate me three times in the past, while he served in the Israeli Army, and failed. Now he is trying to kill me by my own people," Arafat was quoted as saying.

The paper said Arafat regarded Barak as no different from his right-wing predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, under whose administration the peace process was halted for months.

Moratinos, who is here accompanying visiting EU parliamentary speaker Nicole Fontaine, declined to comment on the report.

Arafat's reported accusations come amid efforts by US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross to resolve the latest crisis in the peace negotiations, which centres on a dispute over a further Israeli withdrawal from 6.1 per cent of the West Bank.

According to Israeli public radio, Barak informed Ross that Israel would not meet Palestinian demands for troop withdrawals from in and around Jerusalem under the land transfer that was due to have taken place a month ago under a signed interim accord.

The radio reported that Barak asked Ross to tell Arafat that his country would consider "slight modifications" to the planned withdrawals "but in no case was there any question of transferring to the Palestinians any land from the Jerusalem area."

Ross cautioned yesterday that much needed to be done to drag stalled peace talks back on track as relations between the two sides sank to their lowest ebb in months.

"There is a lot of work to be done and the best way to do that is to get on with it," Ross said. "We need to resolve some of the remaining problems with regard to the interim issues, we have to get on with the final status negotiations."

Frustration at the deadlock spilled over into sporadic violence

in the West Bank, where demonstrators burned US flags and threw stones at Israeli soldiers at various protests yesterday, amid warnings by Israeli intelligence of a new *intifada* or popular uprising.

In Ramallah, four Palestinian students were lightly wounded by rubber bullets fired by Israeli border guards when they tried to march on an Israeli checkpoint.

Ross, who met Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy and is due later to meet Arafat, said he did not believe there had been a breakdown in communications between the two sides.

"We will be discussing all the areas where there are difficulties and how best to move forward. What I am quite certain of is that both sides are determined to find a way to move ahead," he said.

Levy said any delays were "not the fault of Israel," telling the Palestinians that they should accept that they too must make compromises.

Barak said on Monday Israel was preparing a new "package" which press reports said covered the inclusion of so-called "quality" areas for transfer to the Palestinians, but still did not meet Arafat's demands for land near Jerusalem. — AFP

Royal decree spells out extradition norms

MUSCAT — Criminals will now be extradited to the country demanding their extradition providing that they are in accordance with the Criminal Extradition Law (Royal Decree No.4/2000), according to the latest official gazette.

Extradition is possible if the criminal commits the crime in the country that is demanding the extradition or if a national of that country committed the crime.

Even if the crime is committed outside the country demanding extradition, if it happens to threaten the country's security, affects its financial status, or violates the authority of its official seals, then the criminal concerned will be extradited.

In all cases, such crimes are punishable by not less than a year's imprisonment, according to the Sultanate's law.

However, extradition is not possible in the case of an Omani citizen, or if the crime or one of its component acts is committed

in the Sultanate's territories. Extradition is also not possible if the person enjoys immunity against legal questioning in the Sultanate and the person may be extradited only if he or she surrenders that immunity.

The other cases where extradition is not possible is when the person has already been granted political asylum in the Sultanate, before receipt of the extradition request; if the crime is of a political nature or related to politics; if the person has already been sentenced for the crime involved or its trial is in progress in the Sultanate, or if the charges were dropped, according to the laws of the Sultanate or that of the country demanding the extradition.

The criminal will be arrested only after the request for extradition is made. Extradition will also be delayed till the person is legally charged with other crimes in the Sultanate.

If many countries file requests for the extradition of the same

person, the criminal court chooses one country for extradition, taking into consideration the nationality of the person, nature of crime, and date of the filing of the request. The law notes that the general prosecutor is entitled to interrogate, arrest and release the person for whom extradition is demanded.

In case of an arrest, the period should not exceed two months. The appeal court in Muscat is the authority to decide on the extradition requests and has the authority to accept or reject the request.

Those countries that are submitting their extradition request should include copies of the personal details of the person; arrest or sentence order; legal laws relevant to the crime; a commitment from the country demanding the extradition that the person involved will not be charged with a crime other than the one in case of the request; a commitment from the country demanding the

Continued on Page 2

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Branches Tel.: Barka - 883983, Buraimi - 610222, Ibra - 471118, Ibra - 491399, Nizwa - 411588, Salalah - 211469, Seeb - 623906, Sohar - 844725, Sur - 442002

Computer, telecom exhibition in April

MUSCAT — The Oman International Trade And Exhibitions will organise the 10th international exhibition for computer and telecommunications (Comex 2000) from April 24 to 27.

The annual exhibition will be held for the 10th successive year under the auspices of the Ministry of Telecommunications.

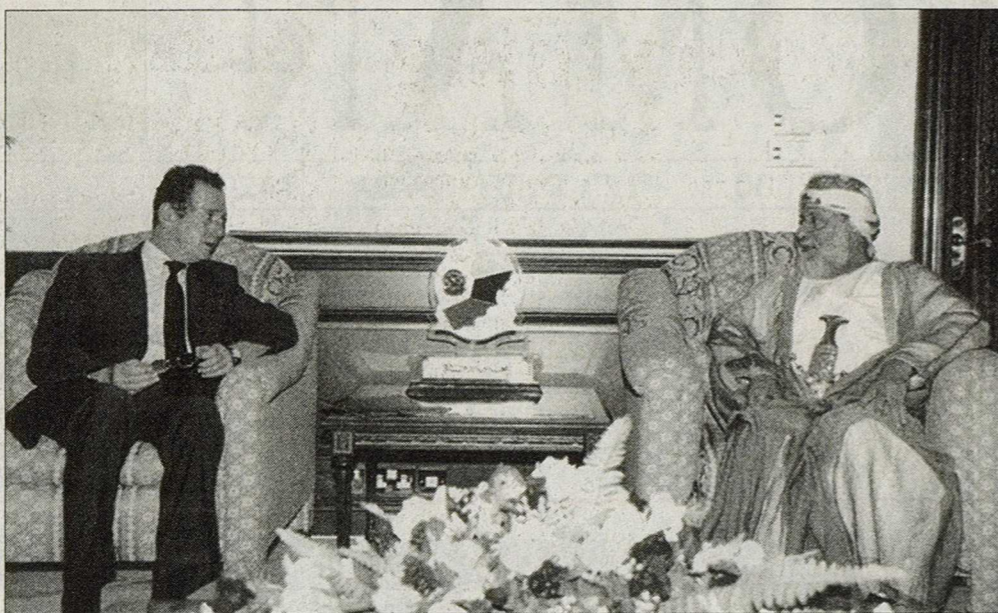
Ahmed bin Saleh bin Abood, the company's executive manager, said Comex 2000 was the largest information technology exhibition in the Sultanate and would provide businessmen, academics, students and the public with the opportunity to discover the latest information technology (IT) innovations.

He said the fair, which would coincide with the Sultanate's enforcing the copy write law, would be installed on an area of 1,500 square metres. More than 60 local and international computer and telecommunications companies, including Arixon and Siemens, will participate in exhibition.

There will be two sections, one for businessmen and the other for the public. Technical and scientific lectures would be organised on the sidelines of the exhibition.

A three-day conference on the security of the Internet will be held at Seeb Novotel. Participants will include experts from the Sultanate and the UK. They will discuss e-commerce, intellectual property protection and the Internet.

— ONA



OMAN-FRANCE FRIENDSHIP: Sheikh Hamoud bin Abdullah Al Harthy, president of the Council of State, received yesterday the president of the Oman-French Friendship Society in his office. They discussed issues of common concern and activities of the association to strengthen the relations between the two countries. — ONA

Second issue of national accounts bulletin released

MUSCAT — The Ministry of National Economy has released the second issue of the national accounts bulletin.

This publication contains a brief analysis of the various economic activities as well as detailed data and information pertaining to the period 1994-1998.

The national accounts bulletin, prepared by the Directorate-General of Economic Statistics, consists of three sections. The first section involves the salient features of the national accounts. Its contents covered the main features of the economy, the merchandise and services account, and the GDP by type of economic activity.

The second section of the bulletin covers a brief summary of the national accounts estimates in

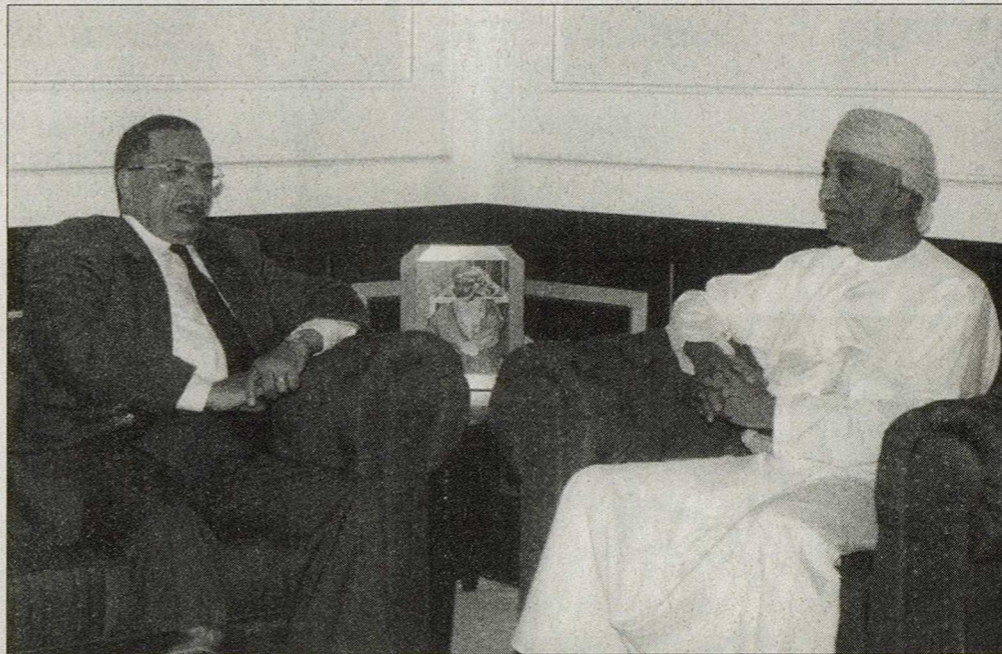
addition to the methodology, sources of data, terms, and definitions indicated in the bulletin. The third section includes a set of tables of quantitative indicators for the various economic activities. The publication of this bulletin by the ministry emanates from the importance of economic statistics to all the experts and professionals in the academic institutions, private interests, government, and international organisations.

Issuance of this publication will not doubt enrich the different areas that require detailed economic information and statistics about Oman's economy. It also conforms with the ministry's objective of exerting necessary effort to update the database, and upgrade the information systems

so as to improve the quality of the national statistics. It is also in line with the basic principle of providing accurate and authentic information when needed.

Since 1990 the Directorate-General of Economic Statistics has started a comprehensive review of the methodology for preparing the national accounts. The review came as a result of the ministry's efforts to provide detailed information in this field and also to follow the most recent system of national accounts (SNA) adopted by the united nations. The annual economic surveys carried out by the ministry and cover all economic establishments are considered to be the most important sources for the preparation of the national accounts. — ONA

SQU-Jordan varsity cooperation discussed



Mohammed bin Al Zubair bin Ali with the Jordanian official yesterday.

MUSCAT — Mohammed bin Al Zubair bin Ali, His Majesty the Sultan's adviser for economic planning affairs and president of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), met here yesterday, Mohammed Adnan Al Bakheit, president of the Jordanian Al

Albeit University, in the presence of Dr Saud bin Nasir Al Riyami, vice-president of SQU. The two discussed cooperation between the two universities, including exchange of scholarships and students visits, joint research projects and assis-

tance from Al Albeit University in the field of humanities. Bakheit's visit is part of the efforts to promote cooperation between the two universities.

He visited the main library, the information systems centre and the college of arts. — ONA

Training on irrigation techniques to end today

MUSCAT — A training session in the field of operating and maintaining modern field irrigation techniques, organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in cooperation with Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, will wound up today. Khalaf bin Saleh bin Mohammed Al Nabi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, will preside over the concluding session.

Participants in the seminar were trainees from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment, Muscat Municipality and the Diwan of the Royal Court. — ONA



Sayyid Abdullah bin Hamad bin Saif Al Busaidi inspecting a guard of honour yesterday.

RAO passing-out ceremony

MUSCAT — Sayyid Abdullah bin Hamad bin Saif Al Busaidi, head of the State Finance Audit, presided over the Royal Army of Oman's (RAO) ceremony marking the passing out of several batches of recruits at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Training Regiment yesterday, in the presence of RAO Commander Major-General

Ahmed bin Harith Al Nabhani. Sayyid Abdullah, in his speech, praised the achievements of the renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, as it enters the third millennium with well studied and successful plans in all fields as well as the level of progress

SAF had reached, including RAO in all fields, particularly in advanced military training.

He congratulated the passing out soldiers for being honoured with the military service.

Several SAF commanders, senior officers and RAO officers, non-commissioned officers and personnel attended the ceremony. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT

This is to inform all concerned that Mr. M.S. BADARI PRASAD, holder of Indian Passport No. N-188279 is no longer in his position as Marketing Manager with effect from 01 March 2000. He is no more authorised to represent our company from the above date and any claims must be brought to the attention of the Company within 72 hours in writing and thereafter Company will not be liable for any claims.

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OMAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY (S.A.O.C)

TENDERS NOTICE

Oman Telecommunications Company (S.A.O.C.), Post Box no. 789, Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman hereby gives notice of the following tenders as per requirements details in OMANTEL Tender Documents.

Contractors registered with the Tender Board engaged in similar activities are invited to submit their Tenders as described in the Tender Documents.

Tender No	Description	Sale of Documents	Last Date of Submission	Cost of Documents
04/00	Cleaning of various Sites/ Premises of Omantel in the Sultanate of Oman	23/02/2000 to 28/02/2000	14/03/2000	R.O. 50/-
05/00	Disposal of Waste Water from various Omantel Sites in Muscat Governorate	23/02/2000 to 28/02/2000	14/03/2000	R.O. 25/-
06/00	Maintenance of Indoor plants, Landscaping, Irrigation Systems and Underground Reservoirs at various Omantel locations in the Sultanate of Oman	23/02/2000 to 28/02/2000	14/03/2000	R.O. 25/-
07/00	Supply of Drop Wire	23/02/2000 to 28/02/2000	14/03/2000	R.O.50/-
08/00	Maintenance Services for Access Barriers at various Omantel location	23/02/2000 to 28/02/2000	14/03/2000	R.O.25/-

Tender Documents may be obtained from the Directorate of Tenders & Contracts, Room No. 21, First Floor, OMANTEL Headquarters, Ministry of Communications Complex at Al Khuwair during office hours after paying the non-refundable amount as stated above for the Tender Documents to the Directorate General of Finance, Room No. 22, Third Floor.

Wax-sealed Tender Offers in triplicate should be addressed in the name of H.E. The President, Oman Telecommunications Company (OMANTEL), indicating the Tender Name and Number. These should be deposited in the Tender Box kept at the Directorate of Tenders & Contracts, First Floor, Room No. 21 OMANTEL Headquarters, Ministry of Communications Complex at Al Khuwair on or before 10:00 hours as mentioned above. There shall be no indication whatsoever on the envelopes as to the identity of the bidder quoting for the project other than the name of the project quoting for.

Prayer Timings

Dhuhr12.25
Asr03.44
Maghrib06.11
Isha07.36
Tomorrow	
Fajr05.14

- ### EVENTS
- Oman will host the fifth meeting of AGCC ministers of higher education and the preparatory meeting of under-secretaries of the ministries from February 26 to 28.
 - Oman will host a seminar on 'Future and development of AGCC industrial regions under the World Trade Organisation' on February 27.
 - PEIE will host the international conference on the future of industrial estates on February 27 and 28.
 - Seminar on 'Awareness on basics of Yoga' on March 5, at 7.30pm at the Yoga Relaxation and Fitness Centre in Ruwi.

OMAN TV

08:00	News Bulletin
08:15	Children's Programme
08:20	Children's Cartoon
08:35	Children's Serial
09:00	Morning Coffee
10:01	Children's Serial
10:24	Cultural Programme
11:10	News
11:14	Omani Serial
12:00	Cooking
12:37	Cultural Programme
01:04	Foreign Programme
01:51	Medicines
02:08	Cultural Programme
03:00	News
03:16	Seminar on Public Utilities
04:02	Children's Cartoon
04:26	Children's Serial
05:01	Football
05:24	This Evening
06:45	News
07:11	Basis of Education
07:44	Arabic Serial
08:30	English News
09:00	Economic Horizons
10:00	News
10:45	Sports Evening
11:18	Late Night
01:00	News
01:32	Sports Evening
02:00	Arabic Serial
02:45	Arabic Drama
04:42	From News Agency
05:04	Religious Programme
05:20	Holy Quran
05:32	Arab Scholars
06:23	Games and Entertainment
07:06	History Serial

OMAN RADIO

07:00	Opening, The Holy Quran, Preview of Morning Programmes and Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty
07:15	News Bulletin
07:30	What the Papers Say
08:00	Classical Relaxation
08:30	Festivals of Classical Music in a Lighter Mood
10:00	News Highlights
11:00	The World of Piano Music
11:05	Preview of Afternoon Programmes and News Headlines, Pharmacies on Duty, Noon Time
12:03	Mark and Markets
12:30	Crossroads
01:00	News Headlines
01:02	Travels Through Oman
01:30	Down Memory Lane
01:57	Weather Forecast and TV Programmes
02:00	Book Club
02:15	Would You Mind Saying That Again
02:30	News Bulletin
02:40	Mind Matters
02:58	Weather Forecast and TV Programmes
03:00	Preview of Evening Programmes
03:02	Themes and Variations
04:00	Local News Bulletin
04:03	Our Changing World
04:15	Reading for Pleasure
04:30	Comedy Cuts
05:00	Kaleidoscope
06:00	News Headlines
06:02	Kaleidoscope
06:30	News Bulletin
06:40	Weather Forecast and Pharmacies on Duty
06:45	Eating Out
07:00	Music Quiz
09:45	The Holy Quran
10.0	News Summary, Preview of Morning Programmes, Pharmacies on Duty, Closedown, National Anthem.

WEATHER

Mainly clear skies over the Sultanate with chances of low clouds along the coastal areas of Gulf of Oman.

Wind: Over the coastal areas of Gulf of Oman winds will be light variable at night becoming northeast light to moderate during day. Over the rest of the Sultanate winds be east to southeast light to moderate.

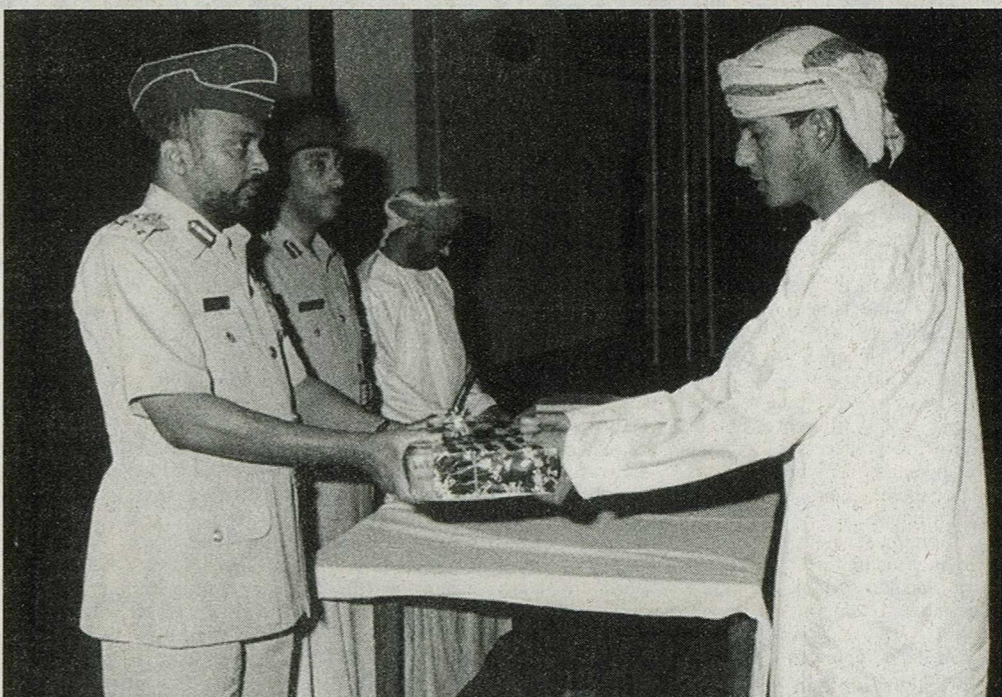
Sea state: Slight along Oman coasts with significant wave height of one metre.

Tides: Muscat
High 11:50pm — Low 06:13am
High 12:03pm — Low 06:08pm
Sunrise 06:35am — Sunset 06:06pm

Tides: Dhofar
High 11:24pm — Low 06:46am
High 11:36am — Low 05:21pm
Sunrise 06:46am — Sunset 06:28pm

Temperatures recorded in other cities:
Muscat 26, Abu Dhabi 22, Dubai 22, Sharjah 23, Ras Al Khaimah 24, Doha 21, Manama 21, Riyadh 24, Makkah 36, Madinah 30, Jeddah 29, Kuwait 22, Sanaa 25, Aden 31, Mukalla 28, Baghdad 19, Beirut 13, Amman 14, Damascus 17, Cairo 22, Tehran 14, Karachi 27, Bombay 27, Ankara 00, Geneva 05, Bruxelles 07, Frankfurt 05, Paris 07, London 08, New York M01, Tokyo 02.

TEMPERATURES: MAX MIN
Khasab27 16
Khasab25 20
Mad'ha24 16
Buraimi27 11
Ibri29 11
Fahud29 11
Sohar25 13
Rustaq27 14
Sumal27 14
Nizwa27 14
Saiq16 02
Jabal Shams10 01
Bahla26 14
Adam27 13
Ibra27 13
Sur28 18
Masirah27 20
Haima32 14
Marmul28 13
Thumrait28 14
Salalah28 20
Quiron Hairiti25 21
Al Halaniyat23 17
Jabal Samhan28 17
Jabal Qamar24 18



GRADUATION CEREMONY: Air Commodore Mohammed bin Nasser Al Rasbi, commander of the Engineering Services, yesterday presided over a ceremony held at the Employment Development and Training Centre to mark the graduation of the eighth batch of technical students. Rasbi distributed certificates and gifts to the graduates. The commander of training centre, and officers and staff of Engineering Services attended the ceremony.

Royal decree spells out extradition norms

extradition that the person will not be extradited to a third country; a commitment from the country demanding the extradition that the person will be given a fair trial and the penal court has the right to reject incomplete requests, within two months.

The court has also the right to reject the request in case the legal conditions are not fully met.

If the penal court rejects the request, the government will follow suit and reject the extradition.

However, if the court approves the request or the person involved agrees to the extradition, the government has the authority to re-evaluate the whole matter.

If the country demanding the request does not come forward to get the person within 30 days of its notification of the approval of the request, the person will be released, and shall not be arrested again unless a new request is initiated.

Workshop on navigational warning systems concludes

MUSCAT — A training workshop on navigational warning systems, hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Housing from February 20, concluded yesterday at Hotel Mercure Al Falaj under the auspices of Majid bin Said bin Salim Al Rawahi, undersecretary of the ministry. Rawahi thanked the lecturers and trainees for their participation in the workshop and presented commemorative gifts to the lecturers. — ONA

MUSEUM TIMINGS

Natural History Museum, Al Khuwair
Tel: 602565 (extension 172), 605400 (direct)
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday: 9.00am to 1.00pm;
Oman Museum, Information City, Qurum, Telephone: 600946.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9.00am to 1.00pm;
Children's Science Museum, Shadi Al Qurum area, Qurum, Tel: 605368, 605369.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9.00am to 1.00pm; Friday closed
Armed Forces Museum, Bait Al Falaj, Tel: 312655, 312646.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 8.00am to 1.00pm;
Oman-French Museum, near Muscat Police Station, Tel: 736613.
Opening times: Saturday to Wednesday 9.30am to 12.30pm
Bait Al Zubair
Opening times: Saturday 4.00pm to 8.00pm; Monday and Wednesday 4.00pm to 7pm; Sunday and Tuesday 9am to 12.30pm; Thursdays 9am to 12.30pm.
Tel: 736688

UAE paper says islands dispute will prove acid test for Iran reformers

DUBAI — Iran's dispute with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over three Gulf islands will prove the acid test for the reform movement which triumphed in the Iranian elections, a UAE newspaper said yesterday.

"The key test will be whether Iran revises its policy toward the three UAE islands and accepts a political dialogue on the issue," said *Al Khaleej*, which is close to the Abu Dhabi government.

"The Gulf region is predisposed to becoming a zone of tranquility, stability and development for all the peoples of the region, provided that the minefields are defused and that suspicions and hostility are dispelled," it said.

Amid a lack of official reaction from Iran's Arab neighbours to the sweeping victory of reformers in the parliamentary polls on Friday, a Qatari newspaper agreed that the islands dispute held the key to improved relations across the Gulf.

Ash-Sharq called for Tehran "to turn the page in its relations with the countries of the region and close the unresolved files, notably the question of the three UAE islands."

Relations that were strained following the 1979 revolution in Tehran have already improved since the May 1997 victory of Mohammed Khatami in presidential elections.

Israeli army says soldier concocted kidnap story

JERUSALEM — The Israeli army said yesterday that one of its soldiers had made up a story about a fellow soldier being kidnapped on Monday in the centre of the country.

"The results of an overnight investigation of the soldier (who informed the army of the alleged kidnapping) show that he made up the story of the attempted kidnapping of an army soldier," an army statement said.

Israeli public radio said that it was not clear why the soldier had concocted the story.

On Monday the army said it suspected that one of its soldiers, who was said to have gone missing earlier in the day, had been kidnapped.

Local media reported that the kidnapping may have been the work of a Palestinian rebel group.

Israeli public radio said the soldier was seen by another soldier boarding a Palestinian commercial vehicle in breach of army rules, a fact which, the radio said, suggested he had been kidnapped by a Palestinian rebel group.

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Two life terms for Israeli Arab murderer

JERUSALEM — An Israeli court sentenced an Israeli Arab to two consecutive life terms for the brutal murder last August of two Jewish hikers, a court spokeswoman said yesterday.

The Nazareth District Court said Abdullah Igbariya, 21, from the Arab town of Mushayrafa in northern Israel, pleaded guilty to stabbing to death Sharon Steinmetz, 21, and Yehiel Fuenfer, 26, after "taking the decision to kill Jews".

The court said he expressed no regret for his actions.

The court found that after speaking with the couple to allay their fears, Igbariya "stabbed them repeatedly all over their bodies until they died," stripped them of their belongings and hid the corpses near a stream.

The murders of the religious Jewish Israeli and his girlfriend occurred in a secluded area of a northern Israeli forest, close to the West Bank.

Arrested in September shortly after the murders, the former construction worker was given a public defence lawyer.

"I'm not asking to be forgiven, because I know it won't help me," Igbariya told reporters after being sentenced.

Israeli army says soldier concocted kidnap story

JERUSALEM — The Israeli army said yesterday that one of its soldiers had made up a story about a fellow soldier being kidnapped on Monday in the centre of the country.

"The results of an overnight investigation of the soldier (who informed the army of the alleged kidnapping) show that he made up the story of the attempted kidnapping of an army soldier," an army statement said.

Israeli public radio said that it was not clear why the soldier had concocted the story.

On Monday the army said it suspected that one of its soldiers, who was said to have gone missing earlier in the day, had been kidnapped.

Local media reported that the kidnapping may have been the work of a Palestinian rebel group.

Israeli public radio said the soldier was seen by another soldier boarding a Palestinian commercial vehicle in breach of army rules, a fact which, the radio said, suggested he had been kidnapped by a Palestinian rebel group.

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Iraqi bride dies of scorpion sting on wedding night

BAGHDAD — An Iraqi bride was stung to death by a scorpion on her wedding night, after the groom ignored her complaints of an itch in her dress, a newspaper reported yesterday.

Al Itihad said medical care failed to save the unnamed young woman, who died in Al Mahawil, some 70km south of Baghdad.

— AFP, Reuters

A journey from 'nothing to everything'

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — The developmental changes witnessed by Sultanate during the last three decades under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said have been awe-inspiring, to say the least. It continues to amaze people who have shared a close bond with the country since those days of yore.

And for people like Dr P.M. Mathew, who have actually seen the country move from 'nothing to everything', Sultanate is a model of progress. It has demonstrated how wise planning and far-sighted implementation of projects can turn the country into a developed one in matter of three decades.

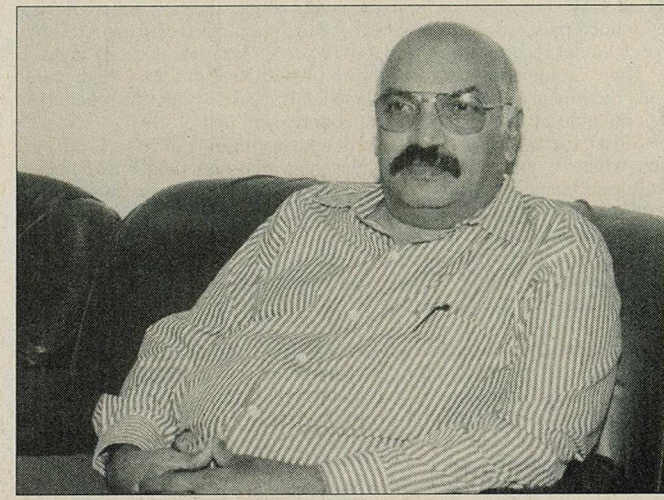
Dr Mathew, who arrived here in 1969 to join the American Mission Hospital, is currently running his family's pharmaceutical business which keeps him in Sharjah most of the time. On a very recent visit to Muscat he reminisced those early days and

charted the growth of the country in the 30 odd years that he has been here.

When Dr Mathew arrived here after a four day ship ride from Bombay, via Karachi, the American Mission Hospital, which was later known as Al Rahma Hospital, was the only hospital in the entire country. There were only three doctors at the hospital — Wells Thomas and Dr Donald Bosch, besides himself. He remembers attending to patients from as far away as Salalah.

Well, hospital was not the only thing that was limited. As far as Dr Mathew can remember there were only two vehicles by way of taxi — an old Land Rover and a Ford.

Those were the days of lanterns. In fact, they were a must after 6pm. People were required to carry lanterns if they had to enter Muscat after 6pm. There were no streetlights and people moving without lantern would draw suspicious attention.



DR MATHEW: 'Oman is a model of progress'

Electricity aside, roads too were a novelty. The only road was limited to Muscat. And travelling to Seeb meant taking the man-made path through the seashore.

Health was Dr Mathew's prime concern and he distinctly remembers that problems like malaria and meningitis, which are almost eradicated, were common. "Health care has improved

drastically. That is one of the most impressive progresses, followed by transport system and the road network".

In those days it took him 18 hours to reach Sur. He remembers undertaking vaccination and treating eyes in the areas like Sur, Buraimi, Sumail and Musna'ah.

He served the Ministry of Health for 10 years and then joined the Bahwan Group. For the last three years now, he has been running his family business in Muscat and Sharjah.

And on the occasion of the silver jubilee of *Times of Oman*, Dr Mathew explained that he has seen the paper progressing from close quarters as he was a close associate of Essa Mohammed Al Zedjali, chairman and editor-in-chief of *Times of Oman*, since those days. "Since those days, the paper has witnessed drastic changes in the entire structure. There is so much to read in each page..." he commended.

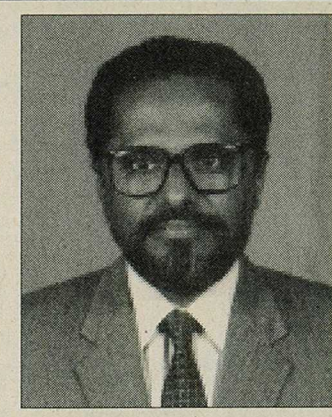
Tremendous progress in three decades

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — George Thomas Kulathakal, the general manager of West Coast Trading, almost had his heart in his mouth when the small plane carrying him began to make its descent towards the old airport located at what is today the Central Business District (CBD). George was flying from Dubai when suddenly confronted by the stately but sombre looking mountains he began to have second thoughts.

"I was really scared when the plane started to descend at the Muscat airstrip as the plane was landing between the mountains. When I came out of the aircraft, I could see nothing but barren mountains around us," George, who has spent nearly 30 years here, recalls on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the *Times of Oman*.

Someone from his company — Joannou & Paraskevaides (Overseas) Limited, now known



GEORGE: Witness to the metamorphosis

as J&P (Oman) LLC — came to pick him up and they began the journey from the old airport to the company's camp, which is opposite the current Seeb International Airport (which was at that time called Mazoon airport).

"J&P had the contract to con-

struct the airport. From the old airport to our camp at Mazoon, we took one-and-a-half hours and during our journey, I could not see any vehicles or houses in between.

All around, I could see only barren mountains. There weren't any asphalt roads except from Muttrah to Muscat through the side of Riam Park.

"Public transport too was not existing save for a couple of pickups that served as taxis in Muttrah. The standard of living was poor at that time," George notes.

In this backdrop, the progress made by Oman from 1971 "was tremendous", he notes. In an year's time, part of the asphalt road between the airport and Muscat was ready. "The first route was through Madinat Sultan Qaboos and then after a couple of years, a single road through Al Khuwair-Qurum began. This was followed up with a new road

Oman in Arab Youth and Sports Cooperation executive office

TRIPOLI — The Sultanate has been elected as a member of executive office of the Arab Youth and Sports Cooperation.

The 23rd session of the council began on Monday.

Other members of the executive office, which is headed by Egypt, includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Libya, Algeria, Morocco and the Palestinian Authority.

The election was through a voting process.

The Sultanate's delegation at the meeting is headed by Abdullah bin Saleh Al Yarubi, vice-president of the General Organisation for Youth Sports and Cultural Affairs.

The executive office has recommended financial support for Tunisia which will organise the Mediterranean games tournament. — *ONA*

Food inspectors to undergo training at Leeds

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Muscat Municipality's food inspectors, who are currently undergoing a two-year High National Diploma (HND) course in food safety and hygiene, will be transferred to the Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) for a year-long course in July to earn their B.Sc. degrees.

As per the arrangement with the university, meritorious students will be transferred for a 12-month intensive course, with the option of continuing for further studies.

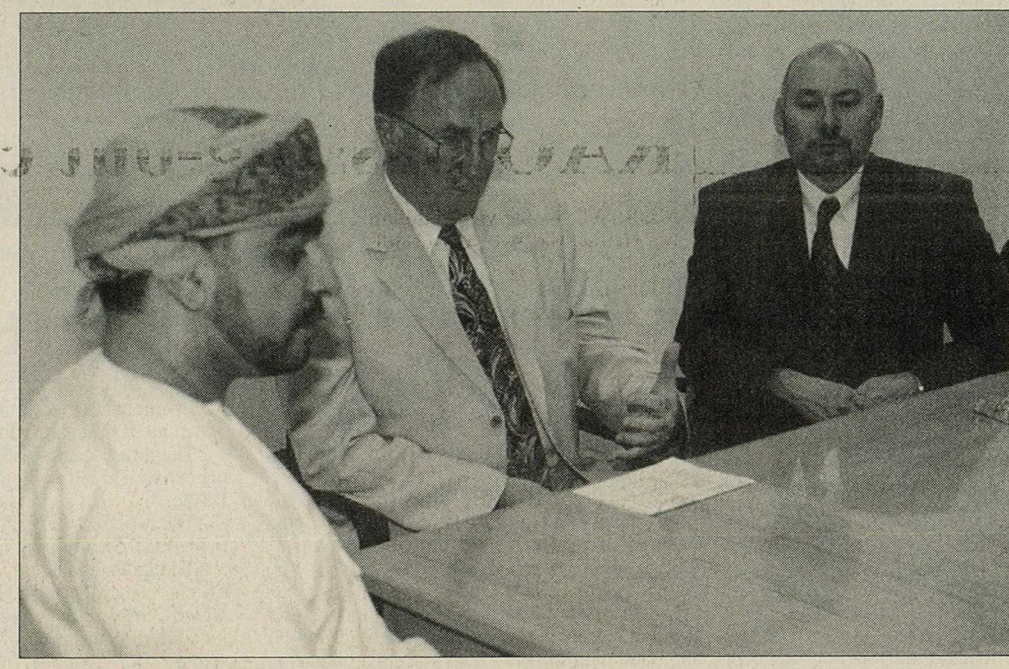
The possibilities of extending this arrangement to other courses and establishing special links with the Muscat Municipality, were discussed by LMU officials Frank Griffiths, deputy vice-chancellor of LMU, and Dr Paul Scofield, deputy head of the faculty of cultural and educational studies, who arrived here on a brief visit.

Talking to the *Times of Oman*, Griffiths highlighted the direct transfer system available for the HND students here. He explained: "Our University offers applied learning like the one offered by the Muscat Municipality. We believe learning should be capable of applying for good purposes — social and economic."

"The courses offered are focused on economy, on improving the quality of life... And that explains the focus on food. Food has played a major role historically at the University, which has been providing courses on technology, management and production of food for more than 30 years."

"Now with the arrangement with Muscat Municipality, the opportunity of attaining the degree after just a year-long course at Leeds, is a tremendous opportunity."

Specifying that the degree offered for the students is B.Sc. with honours in Food Safety and



Frank Griffiths and Dr Paul Scofield explaining details of the training programme yesterday.
— Photo by Rodolfo Alfonso

Quality Assurance, Scofield said food inspectors who have completed the two-year HND course can get transferred directly to the university. Meritorious students will be selected for university transfer.

The uniqueness of the course lies in the fact that it is totally based on applied learning, where in the students have the liberty to work while completing the course.

Explaining about the programme Dr Ramin Mohajer, Training Specialist at the Muscat Municipality, said the HND in food safety and hygiene was started two years ago.

"The programme was tailored for Muscat Municipality and the syllabus was structured in collaboration with the Leeds Metropolitan University and other universities," he said.

The first batch of the HND training programme will be completed in April this year and the second in November. There are ten students in each group. In the first group, all the 10 inspectors are from Muscat Municipality, while there are six in the second.

As per the applied learning programme, all the food inspectors received a brief intensive training at the municipality. And in the course of the period, they were required to do a project and review the material for examination.

However, on the last two days of the training period, the trainees will have to present the project and undergo an examination.

During these two years, Muscat Municipality has offered total support by way of computers, Internet and membership to the libraries at Sultan Qaboos University, technical library, etc.

HND in food safety and hygiene, which is recognised by Edexcel.

And as per the arrangement with Leeds Metropolitan University, the University will offer a three-month specialised English language-training programme to the students before they take up the intensive 12-month B.Sc. programme.

According to Griffiths, such a programme cannot be found in other universities.

Highlighting the positive features of applied learning, he called it a challenging experience. "These are pressing times when people have limited time in their hands... Concurrent learning — it is a parallel process of learning and working. LMU is also seeking to establish electronic link so that the students who do not transfer to the university can also benefit."

Griffiths and Scofield also had discussions with the organisations concerned to explore other areas of studies like the unique public relations course the university is offering.

"We are discussing the possibilities of arranging students to come to the UK to study language and as part of applied learning, relate the course to media and public relations," he said.

The focus is on customised courses. And being aware of the conservative stance of the society, the university has made special arrangements for female students to stay with Muslim families in Leeds.

Scofield also pointed out that the university has plans to merge with other universities to offer further education programme.

Interestingly, Griffiths and Scofield took a break from the academic exercise to admire the beauty of Muscat and pay tribute to the municipality for maintaining the city in its pristine glory. They even called it one of the cleanest cities in the world, after Singapore.



Satnam Jit Singh with the school authorities during the celebrations.

Indian School Ibra day

MUSCAT — Indian School Ibra has organised its annual day celebrations on the school premises.

Satnam Jit Singh, Indian ambassador to the Sultanate, was the guest of honour on the occasion.

Kiran Asher, chairman of the board of directors of Indian schools, had given the inaugural speech.

Dr V.S. Pal, president of the management committee of the school, has given a welcome address.

The annual report was read by Principal Mrs P. Radhalaxmi.

Dr Padmanabhan, convener of the school proposed a vote of thanks.

Thousands of pilgrims pour into S. Arabia

JEDDAH — Some 220,000 pilgrims from around the world have already arrived in Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage to Makkah that starts in earnest March 14, the official news agency SPA said yesterday.

SPA said 215,702 Muslims had arrived by air, 4,428 by land, and another 164 by sea for the annual pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites, known as the Haj. The Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam, obligatory for all Muslims sound of body and able to pay to carry it out. A total of two million pilgrims take part annually, including Saudis.

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd bin Abdulaziz has offered to host 1,500 pilgrims from 14 Asian countries at his own expense during this year's Haj, newspapers reported yesterday.

They quoted the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowments Propagation and Guidance, Saleh Al Sheikh, as saying his ministry would make all the arrangements for the pilgrims.

He said the guests would come from 14 Asian countries, including China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

More pilgrims are expected this year from Asia, where the economy has begun recovering from crisis.

Saudi Arabia hosts around two million pilgrims every year during the Haj. This year it has given fresh emphasis to safety measures to prevent a repeat of previous tragedies.

The Health Ministry said in a statement it was fully mobilised to offer services to the pilgrims — it even has five medical centres inside the Grand Mosque in Makkah. — *AFP, Reuters*

Oman, Turkey mull steps to boost ties

MUSCAT — His Highness Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq Al Said, secretary-general of the high committee for conferences, chairman of the Omani side in the Omani-Turkish Joint Committee, and the Turkish minister of state, chairman of the Turkish side in the committee, held talks on the high committee for conference premises yesterday.

The talks dealt with strengthening cooperation between the two countries in several fields, particularly in the work of the joint committee. The committee reviewed what has been achieved during the second session, which was held in the Sultanate last year. Asa'ad reviewed with the guest the issue of scholarships granted by Turkey.

The Turkish minister pledged that scholarships for Omani students would be in the major Turkish cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir and students would have to choose the specialisations available at the Turkish universities.

Asa'ad stressed that students would be sent to Turkish universities after verifying the details of the scholarship with the authorities concerned in the Sultanate.

The Turkish minister noted that there was an agreement on exporting Omani products to Turkey such as dates and fisheries, and that there were ongoing negotiations with the private sector in that regard. The Turkish minister also said that his country would buy Omani natural gas. The obstacles of the agreements of the avoidance of double taxation and encouraging and protecting investment between both sides will be eased before September and that a technical delegation from the Ministry of National Economy and the authorities concerned will visit Turkey to review the framework agreement signed between the two countries. — *ONA*

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Coopers & Lybrand, Chartered Accountants in the Sultanate of Oman, announce that following the merger of the head offices of Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand in the United Kingdom under the name of:

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

this merger has accordingly been applied to the two branches of the two offices in the Sultanate of Oman. Consequently, the office of Price Waterhouse, Muscat Branch has been closed and the name of Coopers & Lybrand has been changed to:

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS Muscat Branch

The Head Office and the branch under the new name will assume all the obligations and commitments of the two predecessor branches.

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Seminar Fee : * 1-3 delegates @ RO 150 per delegate
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IRA delivers another blow

DUBLIN — The Irish Republican Army yesterday delivered the latest blow in a war of words over weapons in Northern Ireland, denying it had made any offer to give up arms if British Army forces withdrew from the province.

The denial, reported by Irish state broadcaster RTE, came only hours after Britain said there was no question its forces would hand over weapons at the same time as guerrilla groups.

"There would never be any equivalence between a man in a beret and a man in a balaclava," a spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair said.

"There is no question of there being any trade-off between demilitarisation and decommissioning," he said, adding however that if guerrilla arms were handed over, it would hasten the day when the army reduced its presence.

Irish newspapers reported at the weekend the IRA had linked an offer of disarmament to troop withdrawal. There are currently around 15,000 British troops in Northern Ireland.

But yesterday, the IRA said the reports, which talked of proposals from the republican guerrilla group on weapons decommissioning, a timetable for an arms handover and a gesture on decommissioning were wrong, RTE reported.

Guerrilla disarmament is at the heart of the current crisis in the Northern Ireland peace process which has seen promising political progress grind to a halt over weapons.

Earlier this month Britain suspended the province's fledgling power-sharing government, which brought rival Unionist, nationalist and republican parties together, because the IRA failed to take steps to disarm. — Reuters

UK doctor suspended over death of patients

CARLISLE (England) — A British family doctor has been suspended pending a probe into the suspicious deaths of five of his patients, apparently from overdoses of the heroin substitute methadone, police said yesterday.

The unnamed 50-year-old doctor from Carlisle was arrested after the methadone-linked deaths of male drug users beginning in January last year.

A police spokesman said detectives, who have released the doctor on police bail, were awaiting the results of toxicology tests and were considering ordering the exhumation of some bodies.

Suspensions were first raised at the start of the year that the doctor had negligently — not deliberately — over-prescribed the methadone. — AFP

Drink, disease, depression erode Russian population

MOSCOW — Emigration, suicide, vodka abuse, abortion, tuberculosis, economic crisis, war ... it is no wonder the population of Russia fell by a post-Soviet record of almost 800,000 people last year, experts say.

There are now almost three million fewer Russians than there were when the Soviet Union collapsed, and analysts are wondering where the depopulation of the world's largest country will end.

Most experts see the population decline continuing due to a low birth rate, which is exacerbated by widespread abortion, and a far higher death rate blamed on formidable alcohol abuse, a failing public health system, a growing AIDS problem and a shockingly high suicide rate.

The statistics speak for themselves. The State Statistics Committee reported on Monday that Russia's population at the end of 1999 was 145.5 million, 2.8 million fewer than in 1992. Last year the population fell by a staggering 784,500, or 0.5 per cent.

The number of immigrants fell sharply to 379,700 while the number who emigrated rose to 214,900. Births fell to 1.215 million while deaths increased to 2.14 million. Georgetown University's Murray Feshback predicted recently that with the birth rate falling sharply, and the death rate climbing, Russia's population would evaporate to just 80-100 million people by 2050.

Russia's birth rate has been hit by the double-whammy of economic crisis, which has made people reluctant to procreate, and the most basic attitude to abortion here.

The Russian press reported earlier this month that for every birth in the country there are two abortions. "Russia is on the verge of a demographic crisis because we don't have very many children being born," said Valentin Pokrovsky, head of Russia's Academy of Medical Sciences recently.

Government reports issued in recent years have suggested that the demographic tendencies in the country could be a "threat to national

security," with a worse-case scenario predicting a halving of the population by 2050.

"These projections are exaggerated," said Kremlin demographics adviser Vladimir Mukomel. "No expert worth his salt could advance such predictions," he said.

And yet the death rate, which implies that the average Russian man dies at the age of 58, still remains a serious concern.

Alcohol abuse is partly blamed for this, but the re-emergence of tuberculosis, rife in Russian prisons, and a growing AIDS problem are also factors, experts say.

At some 40 people per 100,000 inhabitants meanwhile, Russia's suicide rate is one of the worst in the world. Eight people killed themselves in Moscow on Sunday alone, the Segodnya daily reported, most of them throwing themselves out of windows.

Emigration meanwhile remains popular with more than 200,000 people leaving Russia on average every year.

Economic penury and the growing criminalisation of society is persuading those who can to seek a future elsewhere, an attitude summed up by top soccer star Andrei Tikhonov, who was the victim of a weekend robbery in which his young child narrowly escaped injury.

"I am going to play abroad," Tikhonov told Sport Express daily. "I no longer want to worry about my family every day."

All of which gives acting president Vladimir Putin pause for thought as he pursues his five-month war in Chechnya, which has done little for the country's population growth.

"Vladimir Putin will have no one to rule," moaned the daily Izvestia, looking ahead to March 26 elections which Putin is a clear favourite to win.

"He apparently says that 'for a country like ours we need no fewer than 500 million people'. Unfortunately on this matter you can't just say 'We'll work on it, Vladimir Vladimirovich.'" — AFP

Cleaner sings her way to the top

LONDON — An office cleaner who had a singing voice and business plan has gone from earning four pounds (\$6.45) an hour to becoming the boss of a £500,000 Internet business venture.

Pippa Scholes, 27, who mopped, dusted and polished an Internet company Phase8.com, begged Chief Executive John Sewell to visit a Website (www.pipstars.com) she had created to showcase her singing voice. Sewell eventually gave in and when he took a look he was blown away, he told the Express newspaper.

"Her original Website was very promising but she was limited by resources. Now we have relaunched her site as a long-term business project," he said.

Scholes's site will not only feature her, but will also provide a showcase for other women artists trying to make it in the music industry. Visitors to the site can listen to 90-second snippets of songs and then download an album for about six pounds.

Scholes was appointed creative director of the site and will receive a salary of £25,000.

Thieves visit police before robbing bank

WARSAW — Polish thieves ensured they had peace and quiet to rob a bank yesterday by first visiting the local police station to tie up the duty officer.

Three masked and armed robbers stopped at the police station in the northwestern town of Golzewo and bound the resident officer with ropes before going to empty the vaults of the local bank.

Police spokesman Krzysztof Targonski from the nearby city of Szczecin refused to say how much money was stolen.

"It's the first time in my career that I've heard of bandits attacking a police station," he said.

Police launched an air and land search operation for the three robbers but by evening had only found their abandoned getaway car, Targonski said.

Belgian prince drives choice of crooks

BRUSSELS — Taking a tip from Belgium's speediest criminals, Prince Laurent has put his money down on a powerful Subaru Impreza GT turbo, a Brussels newspaper reported yesterday.

The second son of King Albert II paid \$25,000 for the dark-blue, 218-horsepower Japanese car "for everyday use" last Friday, and has already put 1,000km on it, the tabloid *Derniere Heure* said.

It so happens that the Impreza is the car of choice for Belgian robbers, having been involved in no less than six get-aways in the past year — most recently a daring January 26 armoured-car heist, the newspaper said.

Subaru's Belgian importer confirmed the sale, but declined to reveal more, saying Prince Laurent, a 36-year-old bachelor and navy commander who champions environmental causes, wanted to be discreet.

The prince also owns a Ferrari 550 Maranello — bought second hand — and a Range Rover.

New medicine helps reduce flu severity

CHICAGO — A new drug, oseltamivir, helps reduce the severity of the flu by 38 per cent and the duration of the illness by 30 per cent, according to a study appearing today in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA).

John Treanor and his colleagues at the University of Rochester, New York, conducted a controlled test on 629 randomly selected people aged 18 to 65, who had been ill with flu symptoms for about 36 hours and had high fevers. Half of them were treated with the oral drug, while the others received a placebo.

Mason severs own organ

RIO DE JANEIRO — A Brazilian stonemason who claimed to be possessed by the devil severed his own penis after stabbing himself in the chest and stomach with a borrowed knife, police said yesterday.

The mason, who has not been identified by authorities, ran into the house of a neighbour, asked for a kitchen knife and proceeded to stab himself late on Sunday, police said.

When police arrived and tried to arrest him, the 32-year-old man sliced off his organ, they said.

The man, who also suffered wounds to his liver and scrotal sack, was taken to a local hospital in Goiania, some 210km southwest of the capital Brasilia.

His organ was transported separately. A hospital spokesman said a seven-hour operation to reattach the mason's organ was successful. — AFP, Reuters

Hoax virus warning on the Internet

PARIS — Computer experts warned yesterday that a hoax warning about a computer virus was circulating on the Internet.

The virus is supposedly called "Wobbler" or is alternatively named "California" or "How to Give a Cat a Colonic," according to e-mails in circulation.

According to the warning, the virus is similar to a well-known, destructive virus called Melissa.

"Wobbler" is supposedly contained in an e-mail that, if opened, will wreck hard disks and wipe out your computer's Internet browser programme. The message asks the recipient to send the warning on to other online friends.

But, experts said, "Wobbler" does not exist and it is a waste of time to send on the e-mail.

"This is an e-mail hoax, a bad sort of joke. It is not a virus — please do not distribute this to others," wrote Ken Denham in a column about antivirus software on About.com.

The US software company Symantec Corp. said it had added the "Wobbler" warning to its list of hoaxes.

"Please ignore any messages regarding this hoax and do not pass on any messages regarding it. Passing on messages about this hoax serves only to further propagate it," Symantec's AntiVirus Research Centre said. — AFP



CAR BLAST: First aid personnel trying to assist bodyguard in front of an Ertxaina (Basque policeman) after car explosion yesterday. — Reuters

Two killed in car blast in Basque region

MADRID — A car bomb exploded in the Basque capital Vitoria yesterday, killing a Socialist politician and his bodyguard in an attack blamed on the separatist guerrilla group ETA, officials said.

The bombing in Spain's Basque Country came less than three weeks before a general election and was the second fatal attack attributed to the guerrillas since they ended their 14-month ceasefire in early December.

The fiery blast occurred as Fernando Buesa, secretary-general of the Alava provincial branch of the opposition Socialist party, and his bodyguard walked past a parked car packed with explosives, regional officials said. Both

died at the scene.

Several vehicles were engulfed in flames. Burning wreckage littered the street and plumes of thick black smoke billowed into the sky.

A paramedic arriving on the scene briefly attended to one motionless victim and then rushed to the other. Upon checking for the man's pulse and examining his wounds, the paramedic shook her head and stopped efforts to revive him.

"We had to leave (our classes) and we saw smoke and people running all around the university shouting 'they've set off a bomb' and then we saw them putting a blanket

over someone. It was a really big shock for everyone," one student told state radio.

The attack came just one month after a Spanish army officer was killed in a car bombing in Madrid blamed on ETA.

The rebels have been blamed for about 800 deaths in their three-decade-long fight for Basque independence.

The latest attack comes just days before the start of the official campaign for a March 12 general election in which centre-right Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar has pledged to continue his hardline stance against Basque separatism. — Reuters

Men willing to take male pill

LONDON — If a male contraceptive pill was available most men would be willing to take it and most women would trust their partners to control fertility, according to an international poll released here.

The survey of 4,000 men and women in Edinburgh, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Cape Town commissioned by the journal *Human Reproduction* showed two-thirds of men would use a male pill.

"The majority of men felt that responsibility for contraception falls too much on women and we found that the strongest incentive for men to use the pill would be their partners' wishes," said Dr Richard Anderson, of the Medical Research Council (MRC) Reproductive Biology Unit in Edinburgh.

Condoms and vasectomy are currently the only contraceptives available for men but scientists predict a male contraceptive pill could be on the market within the next five to 10 years.

The poll showed that when it is, men will be ready for it. Even in Hong Kong, which is more conservative than the other centres, nearly half of the men said they would use a male pill.

Despite the overwhelming approval of the pill, some men admitted they were concerned about the pill's impact on their masculinity and whether it would affect their sexual desire or satisfaction. Only two per cent of women said they would not trust their partners to take the pill.

"The idea of hormonal contraception for men appears to be extremely popular among women and this survey should dispel once and for all the myth that women would not trust their partners to use a male pill," Anderson said.

Human Reproduction is a monthly journal of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology. — Reuters

Woman feels improvement after drilling hole in head

LONDON — A British woman suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome travelled to the United States to carry out do-it-yourself brain surgery before a film crew, press reports said yesterday.

Heather Perry, 29, from Gloucester, England, performed the ancient surgical technique of trepanation, which is legal in the United States but not in Britain, on herself after applying a local anaesthetic to the top of her head.

With ABC News filming the event, Perry stood in front of a mirror and drilled a two-centimetre hole in her head, having used a surgeon's knife to cut away a section of her scalp before using the drill.

The 20-minute operation went slightly awry when Perry drilled

too far and pierced the first layer of the membrane protecting brain tissue. A doctor gave her antibiotics.

After recovering from the procedure, Perry, who had been diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis, said she has experienced a "definite improvement" in her health following the trepanation, which is supposed to allow blood to flow more easily around the brain, increasing alertness and concentration.

Perry had decided to go to the United States to carry out the procedure, over the strenuous objections of relatives and friends, after an exchange of e-mail with self-styled trepanation expert Peter Halvorson of Pennsylvania.

Gloucester police, at the

behest of Perry's boyfriend and family, had asked the FBI to track her down, but she and Halvorson evaded police and went to a secret location somewhere on the West Coast for the procedure.

"I have no regrets," the communications studies graduate told reporters on Monday. "I know what I've done sounds totally horrific and I know most people will think it is extremely dangerous."

"I'm the first to admit it sounds totally ridiculous and I can understand the reaction I've provoked ... but I felt something radical needed to be done."

"I can't say the effects have been dramatic but they are there. I generally feel better and there's definitely more mental clarity."

— AFP

New 'royal' family hits spotlight

LONDON — Royalty can relax — Britain's ever-hungry press has set its sights on pop star Posh Spice and her footballing husband David Beckham.

Never mind that she won't take the throne or that his insights into national affairs are restricted to the soccer pitch, the Spice-Beckham union is the only one worth watching.

His choice of underwear (thongs), her taste for crisps (low-fat): no minor detail is too small as the press tries to emulate the royal soap opera that once captivated readers.

"Celebrities are the new royals," said Susan Rozsnyai, features editor of *Hello!* magazine.

"A couple like Posh and Becks are wonderful material because she is a pretty pop star who wears glamorous clothes and he has made his life-long footballing dream come true."

The celebrity bible features the couple on its cover this week and carries photographs of 25-year-old Victoria, invariably jutting out of a strapless dress, in most editions.

"They are very aspirational. They are the realisation of our dreams and to have them as a couple is even better," she said.

Indeed, since the death of Princess Diana robbed the tabloids of their favourite pinup and prompted a backlash against invasive press coverage, royal tit-tattle has faded in favour of celebrity gossip.

And what better couple to take the spotlight. They love fast cars, expensive clothes, cham-

pagne parties and each other. Yet they also eat baked beans, stick by their family and dote on their baby son Brooklyn.

She has made her own documentary and taken to the catwalk. He has risked ridicule on the pitch by wearing a sarong and headscarf off it.

With football big business and entertainment a key British export, the days when sports stayed at the back of the paper and pop was confined to the review pages are gone.

The *Mirror* says Posh and Becks have overtaken the royals in terms of selling papers while *Sun* insiders say a front-page picture of the new stars can mean 20,000 extra sales.

Yesterday's coverage was no exception. "Becks: I'm so torn up," was front-page news in the best-selling *Sun* as it delved, again, into problems 24-year-old Beckham is facing in his career at Manchester United.

"Becks missed training as Posh shopped," was the rival headline in the *Mirror*.

The broadsheets were just as happy to jump into the fray, albeit with an intellectual veneer. The *Guardian* mused on Beckham's move from the rough and tumble of the terraces to the "world of stellar celebrity."

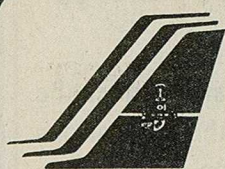
But given the tragic ending to the royal soap opera — many blamed the press for hounding Diana to her death — even those who feed on the new "royals" offered a word of warning. — Reuters

OMAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY (S.A.O.C)

NOTICE NO: 2/2000

UPGRADING OF INTERNET SERVICE IN DHOFAR GOVERNORATE

In line with the promotion and upgrading of telecom services in the Sultanate, OMANTEL is pleased to announce to its subscribers in Dhofar Governorate that the speed of the Internet backbone has been increased from 256 kbps to 512 kbps. OMANTEL strives to provide the best service available.



OMAN AVIATION SERVICES CO. (SAOG)

Seeb International Airport, P.O. Box 58, Central Post Office
Postal Code 111, Sultanate of Oman, Fax No.: 00 968 510434

Applications are invited from suitable candidates for the following position of Accountant based in Muscat.

Omani Nationals will be preferred for this position.

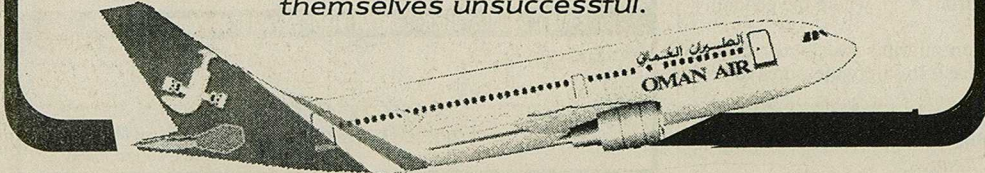
Accountant - (Muscat)

The incumbent should meet the following criteria:-

- ➔ Should be Graduate - AAT (Associate Accounting Technicians) preferred.
- ➔ Should be below 35 years of age.
- ➔ Minimum 4-5 years of experience in Finance Department of reputed Organization (Airlines Preferred).
- ➔ Excellent Reporting and Communication Skills in English.
- ➔ Well versed with computer packages like Excel, Word and Powerpoint.
- ➔ Provide support to management on routine and other financial issues.
- ➔ Ensure strict financial controls and evaluate any deviations from these.
- ➔ Ensure the smooth functioning of systems and attaining highest standards of excellence.

Please send your CV's with a latest photograph and contact no. to: 'Manager Human Resource' mentioning the post applied for at the address mentioned above, latest by 29 February 2000.

* Applicants who do not receive a response from us within one month of publication should consider themselves unsuccessful.



Chinese kids rejoice over cut in homework

BEIJING — Beijing's army of 1.6 million school children were celebrating yesterday, after the government moved to stop teachers piling them high with homework, state media reported.

The English-language *China Daily* said the education authorities had removed the 100-mark system for pupils in the capital in which each piece of homework was graded from zero to 100. The paper said the system was seen as encouraging overbearing parents to put too much pressure on students to score perfect marks, as well as encouraging teachers to set too much homework. Education officials have told teachers to ease up on the homework to allow students to "develop all-round personalities," said the paper.

A lively debate has been triggered in the Chinese press in recent weeks over the unacceptable hot-house pressure in the country's schools after a model student murdered his mother in response to constant pressure to achieve top marks in school. The official press and Chinese education officials all expressed sympathy for the student and warned that reform was needed to alleviate the intense pressure on students to score high marks in exams to win places at university. — *AFP*

Killer whale creates panic as it swims up river

TOKYO — Japan's television viewers and startled passers-by watched yesterday as a five-metre killer whale swam up a river in Nagoya, on the Pacific coast. Families shrieked and pointed from a bridge in Nagoya as the orca, apparently separated from the rest of its pod, made its way up the city's Hori River.

"The coastguard spotted the killer whale yesterday afternoon and now it has entered the Hori river," said Yuki Okada, a spokeswoman for the Nagoya port authority. "We don't know where it came from. It appears to be wild and to have strayed from its group."

The orca's antics were relayed on national television station Japan Broadcasting Corporation Shunji Okamoto, a marine official from the regional Aichi government, said the authorities were hoping the killer whale would return to sea without any need for help.

"Because it is quite big it is difficult to catch," he said. "So if it shows signs of weakening or gets stranded we will have to consider ways to rescue it," he added. "For the time being we will just watch how it goes." The Tokyo *Shimbun* newspaper said the orca, the biggest of the oceanic dolphins, may have strayed into the river while hunting.

In 1985, one killer whale stayed for three weeks at Nagoya's Ise Bay, according to the port official. Killer whales are found in the open oceans and coastal waters and their movements are often influenced by fish migrations, experts say. They inhabit all oceans of the world but are most numerous in the Arctic, Antarctic and cold water swells. Although their numbers are unknown, killer whales are not endangered. Experts estimate that there are about 180,000 in the Antarctic alone. — *AFP*

Parliament to quiz Wiranto on Timor unrest

JAKARTA — Indonesia's lower house plans to summon former Armed Forces chief General Wiranto next month as "a military expert" to explain last year's violence in East Timor, a senior MP said yesterday.

The head of the House of Representatives (DPR) commission I, Yasril Ananta Baharuddin, said members of the commission — which deals with Indonesia's defence, security and domestic affairs — have approved the idea "in principle".

"I have discussed the idea with friends in the commission and in principle it has been approved," said Baharuddin, an MP from the powerful Golkar faction. "Many questions will be asked to him, and he will be invited in his capacity as a military expert. It will be on the first week of March," he added.

Wiranto last week was suspended from the cabinet pending a probe by two teams from the Attorney-General's office after a domestic inquiry said the general was "guilty by omission" for the violence in East Timor.

He has since repeatedly protested his allegedly-unfair treatment.

Baharuddin said the commission wanted to hear from Wiranto himself about the killings and destruction in East Timor, following similar talks with the National Commission Human Rights (Komnas-HAM). — *AFP*



CRY FOR SALARY: Indonesian workers from a shoe company 'Kong Tai Indonesia', which produces 'Reebok', crying as they stage a protest at parliament building in Jakarta yesterday. They want the parliament to mediate their problem, as they claim they have not received their salaries for the past four months. — *Reuters*

Radiation spill puts Thai firm in tight spot

BANGKOK — Thai authorities yesterday said that they would file charges against a local firm for improper disposal of radioactive waste and equipment that has now put nine people in hospital with radiation poisoning.

"All radioactive equipment is supposed to be kept in safe housing, not in the open air," said Science, Technology and Environment Minister Arthit Ourairat.

"We will file complaints to the police to press charges against the company," he told reporters ahead of a weekly cabinet meeting. He identified the company as Kamol Sukosol Electric Co, a Thai distributor of imported radiotherapy machines. A spokesman for the company said it would consult its lawyers on the matter.

On Monday, officials from the government's Office of Atomic Energy for Peace (OAEP), removed three radiotherapy machines from

undeveloped land owned by Kamol Sukosol in an eastern Bangkok suburb and moved them into OAEP safe storage.

Officials initially had said three canisters believed to contain radioactive waste had been found.

The machines were found after five workers at a junkyard were admitted to hospital last weekend suffering from exposure to cobalt 60 radiation after handling parts from one machine.

Four other people were admitted to hospital with radiation exposure on Monday, spokesman Amphon Jindawatthana said. They were in less serious condition than the other five because they did not come into direct contact with parts with radiation. "Five other patients, who are workers at the junkyard, are in serious but stable condition as they directly contacted the cobalt 60 radiation while disassembling machine parts," he added.

Cobalt 60 is an isotope artificially produced to be used as a source of gamma rays or high-energy radiation. It is used in cancer treatment machines, in food irradiation and in glass colouring, OAEP officials said.

Chaweng Suwanarat, Kamol Sukosol's manager for medical equipment, said on yesterday: "We'll let our lawyers handle those allegations by the government." He said one of the machines was decommissioned from the National Cancer Institute and another from a hospital in a northeastern province of Kon Kaen.

The third, bought from the Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd (OECCL) by a private clinic in Bangkok in 1974, was kept at the company's site because the clinic did not have a proper storage place, Chaweng added.

The Canadian embassy in Bangkok said OECCL was "concerned" about the incident, but held no responsibility for it. "We are concerned about the

people who are exposed to radiation in Thailand," an embassy spokesman said, adding that all the details were not yet available.

Meanwhile, hundreds of panicked residents queued for blood tests over the weekend after scarpayard workers dismantled a reportedly stolen capsule containing radioactive cobalt-60 used in hospital cancer therapy.

"This will make it more clear to the public they don't want a reactor built here," said Ida Aroonwong of the independent Alternative Energy Project, which is opposed to the construction of a 10 megawatt nuclear power plant northeast of Bangkok.

Thailand last year ordered the suspension of work on the plant being built by a US firm — General Atomics at a cost of some \$90million — amid safety concerns and protests by residents of Nakhon Nayok province. — *Reuters, AFP*

Red-carpet welcome awaits 'peace apostle'

SYDNEY — Major-General Peter Cosgrove, commander of the international military force that pacified East Timor, leaves the territory today, to return home to a hero's welcome from the Australian government.

He and the 5,800 "diggers" who marched into the annals of Australian military history spearheading the force that drove pro-Indonesia militia out of the bloodsoaked territory, may also receive a ticker tape welcome from the people of Australia.

But it is Prime Minister John Howard who owes the 53-year-old Vietnam veteran most for achieving what few thought possible at the time he was assigned to the unenviable mission last September.

Using his acknowledged skill as a military tactician, combined with extraordinary diplomacy and restraint for which he was criticised in the early weeks of "Operation Stabilise", he subdued a well-armed and brutal terrorist army without losing a single soldier in combat. Yet he gave his troops orders to fire not when provoked but only when their lives or the lives of others were seriously threatened.

It was an order that drew some criticism in the international media — criticism reflected in questioning at news conferences Cosgrove chaired in the forecourt of Dili's smoke-blackened Hotel Turismo in the early days of the mission.

But he stood his ground, insisting restraint was as much a part of modern soldiering as an ability to fire an assault rifle, and forcefully arguing that his mission was not conquest but the restoration of peace. Pro-Jakarta militia went on an unchecked murderous rampage after East Timorese voted for

independence last August 30, but the bloodbath feared even by some military experts when the international force arrived three weeks later never eventuated.

Only a handful of militia who chanced their arms were shot. Peace was restored to a devastated East Timor and its people were able at last to try to resume a semblance of normal life.

Although the diplomatic fall-out from what was in effect an Australian-led invasion of Indonesian sovereign territory is still being felt, President Abdurrahman Wahid has promised to visit Australia this year, a sign moves are under way to repair relations.

Unheard of by the public before the East Timor violence, Cosgrove is now a household name in Australia. Indeed, one newspaper columnist suggested yesterday that he should be a contender for governor-general or president, if ever Australia becomes a republic. Although Australia has no military-political tradition, it is hard to escape the feeling that if Cosgrove chose to change careers and become a politician, he would be an instant hit.

But at the moment, the man who won a 'Military Cross' as a 22-year-old platoon commander in Vietnam and later became a distinguished instructor of military tactics is heading for a desk job as Land Commander, Army, in his home town of Sydney.

It will give him more time to spend with his wife, his three sons, and his golf. He also played cricket and by all accounts was a fair rugby player in his days as a cadet at Duntroon military college, which he later commanded. — *AFP*

TOKYO — An All Nippon Airways passenger jet with 285 people aboard made an emergency landing in southwestern Japan yesterday, after the captain saw smoke in the cockpit, an airline official said.

"The captain reported white smoke coming out in the cockpit," said a spokeswoman for All Nippon Airways.

The Boeing 737-300 aircraft, carrying 277 passengers and eight crew, landed safely at Matsuyama airport, about 15 minutes after the smoke was seen, she added.

The emergency on flight 191 occurred 75 minutes after takeoff from Tokyo's Haneda airport, said the spokeswoman, adding that the source of the smoke was not yet known. The plane was originally headed for southern Japan's Oita.

"Nobody was injured in the landing," the spokeswoman said. "We are looking into details of the accident but the cause is yet to be determined," she added. — *AFP*

Japanese jet force-lands due to smoke in cockpit

Japan cult guru arrested over mummified body incident

TOKYO — Japanese police yesterday arrested a cult guru who believed he could cure illness by patting people on the head, signalling a tougher stance by Japan against religious cults.

Koji Takahashi, leader of a cult called "Life Space," was arrested with six followers in connection with the death of a 66-year-old sect follower whose mummified body was found in a hotel room last November.

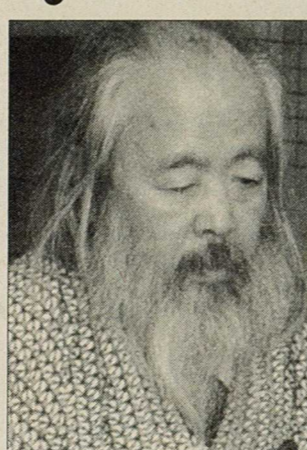
Television showed police slowly guiding the kimono-clad, grey-bearded cult leader into a car, surrounded by press photographers.

The sect disciples were arrested on suspicion of leaving the dead man to die without appropriate medical care, said the police spokesman, who declined to be named.

The mummified body of Shinichi Kobayashi was found on November 12 in a hotel room near Tokyo-Narita airport, which had been occupied by members of the Life Space cult since July.

Police investigations allegedly found that Kobayashi was taken from hospital to the hotel in July by Life Space members, including his own son, on the cult guru's orders, said the spokesman. "Kobayashi needed medical treatment but they did not take any action over it," the police spokesman said.

The Life Space guru and his disciples astounded the public at the time by insisting they had been taking care of the body for four months because Kobayashi was supposedly still alive. Those arrested included the victim's 61-year-old wife and his 31-year-old



TAKAHASHI: Arrested son, the spokesman said. Both were with Kobayashi when his body was discovered.

"We have decided to arrest the members after interviewing the doctors and examining what the group's members did to the sick man," he said.

The cult leader appeared to be "relaxed" when he was taken into police custody in the seaside resort of Ooarai, northeast of Tokyo, the police spokesman said. "The leader denied charges," he added.

Following the discovery of the body in November, Takahashi told news conference that Kobayashi was "absolutely alive." "He was alive when police said they would conduct an autopsy on him. I am absolutely sure about it," he said.

Life Space, which holds expensive "self-enlightenment" seminars, was founded by Takahashi in 1983. — *AFP, Reuters*

Wages hiked in Indonesia amid protests

JAKARTA — The Indonesian government has announced basic wage hikes of 15 to 55 per cent but unions threatened a nationwide strike saying incomes still fell short of living costs, reports said yesterday.

The *Jakarta Post* quoted a ministry of manpower announcement late on Monday as saying the new wages for unskilled single workers, graded according to region, would give workers in Jakarta a 23.8 per cent rise to 286,000 rupiah (38 dollars) a month.

The highest increases of 55 per cent and 40 per cent respectively went to the restive provinces of Aceh and Irian Jaya, both of which have festering independence movements, while the lowest of 14.6 per cent was awarded for Bali.

The *Post* quoted the director-general of industrial relations and labour standards, Syauffi Syamsuddin as conceding that the new basic wage, effective in April, still did not cover living costs. He noted that inflation soared by 78 per cent in 1998 amid the region's economic crisis. Based on cost of living statistics, only in two regions — Riau on Sumatra island and East Java region II — would the wages reach subsistence levels, government statistics showed.

In Jakarta, one of the most expensive parts of the country, the \$38 a month reached only 81.42 per cent of the subsistence level. — *AFP*

Avalanches block rescue operations

TOKYO — Fresh avalanches yesterday forced Japanese rangers to scrap their search for three New Zealand snowboarders swept away by a weekend snow slide, police said.

A team of 12 rangers made their way to the treacherous river valley where the trio were buried in an avalanche on Saturday, near the village of Hakuba in Nagoya district, central Japan.

"But about four avalanches occurred right in front of them in that valley area alone," Masaichi Ito, chief of the nearby Oomachi police station, said. Other avalanches fell in nearby valleys, he said. "I ordered the rescue team to evacuate to a safe place," Ito said. "They could not launch any kind of rescue operation because it could be extremely dangerous." The police chief admitted frustration over the stalled search for 25-year-old Chris Coaster, 18-year-old James Gordon and 25-year-old Craig Mowat. "I recognise the need to respect the feelings of their families and friends as much as possible, but I just cannot place other people in further danger," Ito said.

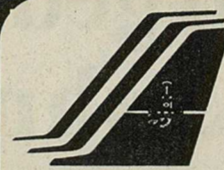
The Japanese police chief refused to comment on the likelihood that the missing trio was now dead. The rangers "came back from the mountain in the afternoon as they could not undertake any rescue activities," Ito said. "Operations will be resumed today, but we still have to decide on how we will do it by taking into account the weather and danger of avalanches," he said. Bad weather has repeatedly frustrated the authorities' attempts to recover the missing snowboarders.

On Monday, a blizzard and the danger of avalanches forced police to suspend their search. The snow storm was over early yesterday, but the sky was grey, said Ito. A police helicopter flew near the accident site but soon had to return to its heliport due to poor visibility.

The three snowboarders, employed at local hotels and lodges, were buried at an altitude of 1,900 meters, in the river valley beyond the Happon-One ridge, site of the 1998 Winter Olympic downhill events.

Snow blanketed the valley to a depth of four to five metres, officials said. The area is notorious for avalanches and warning signs are posted.

Police have fiercely denied a New Zealand newspaper report that they had refused to start a proper search until they had received faxed confirmation of the trio's insurance cover. — *AFP*



OMAN AVIATION SERVICES CO. (SAOG)

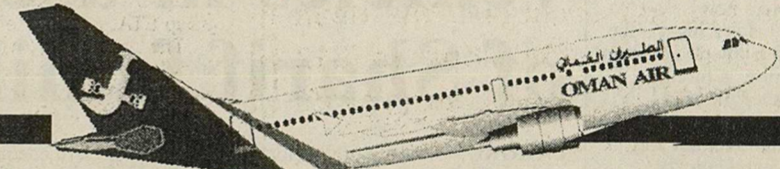
TENDER NOTICE

Tenders are invited for the supply of the following items for our operations at Seeb International Airport

TENDER NO	ITEM	TENDER FEE
MC/2006/1/368	Supply of Auto Baggage Tags on contract for 3 years	RO.200/-

Full Tender specifications, terms and conditions of supply can be obtained from the Office of the Financial Controller, Telephone No. 519319, on payment of a non-refundable documentation fee shown above from 23 February 2000 till 5 March 2000 during working hours (Sunday to Thursday).

The last date for receipt of bid is 16 March 2000 before 1.00 p.m.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF REGIONAL MUNICIPALITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Environment invites Registered Specialized Electrical Street Lighting Material and Cables Suppliers/ Establishments / Enterprises to the following Tenders :

Tender No 15/2000	- SUPPLY OF STREET LIGHTING POLES AND ACCESSORIES AT WILAYATS
Tender No. 16/2000	- SUPPLY OF CABLES AND ACCESSORIES AT WILAYATS


Tender documents can be obtained from the Directorate General of Technical Affairs, Al Khuwair, during the office hours against payment of a non-refundable fees of R.O. 25/- to each tender.

Tenders must be accompanied by Tender Bond for 2% of total tender value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local Bank, valid for 90 days from the last date of tender submission.

Tender must be submitted in closed envelopes sealed with red wax. The Tender No and name of the project shall be written on the top of the envelope containing the tender. Nothing should be written on the exterior of the envelope to display the identity of the tenderer.

Tender should be addressed to H.E. The Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee and deposited in the Tender Box, 2nd Floor, MRM&E Building, Al Khuwair by 10:00 a.m. on Monday 23/3/2000.

The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.



Islamabad 'respects' Iranian poll result

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan yesterday gave a cautious reaction to the victory of reformers in elections in neighbouring Iran, saying merely Islamabad respected the vote.

"Elections in a country are the internal affair of that country," Inamul Haq, Pakistan's new foreign secretary, told a news conference.

"The people of Iran have made their choice and we respect that choice," he said.

Iranian reformers backing President Mohammed Khatami have finally won their long-sought majority in parliament, paving the way toward Khatami's goal of a more liberal and democratic Iran.

Afghan airline starts Haj flights to Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD — Afghanistan's Ariana Airline made its first external flight since the imposition of United Nations sanctions in November when a plane carrying 127 pilgrims left for Saudi Arabia yesterday, a report said.

The Boeing 727 left for Jeddah from Kandahar, the headquarters of the ruling Taliban in southern Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press said.

The UN has allowed Ariana to fly pilgrims despite financial and aviation sanctions imposed against the Taliban on November 14 after their refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden. Hundreds of people will be flown to Saudi Arabia over the coming days, the Pakistan-based private agency quoted an unnamed spokesman of the Taliban-run airline as saying.

Taleban Civil Aviation minister Akhtar Mohammed Mansoor told the agency that an Ariana Boeing 727 that had been hijacked earlier this month may return from Britain in time to also fly pilgrims.

Ex-Chechen president asked to leave

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan has ordered former Chechen president Zelimkhan Yandarbyev to leave the country after his visa expired, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday.

Yandarbyev's visit sparked fierce criticism from Russia, which accused Pakistan of organising the trip and encouraging an anti-Russian campaign.

"The visa issued to him by our consul general in Dubai expired some time ago," Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Inamul Haq told a news conference. "This is a legal issue. According to the law of a country once a visa expires a foreigner is expected to leave," he said.

Yandarbyev was still in Pakistan, he admitted, but had been asked to leave quickly.

Drugs disguised as patient in ambulance

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani police stopped an ambulance for checks and found 47kg of quality hashish "concealed in a red blanket posing as a patient", the anti-narcotics force said yesterday.

It said that the driver of the ambulance was arrested on the spot and investigations were under way to catch his accomplices.

Imran's party not to go solo for time being

LAHORE — The party of Imran Khan stay put in an umbrella alliance of about 20 parties, the largest of which is Pakistan People's Party of Benazir Bhutto, an official said here yesterday.

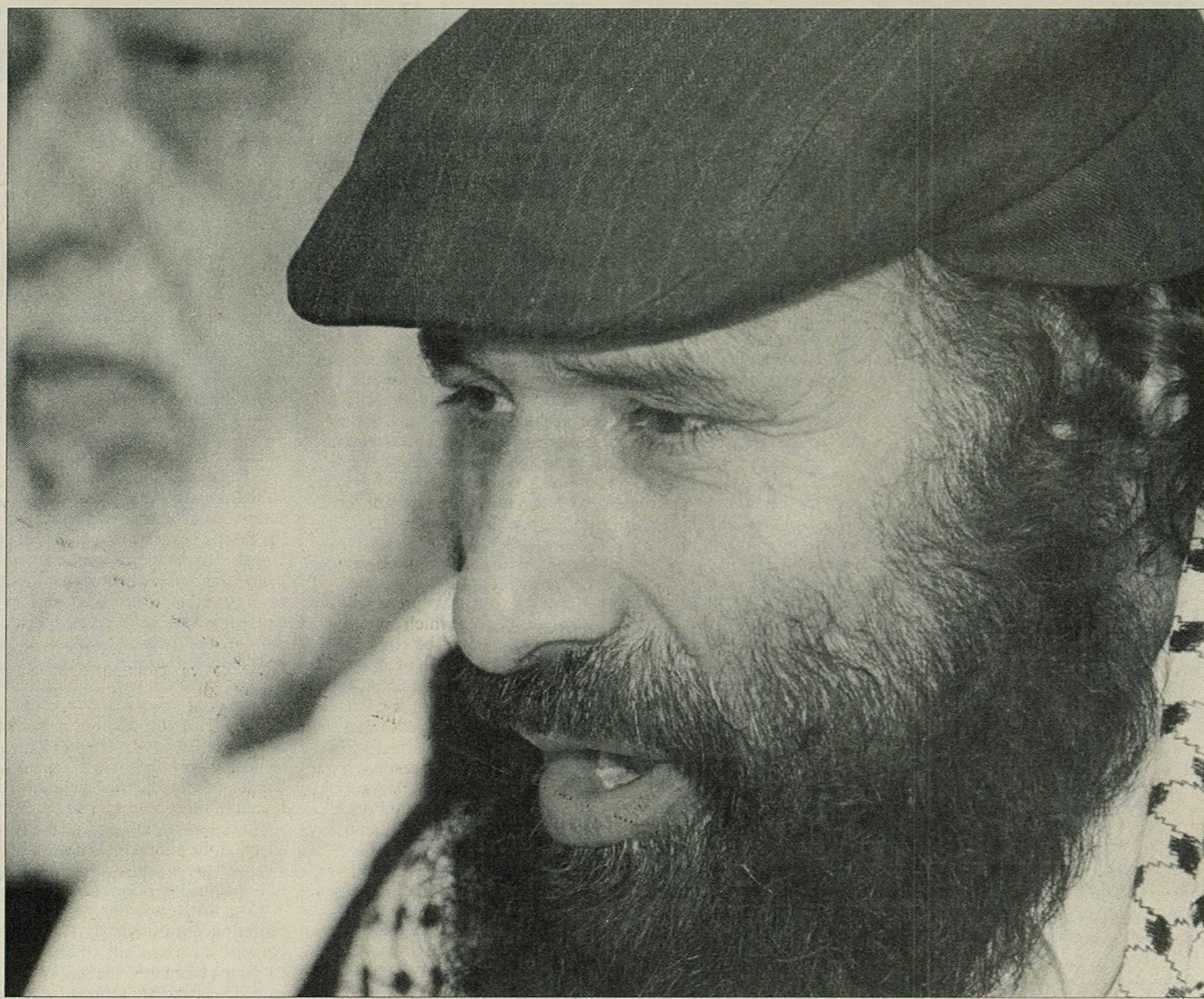
"We have decided to stay in the Grand Democratic Alliance for the time being," a spokesman for the Tehrik-e-Insaf said. "There's no point in going solo until circumstances so dictate," he added.

He was reacting to differences between Tehrik-e-Insaf and a group of parties on the issue of immediate restoration of democracy in the country.

Fight against leprosy makes progress

KARACHI — More than 60,000 persons suffer from leprosy in Pakistan and efforts are being made at the government and non-government levels to eliminate the curse. Dr Ruth Pfau, adviser to the government of Pakistan on leprosy, says the World Health Organisation had set the year 2000 as target to control leprosy but in Pakistan it had been brought under control four years back.

"The WHO target is to eliminate leprosy by 2020 and leprosy-affected people are to be made useful citizens of society," Pfau said. — Agencies



NEWS CONFERENCE: Syed Salahuddin, chief of the Hizbul Mujahideen group and a top Kashmiri activist during the news conference in Karachi yesterday.

Clinton urged to help resolve Kashmir row

KARACHI — The head of an alliance of groups fighting in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday urged US President Bill Clinton to help resolve the crisis.

Syed Salahuddin Ahmed told a news conference that the dispute, which has caused two of the three wars between Pakistan and India, could not be solved by the UN talking to India alone.

Ahmed heads a United Jihad (holy war) Council, which embraces more than a dozen rebel groups.

Clinton should convince India to engage in talks with the All Party Hurriyet (Freedom) Conference, an umbrella organisation of political and rebel groups in Indian Kashmir, he said.

He also said the US leader

should not skip Pakistan during his March tour of south Asia as that would "increase tension in the region."

"We welcome Clinton but if he wants to make his tour fruitful he should address the core issue of Kashmir. He must contact the leadership of Kashmir while engaging both India and Pakistan," Ahmed said.

"It (Kashmir) is not a border issue. It is an international issue."

Clinton is scheduled to visit India and Bangladesh, but has not yet decided to include Pakistan on his itinerary.

"If Clinton visits only India then there (in Kashmir) the situation will worsen. The situation is volcanic and complicated. Anything can happen," the guerrilla leader said.

He suggested tripartite talks involving Pakistan, India and Kashmiri representatives, to be held with the help of the United States.

Asked whether the rebel groups would stop fighting if such talks got under way, he said: "The guns will only be down when the last Indian soldier is withdrawn from Kashmir."

Clinton has offered to broker peace between Pakistan and India if both countries request mediation. India has ruled out any third-party involvement.

"(The) Mujahideen have chalked out an aggressive policy for the year 2000. And if India does not stop its human rights violation and massacre of Muslims in Kashmir then our activities will shift from the valley to India," Ahmed warned. — AFP

Govt seizes state vehicles in use of Sharif family

LAHORE — In a major development, which spells deep trouble for Pakistan's deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the military authorities have made a sensational discovery.

The authorities have recovered 17 luxury vehicles and 45 motorcycles from the palatial farmhouses of the Sharif family at Jati Umra, Raiwind.

According to reliable sources, the authorities have determined that the 62 discovered automobiles were all government property but were being abused for private purposes.

"We have seized the 17 vehicles and 45 motorcycles from the Raiwind estate and have handed them back to the Lahore Police, whose original property they are," a senior administration official said. "Nawaz Sharif is guilty of misusing state property for private gains on a massive scale as the number of vehicles shows," he said.

The official added that Nawaz Sharif had personally ordered shifting of all these vehicles to Jati Umra immediately after assuming power and declaring his private family residence the Prime Minister House.

"One of the major causes of an upsurge in the crime rate of

Laure was lack of adequate number of vehicles to patrol the crime infested streets," the official said.

"The city police was practically paralysed as the vehicles had been shifted to Raiwind for personal use of the then ruling family," he maintained.

He added that with the return of these vehicles now, there is bound to be marked improvement in law and order situation in and around the city. According to official documents, some of these vehicles were also in the personal use of deposed Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, Nawaz Sharif's younger brother.

These vehicles were often used by the wives of former ruling brothers for sightseeing, while the motorcycles were mostly used by the sons and nephews of the Sharif brothers in and around Raiwind.

"Some of the four-wheelers which included single and double cabin Toyota pickups were used for transportation of fodder for the tens of dozens of animals on the Raiwind farms," the official said.

According to him, some of the motorbikes were also used by the private guards employed by the Sharif family to patrol the Jati Umra estate to keep away unwanted intruders. — Internews

Party planning damage control in case Sharif is convicted

LAHORE — Senior leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League are planning damage control for the party in case their president Nawaz Sharif is convicted in any of the several cases against him.

A source confirmed here yesterday that at a recent meeting, they concluded that an acting president should be appointed as soon as possible to keep the party united at a juncture when it was facing many challenges.

They say that although all office-bearers had completed their term and fresh elections are due, for the time being the party will not elect any office-bearers.

The PML leaders say that they will not take any step that gives the deposed prime minister an impression that he is being abandoned.

"The party leaders plan to meet Sharif in jail next month and urge him to appoint an acting president to run the party in his absence," the source said.

The decision on sending a delegation to Karachi to call on Sharif is expected after the central working committee meeting scheduled for March 2 at Peshawar.

He said although it is the president's prerogative to nominate an acting party head in his absence, he has to nominate some vice-president as his replacement. — Internews

Muslim scientists to get \$1m funding for research

ISLAMABAD — An organisation promoting young scientists in Muslim countries has received a fresh dose of money to fund their research, officials said here yesterday.

Comstech, the Pakistan-based Organisation of Islamic Conference Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, has received commitments of nearly a million dollars from member states to carry out projects that are widely beneficial. "We have received money from Saudi Arabia and Malaysia and the rest of the countries will shortly deposit funds for the present bi-annum — 2000 and 2001," a Comstech official said.

Out of the amount received so far, Malaysia has paid \$45,000

and Saudi Arabia \$40,000. The rest they will pay next year as both countries have committed to pay \$90,000 and \$80,000 respectively.

Pakistan has committed to pay \$500,000 to the Comstech during the current bi-annum. It provided \$700,000 in the last bi-annum.

Kuwait, Iran and Sudan have also committed to pay \$50,000 each while Turkey has not yet responded to the query by the Comstech, the official said. Ankara, he hoped, would also pay its due share. During the last bi-annum Kuwait paid \$200,000, Syria \$200,000, Saudi Arabia \$33,333, Iran \$20,000, Sudan \$20,000 and Pakistan \$700,000.

The official said that the amount paid during 1998-99 by

the member countries and some of the other agencies, rose to \$1.32m.

Comstech is meant for collective efforts to promote scientific and technological cooperation among OIC countries and the members have responded positively to this move.

During last year's meeting of the heads of Comstech member states, Pakistan President Rafiq Tarar had proposed to set up a fund of \$20m for Comstech. Though the move remained unfulfilled, member countries and other donors kept the funds coming for Comstech to carry out its agenda of scientific and technological cooperation and research of new vistas in different areas. — Internews

War over actual number of days in February this year

ISLAMABAD — Controversy over acceptance or rejection of the year 2000 being the leap year is continuing among astrologers and mathematicians in Pakistan.

Leading mathematician Iftikhar Ahmad Chaudhry has debunked the claims regarding authenticity of year 2000 as leap year from mathematicians of international repute.

"It is essential to declare last year of century as leap year if it is divided by four after expunging its all zeros from its right side in order to bring calendar in conformity with solar year," he explains.

Under this formula if all zeros are struck off then only number two is left which is not divisible by two, he points out. "Hence 2000 is not a leap year and February will consist of 28 days," he claimed.

However, an astrologer from Suparco, Pakistan's space agency, insists that this is a leap year as the issue has been settled for 3,300 years in Gregorian calendar, which is in force.

"After such an incredibly long time, we have to face the problem of one day short," Mohammed Amin said.

He proposes that a year should not be declared leap year if it is not divided by four but it is not acceptable as it is decided that any change in Gregorian calendar will occur in year 4000 or in some year nearing to 4880. Those who favour the year 2000 as leap year argue that the concept of leap year has crept in because the actual length of a year is 365.24 days instead of 365 days, which results into difference of one day after every four years. — Internews

Fighters promise to win Kashmir within three years

ISLAMABAD — Rebels fighting in the disputed state of Kashmir are stepping up their campaign and will force Indian troops out within three years, a spokesman for the largest group said yesterday.

"Soon we will start a new round, it will be very dangerous for India, and it will be the final round," Abdullah Muntazer, spokesman for Lashker-e-Taiba, said in an interview.

"India is losing occupied Kashmir and inshallah (God willing) within two to three years we will liberate Kashmir," he said.

Lashker-e-Taiba is one of the largest of more than a dozen rebel Pakistani and Kashmiri groups involved in a decade-long armed struggle in Indian Kashmir.

The Himalayan state has been at the heart of bitter relations between the two neighbours since their independence from the British in 1947.

The Hindu maharajah of the majority-Muslim state opted to join India after partition and since then the two nations have fought two wars over the ownership of Kashmir.

Ten weeks of heavy fighting around the Kargil heights last year nearly pushed the two nuclear-armed nations into another war.

Now, in the weeks ahead of a visit to south Asia by US

President Bill Clinton, tensions between India and Pakistan have again worsened.

In the past week both New Delhi and Islamabad have each expelled three of the other's diplomats.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has ruled out any negotiation unless Pakistan gives up the third of Kashmir under its control. Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has said he is ready to meet any threat from India.

Lashker-e-Taiba has hundreds of young men, aged between 17 and their late 20s, fighting in Indian Kashmir.

Most are educated at colleges or universities and only 20 per cent come from the madrassas, or religious seminaries, in Pakistan, said Muntazer.

"For a Muslim this is the real Islam," he said.

According to Indian figures more than 25,000 people have died in Indian-administered Kashmir since the campaign began in 1989. Pakistani groups say the death toll is nearer 60,000.

Their first goal for Kashmir is to defeat and force out Indian troops, after that the future of the state is not clear.

"We will liberate Kashmir from India then all the organisations will sit together and work out what will happen," he said.

That could involve either

Kashmir joining Pakistan or having its own independence, he said.

Lashker-e-Taiba denies it has any links with the Pakistan government or the country's military intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence. Their funding comes from private donations, Muntazer said.

"People who give us their sons or their brothers give us money too," he said. "There are many businessmen in Pakistan who give us their money. We are not under the control of the ISI or the Pakistan government."

Musharraf, the army chief who seized power here in a coup in October, has come under pressure from the United States to curb rebel groups like Lashker-e-Taiba. But Muntazer said any crackdown is unlikely and dismissed Clinton's ability to mediate over the disputed state.

Although Lashker-e-Taiba is more happy with Musharraf than the previous regime, the fighters want Pakistani soldiers to join them.

"All the mujahideen are saying that the Pakistan Army should be involved," Muntazer said.

"If the Pakistan government makes a wrong decision that could damage our cause," he said. "But we think inshallah (God willing) that with the grace of Allah we will surely achieve our goal." — AFP

Tension with India worsens: Islamabad

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan said yesterday tension with India was rising ahead of US President Bill Clinton's visit to South Asia as, separately, militants in the disputed state of Kashmir vowed victory in three years.

Inamul Haq, Pakistan's new foreign secretary under military rule, told a news conference that Islamabad was still ready to begin talks with New Delhi as long as the disputed state of Kashmir was the core issue.

"We have noted the increased stridency of the statements issued by Indian leaders and particularly the Indian prime minister," said Haq.

In the past week both New Delhi and Islamabad have each expelled three of the other's diplomats and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has ruled out any negotiation unless Pakistan gives up the third of Kashmir under its control.

"There is of course no question of Pakistan vacating Azad (free) Kashmir," Haq said, using the Pakistani description of the part of Kashmir it holds.

Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has said he is ready to meet any threat from India.

"Pakistan is ready to hold dialogue with India for a settlement of the issue of Jammu and Kashmir," Haq said, adding this was the wish of the indigenous

population. "It is up to India to respond. The core dispute between India and Pakistan is the issue of Jammu and Kashmir."

The Himalayan state has been at the heart of bitter relations between the two neighbours since their independence from Britain in 1947.

The Hindu maharajah of the majority-Muslim state opted to join India after partition and since then the two nations have fought two wars over the ownership of Kashmir.

Ten weeks of heavy fighting around the Kargil heights last year nearly pushed the two nuclear-armed nations into another war.

Now, in the weeks ahead of a visit to South Asia by US President Bill Clinton, tensions between India and Pakistan have again worsened.

Clinton has offered to broker peace between Pakistan and India if both countries request mediation. India has ruled out any third-party involvement.

Haq said there was still no decision whether Clinton would visit Pakistan during his trip. So far only he is only scheduled to visit India and Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, as if to underline Haq's warning, militants fighting Indian troops in Kashmir vowed victory in three years. — AFP

Spring arrives in Karachi

KARACHI — It is springtime thanks to the riot of bougainvillea and sumbuls in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city.

Large bulbs of bright deep red flowers in the branches of towering sumbuls give the trees a majestic all-embracing look in the city.

The bougainvillea too have a rich variety: all the hues and shades of red, rosy and purple, even yellow and blue.

The brief winter spell is over. The evenings are cosy and comfortable with resumption of sea breeze in Karachi.

The soothing norm this fall is that more and more nurseries have come up in the metropolitan city. One finds these at a number of empty patches, roundabouts and roadside corners with abundant plants and flowers to offer.

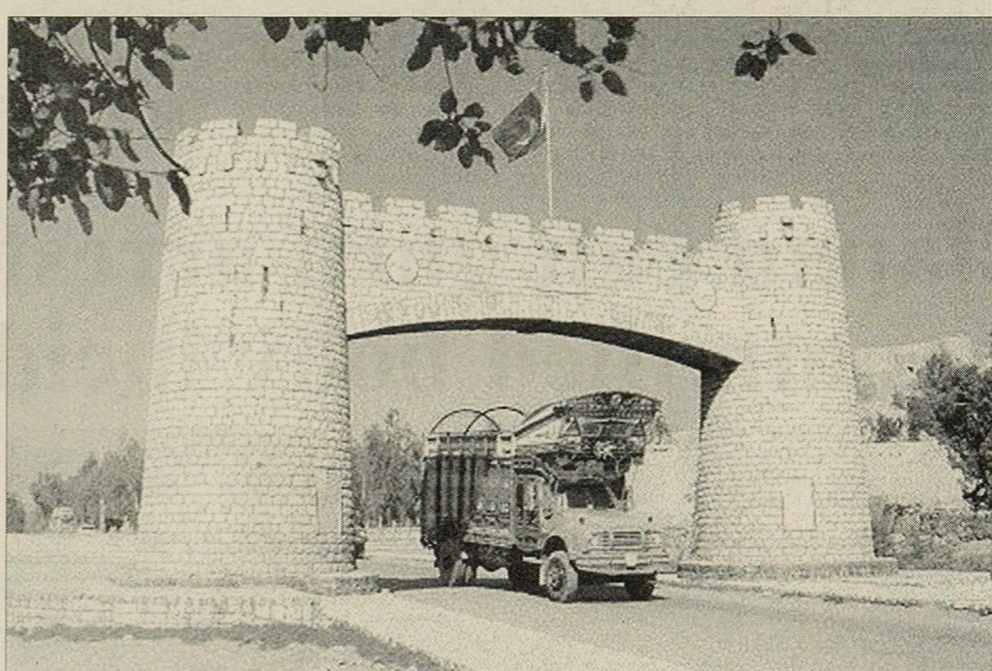
Mahogany, the craze of the 60s, is again in fashion. This time the nurseries offer saplings and plants at reasonably low prices. Plants of palm trees are still much in demand, so are the Auricularia and ornamental trees.

In the courtyards, till recently, one found plants of mango, lemon, jamun, and karhi-patta. Now, the taste is changing. The certain visible change is the result of foreign television channels and the increase in literacy rate.

In the recent past, it was the phase of dish antennas and going for lead (cable) system. The craze was in slums as well. Jungles of flats and apartments followed and, till recently, it was time for acquiring Internet connections.

At present a noticeable change is coming up, particularly in posh areas. — Internews

Safari Train to Khyber Pass delights tourists



ENGINEERING MIRACLE: A view of the Khyber Pass

PESHAWAR — Pakistan's famed Safari Train has made the spring season's first journey to the Khyber Pass with about 50 delighted foreigners on board, on a track described as a miracle of engineering.

Provincial Minister for Tourism Imtiaz Gillani and some other high officials of the

administration also accompanied the travellers.

The tourists were an excited lot and thoroughly enjoyed the journey, quite unusual and adventurous.

One British woman said she was travelling by this train for the third time. A Canadian engineer, who is a consultant at a

local dam, said he had also made three journeys to the Khyber Pass by this train and had always been fascinated.

The Safari Train, which is run once a month, has completed five years of operation. Seats are booked by foreigners through embassies or tour agents in the country. A joint

venture of Pakistan Railways and Sehrai Travels and Tours, the Safari Train holds much promise as far as promotion of tourism is concerned, provided the train is given a better look and made more comfortable.

A big problem is that, as the train passes through Peshawar airport, it has to some time wait for hours to get clearance to move.

The journey is quite expensive and as such local tourists cannot afford it but those that do, find it is a breath-taking experience as the train cruised through the difficult rocky terrain of the Khyber Pass.

Comprising two old-fashioned bogeys, it is driven by two steam engines, no more in use anywhere else. The train passed through some 18 tunnels and over 92 culverts.

The train, which departs from the Cantonment Railway Station early in the morning, takes some three hours to cover about 50km. Organisers of the trip provide extensive briefing to tourists at Michni checkpoint about the history of Khyber Pass.

From there, the tourists drive up to the historic Khyber Rifles mess for lunch.

There, traditional Khattak and other tribal dances are presented. — Internews

Filipina charged with attempted murder of her baby

SINGAPORE — A Filipina has been charged with attempted murder in Singapore after her newborn baby was found in a hospital toilet bowl, the afternoon *New Paper* reported yesterday.

Fagarang Petron, 34, who worked as a maid here, was arrested on Saturday, six days after the baby boy was found with his umbilical cord still intact in a toilet bowl at Mount Elizabeth Hospital.

Staff at the hospital managed to save the baby after receiving a call saying that there was some blood in one of the toilets, according to local media.

Just before the baby was found, a woman had gone to the hospital's emergency unit with vaginal bleeding and abdominal pains, the reports said.

She was reportedly turned away because she had no identification papers.

The *New Paper* said Petron had been formally charged with attempted murder on Monday. She is currently in another hospital under round-the-clock police surveillance.

As part of their contract, foreign domestic helpers here can be repatriated if they become pregnant.

Fake finger falls off at immigration counter

MANILA — A Japanese man was denied entry to the Philippines after a fake finger fell off, raising suspicions that he was a member of a Yakuza gang, press reports said here yesterday.

The Japanese man was waiting in line in front of the immigration desk at Manila airport on Monday when a finger detached from his left hand, catching the attention of an immigration agent, the newspapers said.

On inspection, the immigration agents found he was lacking a little finger and his body was covered by tattoos, two common characteristics of Yakuza members.

The Japanese man admitted he bought the rubber finger in Hokkaido for \$60 to hide the fact he was lacking a digit. He was sent back to Japan on a Japan Airlines flight.

Before leaving, the suspected Yakuza member presented his fake finger to his immigration escort as a souvenir, the newspapers added.

Yakuza gangsters of Japan are traditionally asked by their bosses to cut off fingers to atone for their failures. As a result, Philippine immigration authorities routinely try to screen out suspected Yakuza members by looking for missing fingers amongst Japanese visitors.

Govt begins talks with rebel leaders

COTABATO — Philippine government and Muslim separatist negotiators met yesterday to try and keep a peace initiative alive following the fall of a key rebel camp in an army offensive.

Troops remained on alert for possible attacks by the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in retaliation for the fall of their Camp Omar Al Farouk to the military on Monday.

MILF legal counsel Lanang Ali confirmed that chief government negotiator, retired general Edgardo Batenga, and his MILF counterpart Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbantas had begun the meeting in the nearby city of Cagayan de Oro.

He said Mimbantas was likely to ask the government to "say what is going on" and to decide whether to continue with the peace effort at all.

Ali said the capture of the MILF camp was "a preliminary blow to the peace process" but added that despite the violence, "we are optimistic because of the government initiative to save the talks."

Formal peace talks between the MILF and the government were to have started on Monday but MILF negotiators pulled out, demanding the offensive against Camp Omar be halted first.

The bureau has complained of an acute shortage in manpower. Ideally, it needs some 5,000 investigators but it only has 425 at present. Some of its provincial offices do not even have a single lawyer, Opinion said.

The NBI also owes the Philippine Long Distance Telephone (PLDT) company about P500,000 in telephone bills. It used to have a P3.9 million debt to PLDT, the main reason why its lines were cut in the middle of last year. "Our austerity measures would include the switching-off of lights not in use and a ban of computer games during breaks to

Volcano emits lava; residents evacuated



VOLCANIC SMOKE: Thick smoke spewing out of Mayon volcano in Albay province, 340km southeast of Manila, yesterday. — Reuters

MANILA — Soldiers yesterday began forcibly evacuating hundreds of residents living near Mayon volcano in the eastern Philippines after a buildup of lava which scientists said could lead to an eruption within weeks.

The National Disaster Coordinating Council said villagers living within the "danger zone" were ordered to board military trucks which brought them to evacuation centres in Albay province, about 350km east of the capital.

About 961 persons were evacuated from villages in the towns of Tabaco and Camalig, the disaster office said. Evacuations were also being carried out in other towns but the office could not give an estimate of how many people had left.

The government has declared a 6km area danger zone around the volcano crater. On the volcano's southeastern side, a 7km area has been ordered evacuated.

"We should tell our countrymen living in the southeast eastern sector to heed the call of the provincial and municipal disaster coordinating council," said Raymundo Punongbayan, head of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

Streaks of glowing lava flowed from Mayon's crater at dawn yesterday.

Punongbayan said the lava dome inside the volcano had built up towards the volcano's rim. Some lava could be seen snaking down a gully on the volcano's eastern slope.

If the buildup continued, an eruption is "possible within weeks," he said in a television interview. But the volcanologist said spectators could safely watch the eruption from a distance. Mayon, with its near perfect cone, is a popular tourist attraction in the Philippines.

"We do not use the word strong (to describe Mayon's eruptions) because most of its eruptions were very gentle." — AFP

party boss to undo what he has done by way of an executive order prescribing what Estrada has precisely rejected.

The Batangas lawmaker said the president should not consider legislators as a hindrance to project implementation but as "worthy partners who can monitor that work is carried out according to law and other required specifications."

He said a court suit or a House boycott of the administration's legislative agenda should be avoided.

"Amity between the two branches can be restored by the issuance of an EO whose objective is to promote transparency in the spending of public funds," he added.

House Majority Leader Eduardo Gullas (LAMP, Cebu) said that priority measures being pushed by Estrada "are now dead in the water."

Because of the congressmen's anger over the presidential rejection of a role that could boost their chances in the May 2001 elections, he said he would not call these measures for plenary discussion.

The priority bills include one that seeks to restructure the power industry and pave the way for the sale of the National Power Corporation, and another that would amend the Revised Securities Act by providing more safeguards against stock manipulation such as what happened in the case of Best World Resources Corporation.

The enactment of the power restructuring measure is being awaited by the International Monetary Fund, which is delaying the release of some loans pending the passage of the bill.

In addition to sitting on Estrada's legislative agenda, congressmen have vowed to challenge the presidential veto before the Supreme Court.

Lawmaker moots compromise to avert House crisis

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — An administration congressman has proposed a compromise to avert a House sit-down strike over President Estrada's decision to veto some special provisions in the P629-billion 2000 budget.

"There is a middle ground. Malacanang can issue an executive order prescribing a process during which members of Congress should be consulted on the implementation of projects in their districts," said Representative Ralph Recto (LAMP, Batangas) in a statement.

The special provisions in the budget law which the president vetoed called for consultation, concurrence, coordination, or recommendation of the congressmen concerned before a project can be implemented in his district.

In effect, Recto wants his

More than 300 servicemen are expected to stay in the former US base here for the manoeuvres, whose main components include amphibious landings and live fire exercises.

VFA Commission spokesman Elmer Cato said the local government of Angeles City has imposed the condom policy in bars and clubs to protect workers and customers from sexually transmitted diseases.

"It's a safety net," Cato said. He added that night club workers also have identification cards and health certificates from regular check-ups.

A protest at the US Embassy in Manila is also planned to coincide with the arrival of the *USS McHenry*, organisers said.

The leftists, along with the influential Catholic Church, are against the joint exercises since they would allegedly lead to increased prostitution, unwanted pregnancies and Aids.

They said it also violates a constitutional provision banning entry of nuclear weapons into the Philippines, with Washington maintaining a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons aboard its vessels.

Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado earlier expressed concern on the potential problems associated with activities outside the war games.

US officials have already enforced a midnight curfew and a "no-drinking policy" to avoid any untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, militant leftist organisations yesterday began a protest vigil at the former US air base.

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Jinggoy birthday party who's who of showbiz, politics

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — As the evening wore on, with everybody having had their fill of the sumptuous dinner, some of the guests expected the birthday boy, San Juan Mayor Jinggoy Estrada, to announce his rumoured bid for the Senate in 2001 but, to most everybody's relief, he did not.

It was his birthday and Mayor Jinggoy wanted everybody to have fun. Everybody meant who's who from showbiz and politics, with Mayor Jinggoy's President father, Erap, and his mom, First Lady Loi Ejercito Estrada leading the array of guests who occupied every nook and cranny of a function room of Club Filipino that Thursday evening (February 17). It's true: President Erap forgot the country's problems and political intrigues for a while and danced the night away.

Besides showbiz stalwarts, such as Marichu Maceda, Ara Mina, Dodot Jaworski, Priscilla Almeda, Cavite Governor Bong Revilla, Judy Ann Santos and Eddie Romero, government officials and political figures also showed up to wish Mayor Jinggoy "Many happy returns of the day," including former DILG Secretary Ronaldo Puno, Senator Bobby Jaworski, Senator Tito Sotto, Senator Jun Magsaysay, and San Juan Representative Jose Mari Gonzalez (with wife Charito Mallarky).

What everybody didn't notice

that night was guest Annabelle Rama seething in silence, but (thank heavens!) holding her temper.

A source reported that Isabel Rivas, seated at a nearby table with Mayor Jinggoy's wife Precy Vitug, Lani Mercado and Lorna Tolentino (among others), approached Annabelle's table where also seated Annabelle's two beautiful proteges Miya Nolasco (who's starring in Seiko Films

Mapagbigay) and newcomer Veronica Veron, Rudy Fernandez and Bong Revilla.

"Without looking at Annabelle," the source, "Isabel asked Bong to transfer to their table. Otherwise, Lani might get mad. A few minutes later, after Bong 'obeyed' her, Isabel again approached Annabelle's table and then asked Rudy to transfer to their table. Otherwise, Lorna might get mad. In a jiffy, only

Annabelle and her proteges were left on the table."

Now, do you understand at this point why Isabel was asking (or has been asked by whoever) Rudy and Bong to vacate Annabelle's table? Yes: The insinuation was that the two 'guys' might be attracted to the two beautiful ladies with Annabelle.

No, the story didn't end there.

"Later that evening when most everybody had left," the source continued, "Isabel again approached Annabelle's table and said something like they (Annabelle and company) could leave now because the 'buyers' had gone."

Was Isabel joking? Was she trying to tease Annabelle maybe? Was Isabel in a buoyant mood because it was the birthday celebration of the husband of her good friend (Precy Vitug)?

Annabelle didn't take it that way, that's why she was fuming mad.

"That night," said the source, "Annabelle wanted to confront Isabel but she kept her cool in due respect to the celebrator. Nobody among the guests noticed it but Annabelle was embarrassed — and very angry (although she was smiling)."

Anyway, the night ended without any untoward incident.

Has the controversial Cebuana shrugged it off as one of those incidents?

"No," said the source. "Now, she's hunting Isabel, spilling for a confrontation — a showdown?"

TINSEL TALK



ESTRADA AND ANNABELLE: Mixing politics with showbiz

Top investigation agency is broke

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The country's top investigation agency is now broke.

NBI budget division chief Nellie Enriquez said 126 of its 320 casual employees will be laid off. Based on the budget programme she has prepared, P317 million will be spent on personnel services while P197 million will go to maintenance and operating expenses. The remaining P12 million, on the other hand, will be used for buying new equipment.

Opinion, however, assured that their limited funds would not affect the performance of his men. The NBI intelligence fund is also down to P12 million — to be taken from the operating expenses fund. It will be divided to about a dozen NBI regional offices nationwide.

"There is no excuse for our NBI investigators not to do their jobs. During my time we never even had the amenities of transportation that the agents have today," he said.

Opinion explained that the NBI would not be able to buy sophisticated investigation tools this year. The bureau bought 23 cars last year from the money given by President Estrada.

The NBI had been pushing for the passage of its proposed P10 billion modernisation fund spread out over five years.

save on electricity. I will issue memoranda to this effect, we would have to adopt to these difficult times," said Opinion.

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Angeles City declared 'condom zone'

From Our Correspondent

CLARK FIELD (Pampanga) — All soldiers, be advised: Angeles City is strictly a "condom zone."

The bars and clubs of the night-life city, where participants of the RP-US war games are expected to troop for their rest and recreation, will be implementing a "100 per cent safe-sex policy" among its workers and customers.

About 1,000 US Navy and Marine personnel will be arriving today aboard a landing vessel at South Harbour for the largescale military exercises under the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). Some 798 US military personnel have already arrived here for the war games called "Balikatan 2000," the first to be held between both allies in five years.

More than 300 servicemen are expected to stay in the former US base here for the manoeuvres, whose main components include amphibious landings and live fire exercises.

VFA Commission spokesman Elmer Cato said the local government of Angeles City has imposed the condom policy in bars and clubs to protect workers and customers from sexually transmitted diseases.

"It's a safety net," Cato said. He added that night club workers also have identification cards and health certificates from regular check-ups.

Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado earlier expressed concern on the potential problems associated with activities outside the war games.

US officials have already enforced a midnight curfew and a "no-drinking policy" to avoid any untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, militant leftist organisations yesterday began a protest vigil at the former US air base.

A protest at the US Embassy in Manila is also planned to coincide with the arrival of the *USS McHenry*, organisers said.

The leftists, along with the influential Catholic Church, are against the joint exercises since they would allegedly lead to increased prostitution, unwanted pregnancies and Aids.

They said it also violates a constitutional provision banning entry of nuclear weapons into the Philippines, with Washington maintaining a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons aboard its vessels.

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Sultanate of Oman
Muscat Municipality
NOTICE No. 7/2000

Muscat Municipality in coordination with Royal Oman Police announces that trucks with loads more than three tons are forbidden from passing on Al Khoudh street between the University roundabout and Sultan Qaboos University entrance, with effect from March 1, 2000. Muscat Municipality requests the drivers of trucks to abide by what is mentioned above for public safety.

Top investigation agency is broke

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The country's top investigation agency is now broke.

NBI budget division chief Nellie Enriquez said 126 of its 320 casual employees will be laid off. Based on the budget programme she has prepared, P317 million will be spent on personnel services while P197 million will go to maintenance and operating expenses. The remaining P12 million, on the other hand, will be used for buying new equipment.

Opinion, however, assured that their limited funds would not affect the performance of his men. The NBI intelligence fund is also down to P12 million — to be taken from the operating expenses fund. It will be divided to about a dozen NBI regional offices nationwide.

"There is no excuse for our NBI investigators not to do their jobs. During my time we never even had the amenities of transportation that the agents have today," he said.

Opinion explained that the NBI would not be able to buy sophisticated investigation tools this year. The bureau bought 23 cars last year from the money given by President Estrada.

The NBI had been pushing for the passage of its proposed P10 billion modernisation fund spread out over five years.

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TIMES OF OMAN

ESTABLISHED: 1975

Deadlock in talks

THE current deadlock in the peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis is reminiscent of the 1997 break when hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu was at the head of the government in Israel. The peace process which was revived last year in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm El Sheikh on a highly sanguine note is now in a becalmed state because of the sclerotic attitude of the Israeli government. The target date for a framework agreement ahead of a final accord has already passed by. Now the Israelis are talking of May as the next target date. The Palestinians know full well that all this talk is just bunkum.

True, UN envoy Dennis Ross is trying to break the deadlock and put the whole process back on track. If he is to succeed, he needs to persuade the Israelis not to wobble on the accords they had signed, and he also needs to tell them that there should be handback of the Palestinian lands, not just deserts but inhabitable lands. The row over 6.1 per cent land transfer which occasioned the current deadlock is a case in point. The Palestinians are being fobbed off with lands away from Jerusalem. The Israelis think that giving lands near Jerusalem is tantamount to 'creating facts on the ground' in favour of the Palestinians, especially when the status of Jerusalem is under discussion as part of the final status talks. Such kind of narrow-mindedness would only help to decimate the peace process. The international community is well aware that the Israelis are adept at creating 'facts on the ground' as evidenced by the inexorable growth of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian land.

The question of settlement is a top issue in the agenda for the final status talks. The Oslo accord stipulates that there should be a freeze on settlement activities. But the proliferation of settlements all over the occupied lands, not least in and around Jerusalem, means that the Israelis do not care a fig about accords and laws. According to reports, the Har Homa settlement on a hill the Palestinians call Jabal Abu Ghneim, is growing very rapidly. It may be recalled that it was the issuing of tenders for housing on this strategic area that stopped the peace process in its tracks, and the stalemate lasted for some 19 months. The project started by Netanyahu is being nurtured by Ehud Barak, the incumbent prime minister. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat was right on the button when he said the other day that settlement was the only thing that did not stop in the Palestinian-Israeli relations. As the peace process has slipped into a stalemate, construction activities are proceeding apace in the Har Homa area.



RUSSIAN POLL: Alexander Veshnyakov, the head of Russia's Central Election Commission, showing an absentee ballot paper to journalists during a news conference in Moscow yesterday. The Central Election Commission cleared the final candidates on Monday for Russia's March 26 presidential poll, bringing the total number of hopefuls to 11. — Reuters

United Ireland unlikely, but not impossible

By Joanne Russell

IRISH unification is unlikely for half a century but cannot be ruled out, according to business leaders and political analysts north and south of the border.

"A united Ireland will certainly not happen in 20 years but with democracy, and a fluid and developing political situation, anything could happen (eventually)," said Bill Jeffrey, vice chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses in Belfast.

Unification of the British-ruled north with the Irish Republic is a sensitive issue. Under the peace process Dublin has renounced its claim to Northern Ireland to reassure a Protestant community determined to remain in the United Kingdom.

Republicans have agreed to sit in a Northern Ireland parliament but are committed to ending the partition which has existed since the 1920s.

Remote though the prospect of unification may be, Reuters asked business leaders, academics and economists on both sides of the border if and when they thought it would ever happen.

Of 11 canvassed by Reuters, four said a united Ireland would take 50 years, one said it could happen within the next 20 to 50, one said it could take 20 years and one said it was possible but gave no time frame. Four said it would never occur. All respondents except two requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

"It's fraught with uncertainty," said one economist. "There has to be a democratic political system in place, violence would have to be eliminated and it could only be decided in a referendum. It could then possibly occur but it's very much something far down the road."

The peace process hangs in the balance over Protestant demands that Irish Republican militants give up their weapons. London reimposed direct rule of Northern Ireland earlier this month to prevent pro-British Protestants walking out of a government in which they had shared power with Catholics.

But whatever the outcome, the demographic shape of Northern Ireland is changing and this will alter the political landscape.

Protestants currently outnumber Catholics 60-40 but the Catholic population is growing faster and the British government says it will respect the will of the majority.

"You need to be looking 40 years down the road when you will have a population that is 50 per cent Protestants and 50 per cent Catholics," said one industry chief. If a united Ireland does come about, the way will have been paved by membership of the European Union, he added.

"When you look at things in the European Union context as the impact of borders start to decline, things will change over the next 30 or 40 years," he said. "What will bring us together would be the EU framework — directives, integration and harmonisation at the European level."

But one respondent based in London said 20 years is a possible timeframe because the demographic changes will eventually produce a nationalist majority in votes for the leading Catholic parties, the SDLP and Sinn Fein.

"Such a nationalist majority at

the party level might not, however, immediately translate into a nationalist majority for Irish unification in a referendum," said Brendan O'Leary, professor of political science at the London School of Economics. "There is a minority of Catholic unionists, but their numbers might shrink as nationalists grow in strength and as the republic becomes increasingly attractive."

Sinn Fein Chairman Gerry Adams, whose Republican Party is the political voice of the IRA guerrilla group, wants a united Ireland and has long campaigned for the withdrawal of the British Army from the province and the end of direct rule from London.

Some respondents said the Irish Republic might not want to unite with the north. The integration of the underdeveloped north into the buoyant south would impose a heavy and unwanted financial burden on Ireland's thriving economy, they said.

"The north of Ireland has heavy subventions from the British government and in a united Ireland it would then fall on the south to try and subsidise

the northern economy," said one economist. "The northern economy has just fallen so far behind it would be a bit of a drag — a little like the reunification of Germany."

An Irish professor agreed. "With the economic costs involved, nobody would be prepared to make the effort. Whatever happens in Northern Ireland in the end the Republic would balk."

To prevent a unified Ireland, unionists and the British government will have to demonstrate that the Union can treat Irish nationalists with full equality, recognition and autonomy, said O'Leary.

"They have shown some signs of being willing to do that but certainly not enough to weaken the strength of Irish nationalist loyalties." Others said Protestant Unionists in the North will never agree to unification. "You should not underestimate the core Unionist sentiment. They would rather live in tents than give up (British) sovereignty," said one top industry official.

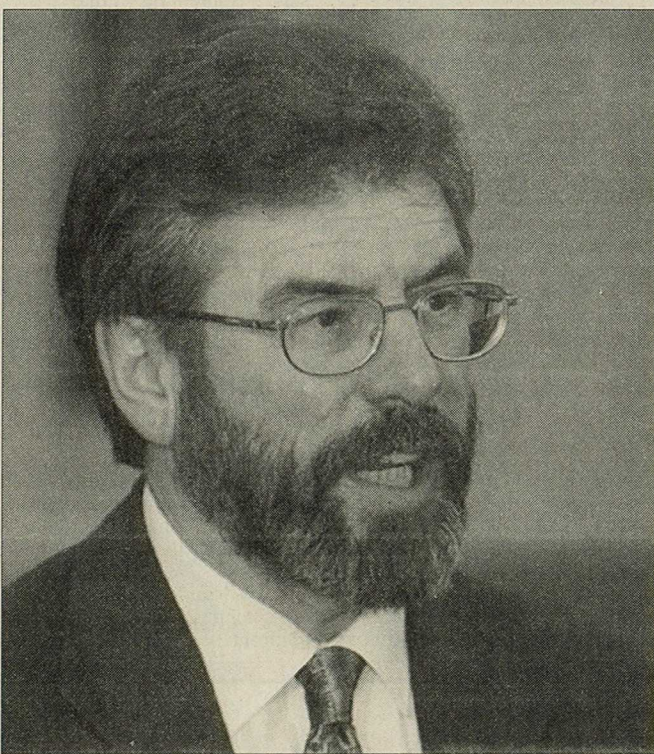
However, future generations could learn to accept diversity as a cultural strength, some respondents said.

"In time, with changes in voting patterns and within the European context, those differences would become blurred," said Jeffrey. "Everyone is proud of their heritage but it may become less important whether one is from the north or south."

Graduates are leaving college with the perception of Ireland as a single job market and will go anywhere to find work, said one economist. "The Republic of Ireland is creating jobs faster than they can educate their kids. There will be a gradual pull heading south for work," he said.

Others said that as more working class children attend university, future generations will gain the confidence to leave prejudice behind. After growing up in a climate of violence and unrest, that could mean they will turn away from politics.

"That generation is blurring the old lines of division. No matter how badly we screw it up, they will get it together," said one economist. "(This generation) want to relax and do not want to play in politics."



GERRY ADAMS: Campaign for unification

READERS' FORUM

Dance show

I REFER to Sushila Nagaraj's response appeared in this column on February 20, with regard to the classical dance programme conducted at the temple hall on the occasion of the Pongal Pooja celebrations.

At the outset, my family and I express our sincere thanks to Sushila for the commendation on the programme, which will be an encouragement to our daughter.

As regards artistes and organisers, my daughter is an eleventh-level student of ISM, and has been learning Indian classical and folk dances. Hence, a show was organised so that she could stage the art she learned before the art-loving people of Muscat.

God willing, such events in the future will be notified in advance.

C. I. Thomas
Ruwi

Craze over video games

ALTHOUGH I am not a stern and strict parent, I do feel it necessary to warn my child away from the bad addiction of video games.

My 13-year-old son is crazy about video games and he is capable of getting glued to the screen for almost six to seven hours at a stretch.

After much cajoling and even indirect and direct threats, I have managed to cut down his hours from seven to two-and-a-half.

But still, it is taking quite a toll on our patience, and we almost feel that we have lost our persuasive skills in this regard.

Our son is not a bad student and manages to get good grades, but as parents, we always feel incumbent to exercise our regret on the fact that he could have done much better, had he been able to further cut down his video habit.

But our entreaties have all fallen deaf in our son's ears and I must

say that it takes much from us to make this confession that in this regard at least we have almost failed in our task.

The news item about the fact that 'video games, cartoons may trigger fits in youngsters' (*Times*, February 22) has given us hope. Now we know that there are other parents out there with similar problems that we must treat with kid gloves.

But, yes there is light at the end of this dark tunnel. Maybe we could collectively act against this craze for video games among our children.

Sudhir Karunakaran
Wadi Kabir

Is hero himself the villain?

THE Sachin Tendulkar-Kapil Dev plot had succeeded in keeping Azharuddin out during the Australian tour. Even the Board of Control for Cricket in India could not do much about it.

Then the BCCI won the game when they recalled Azharuddin for the first Test.

Sachin has already resigned, and rumours are that Kapil Dev will follow suit.

Now, Azhar is suddenly not fit and Ajay Jadeja is back.

Azhar's injury was not that serious, according to the first report. And it looks like Jadeja, who is not in the original 14, will get the chance ahead of Kaif.

One wonder what's happening in Indian cricket. It looks like we are watching a Hindi movie.

Sachin, of course, is the 'Hero No. 1', but who's the villain? Or, like Shah Rukh Khan films, is the hero himself the villain?

Salih Thacher
Rusayl

Israelis on farewell tour to Golan

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti

"VISIT the Golan Heights before it is too late", read a recent newspaper advertisement placed by a resort hotel on the Israeli-occupied plateau.

Israelis apparently got the message, flocking in record numbers to the Golan in the wake of peace talks that could lead to the return of the heights to Syria.

Since the currently frozen negotiations resumed in December after an almost four-year break, Israeli tourism to the Golan has increased by about 30 per cent, tourism officials say.

They come either to bid farewell to the impressive view — the Sea of Galilee below and snow-capped Mount Hermon above — or to support the 17,000 Jewish settlers who have made the heights their home since Israel captured the region in 1967.

Many are on a first-time visit to the area known for its ski slopes and springtime blossom.

Shuka Saliternik, a professional tour guide, has doubled the weekly number of tours he gives to about six.

Many of the groups are made up of Russian immigrants to Israel. "We estimate that 95 per cent of Russian immigrants don't understand what is happening with the Golan," Saliternik said.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak has promised to hold a national referendum to ratify any peace deal he forges with Syria.

Most groups get a "political" tour of the Golan and its observation points where visitors can see where the Syrian Army was deployed before the 1967 Middle East war. Saliternik, who has lived on the Golan for 26 years, grew up on the Ein Gev kibbutz, or collective farm, just below. "I saw the Syrians from the bottom. I used to go out to plough the fields in an armoured tractor," he recalled.

"When I went out to plough the field, half the army peeped."

The Golan Residents' Committee is helping to organise the tours with a group that includes Jews who live in the West Bank and fear a withdrawal from the Golan would be a precedent for forcing them from their homes in a deal with the Palestinians.

Her husband, Yaacov, disagreed with his wife. "We love this place. I have an emotional tie to the place," he said.

Avi Tubul, who rents sleds at the Hermon Mountain ski resort, said talk among tourists slid easily into politics.

Despite efforts to attract Israelis from all sides of the political spectrum, Saliternik said most of those who are now visiting have already formed their opinion about the Golan.

"Those from north Tel Aviv don't come. They ski in Switzerland, they don't care about the Hermon Mountain (ski resort)," he said.

"Walking through these fields and seeing the cyclamen flowers means nothing to them."

Uri Meir, general manager of the Golan Development Company which promotes Israeli business investment on the heights, is convinced the biggest problem is education. He recalled a conversation he overheard at a gourmet \$300-per-head dinner at the Golan Heights in the settlement of Katzrin a few months ago.

A Tel Aviv man was speaking about his five-hour trip to the Golan. His destination was Katzrin, the biggest Jewish settlement on the Golan, but he kept driving until he got to Mas'ada, a Druze village about 40 minutes drive.

"What happened? He knew the Golan was in the north, so he drove until the north ended," Meir said, emphasising Israelis' lack of knowledge. Looking out the window of the Ramot Hotel at the Sea of Galilee and the mountains beyond, Sara Shimoni was unconvinced that keeping the strategic hills under Israeli rule was more important than peace with Syria.

"I know I probably sound terrible to the residents of this place," she told her husband on a weekend trip to the Golan.

"They say, 'You live in Jerusalem, so what do you care?' But because I live there I can be more objective and I can say, 'We can't be your victims forever.'"

Like many other tourists, the Shimonis and their friends who joined them for the weekend, spent a good deal of their time discussing politics.

Her husband, Yaacov, disagreed with his wife. "We love this place. I have an emotional tie to the place," he said.

Avi Tubul, who rents sleds at the Hermon Mountain ski resort, said talk among tourists slid easily into politics.

Japan ratings split highlights debt risks

By William Mallard

DEPENDING on whom you believe, Japan is either crawling out of its worst recession in half a century and building the base for a durable recovery, or sinking inescapably into debt.

Starkly different reports in recent days by two big international credit ratings agencies, Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service, highlight a split in views on the risks facing the world's second-biggest economy.

Moody's announced last Thursday that it might downgrade government bonds issued in yen because of the explosion of public debt. But S&P overnight reaffirmed its top-notch rating on the view that the government can manage its debt burden.

Yet even if S&P's more benign view is true, the government will still come under pressure later this year to come up with a plan to bring debt under control through tax hikes or sharply reduced spending. And that raises concern whether the fragile economic recovery could survive either course of action.

"It's going to come to a head sometime this year," said economist Matthew Poggi at Lehman Brothers. "If the economy doesn't recover, the government will have to make a choice about fiscal policy again."

Moody's reawakened the markets to the nightmare scenario of a giant economy, addicted to fiscal stimulus and losing its punch, slipping so deep into debt that it cannot grow its way out.

The government has spent more than ¥120 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) since 1992 trying to revive the economy from the funk it tumbled into with the collapse of the asset-price bubble of the late 1980s.

That has left Japan with a public debt soon to equal 130 per cent

of gross domestic product — the worst in the industrial world.

S&P, by contrast, largely buys the government line that massive government spending and a year of near-zero interest rates leave the economy poised to recover under its own steam, allowing a prudent paring of debt in coming years.

Government debt is "manageable in the context of Japan's economic and external strengths", S&P said in affirming Japan's triple 'A' rating.

The government is gambling that a decade of deficit spending is about to pay off, with a recovery that will lay the groundwork for paying off its debt. But expectations now are that Japan slipped back into technical recession in the second half of 1999.

Shrugging off the S&P vote of confidence, the yen slipped to six-month lows against the dollar as the worries grew over Japan's ability to achieve a sustainable economic recovery.

A weaker yen, while helping Japan's powerful exporters, could eventually threaten the ultra low interest rates that have kept Japan's debt-service burden in check. Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa candidly admits that 10-year bond yields, stuck below two per cent, are extremely abnormal. He publicly frets that an economic pickup — rather than allowing the economy to simply grow its way out of debt — would push government bond yields up and compound the debt-service burden.

One of the most vocal Japan bulls, Richard Jerram of ING Baring Securities, who blasted Moody's for threatening a second downgrade in two years when the economy has clearly improved, has expressed hope that the move will prompt the government to outline a medium-term fiscal reform plan.

From Our Archives

February 1985

Community school sponsorship rule

MUSCAT — The Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs has decided to stop all community schools being run under private individual sponsorship.

The Department of Private Education of the ministry has advised all schools belonging to foreign communities to obtain sponsorship from their embassies — otherwise they will have to close.

A spokesman of the department told the *Times* that the move is aimed at bringing these schools under the responsibility of embassies or big companies.

He said while most of the community schools are sponsored by embassies there are some that are under private individuals' sponsorship.

If any community school failed to submit the sponsorship letter from the relevant embassy by the next academic year the management will be asked to either close the school or turn it into a private school taking the Omani syllabus, the spokesman said.

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

Bank Dhofar net jumps to RO5.46m

By Our Business Reporter

MUSCAT — Bank Dhofar Al Omani Al Fransi has reported an increased net profit to the tune of RO5.46 million compared with 1998 figures.

The bank has stepped up its proposed cash dividend by one per cent to 5 per cent.

Loans and advances by the bank have shot up sharply in the last quarter of the year with about RO12 million of the total advances growth of RO29.3 million being accounted in the last three months of the year.

India, China ink WTO accord

BEIJING — India and China signed a bilateral trade agreement here yesterday, removing one more barrier to China's 14-year bid for membership of the World Trade Organisation.

Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Murasoli Maran and Chinese Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Shi Guangsheng signed the document in front of journalists in Beijing.

The two ministers declined to give details of the accord, but hailed the agreement as a boost to Sino-Indian relations and another important step for China along the road to WTO membership.

"The agreement embodies the spirit of cooperation between China and India, both developing countries, towards the multilateral trading system," said Shi in a joint written statement.

The statement said India gave full support to China's entry into the global trading body and would work with China to develop trade ties in the future.

"It (the agreement) is a significant step forward in bilateral trade relations," Maran told reporters at the ceremony, adding that it would be of "mutual benefit" to the two countries.

An Indian diplomat said China had agreed to a series of tariff reductions on Indian exports.

"China has agreed to lower general tariff rates for a range of agricultural, industrial and marine products from about 20 per cent to 10 per cent," the diplomat said, asking to remain anonymous.

He said the agreement was sealed on Monday after several days of talks since Maran arrived on Thursday.

The accord comes as a visiting European Union trade delegation is engaged in highly-secretive talks with Chinese trade officials on sealing a bilateral deal.

The EU is by far the biggest of China's 13 trading partners which have yet to finalise the bilateral deals necessary for Beijing to finally end its long crusade to join the WTO this year. The European delegation, led by the commission's director general of trade Hans-Friedrich Bessler, began a second day of technical talks at Moftec in Beijing yesterday.

Both China and the EU have declined to give any details about the negotiations, fearful publicity could cause the discussions to come unstuck. — AFP

Muscat Fund: Unit holders get high returns

Experts say first-ever redemption will invite more retail investors into such funds

By C. L. Jose

MUSCAT — The investors in the Sultanate are witnessing the first redemption of an investment fund in the country as the Muscat Guaranteed Fund, floated by BankMuscat in December 1996, is redeeming the 5.66 million units of the fund which carries a par value of RO1 each.

The highlight of the redemption is that the unit-holders are getting substantially high returns over that has been guaranteed by the fund at the time of the launch.

According to experts, this might invite more and more retail investors into such funds managed by experts.

While the Class-A unit-holders are getting 125 per cent of the par value of the unit on

redemption, the Class-B unit-holders are getting 127.6 per cent of the par value of the unit.

Thus, while each unit in Class-A fetches RO1.25, the Class-B unit fetches RO1.276 on redemption.

The higher return on the Class-B units is attributed to the fact that these units were guaranteed 90 per cent of the par value. In the case of Class-A units, the guarantee on capital was 100 per cent.

"It is the higher risk the Class-B unit-holders have borne that has attracted the higher returns for them," a top official at the BankMuscat Investment Banking Department told *Times Business*.

Interestingly, even the Class-A units of Muscat Guaranteed Fund, which was listed on

the Muscat Securities Market (MSM), were being traded below par value even till recently against the fact that the par value anyway, was guaranteed.

"It must be the lack of understanding by the investors that has resulted in such a scenario. Anybody who bought these units from the market could have made good money without being exposed to any sort of risk," an analyst with a brokerage firm noted.

The returns from the fund was linked to the performance of a broad and diverse range of world basket of equity indices. However, a good portion of the fund was used for fixed income and this portion was parked with BankMuscat itself.

However, the bank claims that it has paid the

fund higher interest than what was agreed bilaterally.

The fund having met with a real success, the investors committee may seek to launch another fund in the same lines of this fund. It makes interesting observation if one views the success of this fund against the backdrop of the capital market here, where currently retail investors are worried about their losses and deliberately keep away from the market.

The investment objective of Muscat Guaranteed Fund was to provide capital protection with the opportunity to participate in returns linked to the world basket of equity. It was decided that at the start of each investment period, sufficient funds of each class required to ensure the return of the capital covered by the

guarantee would be invested in instruments predominantly based in the Sultanate of Oman.

These included government development bonds and any other fixed income earning securities issued by the government, other investment-grade fixed income or interest bearing corporate securities and bank deposits and certificates of deposits issued by banks.

The other funds listed on the MSM are Oryx Joint Investment Fund managed by Al Ahlia Portfolio Securities Company, Majan Investment Fund managed by Oman and Emirates, First Mazoon Fund managed by the Gulf Investment Services (GIS), Muscat Index Fund managed by BankMuscat and Oman Investment Opportunities Fund being managed by the Al Ahlia Asset Management Company.

Oracle to hold e-business seminars throughout Gulf

By Our Business Reporter

MUSCAT — With both public and private sector interest in e-business reaching new heights, Oracle Middle East yesterday announced its commitment to host educational seminars throughout the Gulf on all aspects of e-business technology, solutions and services.

Organisations in every part of the world are embracing e-business as a means of increasing efficiencies, increasing market reach and improving customer satisfaction.

In fact, high availability of information technology infrastructure is the key to e-business transformation, said Ayman Abouseif, Oracle's manager for marketing and technology solutions while addressing a seminar on 'e-business' at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel here.

Oracle initially plans to spon-



AYMAN ABOUSEIF: Future of business is the Internet

business model.

Husam Dajani, regional manager of Oracle Middle East, states: "The business environment in the Middle East is experiencing an unprecedented change with the arrival of e-business. The public and private sector have advanced beyond the 'what is e-business?' stage to the 'why should we adopt e-business?' and 'how do we proceed?' stages."

Oracle aims to answer those questions through its most aggressive educational outreach programme-ever, with the Oracle e-business seminar series and comprehensive partner training.

Following the global e-business seminar in Oman, the road show will continue in Qatar.

Oracle will host an additional e-business seminar in Oman, this time focussing on Internet availability on March 26.

Continued on Page 11

Unilever to slash jobs after net profit dip

ROTTERDAM, (Netherlands)

— Anglo-Dutch Unilever yesterday reported a 6 per cent net profit fall last year to 2.775 billion euros (dollars) and said that major restructuring would cost 25,000 jobs in the next five years.

The agrifood group announced it would embark on a restructuring programme costing five billion euros and lead to a 10-per cent reduction of the workforce. Most of the jobs would be cut in Europe, North America and Latin America, it said.

Unilever's diverse business includes Lux soap, Omo detergents, Calvin Klein perfumes and Magnum ice creams.

Dutch co-chairman Antony Burgmans said the job losses were needed for the group's long-term health and that there would be close consultation to limit the consequences for those affected.

The restructuring will close around 100 sites to concentrate production in 150 strategic locations and aims to produce annual savings of one billion pounds by 2004, to be ploughed back into strengthening leading brands.

The British co-chairman Niall Fitzgerald said the group was also looking to buy companies in the personal care and food sectors.

— AFP

Crucial Riyadh meet of oil ministers today

RIYADH — Arab Gulf oil ministers will hold a crucial meeting in Riyadh today that may confirm what consumers are desperate to hear — the world's biggest producers will unleash extra barrels to cool torrid prices.

Saudi Arabia — by far the world's biggest and most influential oil producer — will likely set the tone of talks with its fellow Opec and Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) members Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and non-Opec producers Oman and Bahrain.

When those nations met at the Saudi desert oilfield of Shaybah last year they agreed to cut output to rescue prices from their lowest levels in decades.

Shortly afterward Saudi Arabia and fellow oil giants Venezuela and Mexico put their collective weight behind the call for curbs. Opec then ratified a major output restraint deal that has tripled prices since late 1998.

That pact has been the main driving force pushing prices to their highest levels since the 1991 Gulf war, prompting the United States — the world's biggest oil consumer — to ring alarm bells.

This time around, producers will be faced with the daunting task of how much to boost output and when, questions already dividing the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries a month before the 11-member cartel meets in Vienna to discuss output policy.

Kuwait, which has repeatedly said that producers had agreed in principle to extend the current cuts of 4.3 million barrels per day after they expire on March 31, has been quiet lately about that scenario. It is strongly opposed to an immediate production hike but does not have the clout to undermine a collective Gulf Arab move to lift output.

If the AGCC backs a call for a production rise, that would leave

few doubts that other oil producers will release extra supplies.

The key question hanging over the AGCC is winning over key Opec producer Iran. Renewed infighting in the cartel would bruise its credibility at a sensitive time. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh warned on Monday that raising production would deal a severe blow to prices. But he suggested that it could be done in the fourth quarter.

Senior Gulf officials said on Sunday that producers had reached consensus on the need to raise output and were busy working out how much volume to release and when. An Opec delegate said producers were likely to ease supply limits starting on April 1.

Just days after the AGCC summit, US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson will visit Kuwait, then Saudi Arabia to express Washington's concern over high prices. — Reuters



LAUNCH: The Honda Odyssey is just like a sedan but contains immense off-road capabilities

Honda unveils 'Year 2000' models

By Our Business Reporter

MUSCAT — Honda Motor Company Ltd, has unveiled its 'Year-2000' lineup of vehicles, including the spacious and luxurious minivan 'Odyssey'.

The 'Year-2000' Odyssey — the versatile, seven-seater multi-purpose sedan — has undergone a complete model change, including a more powerful 3.5 litre SOHC VTEC, 24-valve V6, 210 HP/5200 RPM, PGM-Fi engine, fully powered with ABS, twin SRS airbags, cruise control, automatic dual airconditioners, keyless entry system, power slide doors,

power tail gate lock, roof rails, eight-way power driver's seat and alloy wheels.

Says Krishnan, Honda's divisional manager: "The Honda Odyssey is a vehicle that's meant to be driven daily, just like a sedan — yet containing immense off-road capabilities, for the week-end outings and other recreational activities."

With generously proportioned interiors, the all-new Odyssey can accommodate seven adults in the comfort of its extra-wide seats, all of which feature, exceptionally, adjustable headrests and three-point seat belts.

Stunning new looks...
Breathtaking performance



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GSM HOTLINE: 9317866, 9317946

African firms lift veil on secrecy

JOHANNESBURG — South African companies, under mounting pressure from vigilant authorities to come clean and meet global standards, are becoming more candid with stakeholders about internal wrong doings, analysts said.

A recent announcement by logistics firm Roadcorp about flawed company information being circulated and a warning by technology group Spicer of gross mismanagement at a subsidiary are just two of an unprecedented string of disclosures made by corporates to shareholders this year. Analysts rank doubts about corporate governance in South Africa alongside the country's notorious crime levels as disincentives to crucial foreign investment.

Although revelations that corporate governance rules have been breached do not inspire investor confidence, they have brought some comfort in signalling a desire by companies to become more transparent and play it straight with shareholders.

Analysts say the firms' disclosures have, on the one hand, been foisted on industry captains by deeper scrutiny of their activities by watchdogs such as the Financial Services Board (FSB) and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE).

On the other hand, many larger companies, especially those with ambitions to win foreign backing, have taken the initiative to weed out corruption. "Mainstream businesses are working very hard to govern their companies properly," said Bryan Adams of Tip Offs Anonymous, a business that aims to promote workplace honesty by encouraging employees to report misdeeds by their colleagues.

"The whole idea is to clean up our act and make South Africa an

attractive place to invest," said Adams, whose company, set up in May last year, is the first of its kind in South Africa.

But a lot of work still needs to be done to turn good intentions into reality. Isolated under apartheid, South Africa lagged behind international standards of corporate control. Authorities, obsessed with political dominance, often turned a blind eye to so-called "white collar" crime.

The bourse, with its incestuous company ownership structures, developed a damaging reputation for insider trading, which is the illegal use of privileged information to deal in shares.

"We are trying to make people understand that they stand a very real chance of being called to account," said Rob Barrow, head of the FSB's one-year-old Insider Trading Directorate.

Armed with tougher new laws, the FSB has stepped up attempts to stamp out insider trading by imposing fines and adopting a high public profile. Analysts say that for the first time there is a real possibility of transgressors being punished.

The JSE has also played a role in forcing openness through its regulatory news feed, which requires that price-sensitive company data be released to all stakeholders at the same time.

But analysts say that although greater openness is a step in the right direction, much still needs to be done to go beyond mere lip service to corporate governance rules. "We must stop congratulating ourselves that we have put structures in place and start focusing on whether they are working properly," said Roy Shough, an expert on corporate governance and a partner at consultants Deloitte & Touche. — Reuters

Oracle to hold e-business seminars throughout Gulf

Continued from Page 9

This technical event will demonstrate the vital need for highly available technology platform in e-business, and how Oracle's Internet platform strategy meets that need.

Hundreds of Oracle business partners throughout the Middle East are registering to attend Oracle e-business training sessions that will give them the skills and insight to pursue e-business opportunities in the region.

Oracle Middle East's local e-business initiative is part of a global e-business transformation by Oracle Corporation. Oracle has been more successful and aggressive in supporting the Internet than their big competitors, especially on the enterprise resource planning side, said industry analyst James Pickrel of Hambrecht & Quist. Their marketing and branding has helped them become a blue-chip e-business company, and that has clearly helped them. Their breadth of products helps them address almost every aspect of e-business problems, he added.

The evidence supporting the need for organisations throughout the Gulf region to adopt e-business is compelling. A recent study conducted by Jupiter Communications revealed that companies that implemented e-business solutions expanded their revenues on average by 52 per cent over a twelve-month period.

Jupiter's research also indicated that these same companies improved customer satisfaction by more than 40 per cent over the year they were surveyed through the customer-centre e-business approach. The new e-business studied were able to achieve significant increases in their internal efficiencies, and the research showed that just a 5 per cent reduction in costs equalled an approximate 30 per cent increase in the companies' profits.

Oracle Corporation is the world's leading supplier of software for information management, and world's second largest software company. With annual revenues of more than \$9.3 billion, the company offers its database and application products, along with related consulting, education, and support services in more than 145 countries around the world.

Talking to *Times Business*, Oracle representatives said: "Businesses today must leverage their Internet investments by focussing on solutions that provide the highest value.

"Measuring the values of delivering higher quality customer service and fostering more exclusive relationships with trading partners are the keys to unlock the potential of the Internet for an organisation.

"Oracle's e-business solution value assessment quantifies Internet opportunities to enable companies to make the best decisions on how Internet can enable their businesses.

"The future of business is Internet enabled. Deciding on how to use the Internet to expand markets, improve efficiencies and retain customers is a difficult task — especially given the multitude of available and evolving business models."

Coca-Cola moves Mideast HQ from UK to Bahrain

DUBAI — Coca-Cola's Middle East and North Africa headquarters is moving from Britain to Bahrain, the division president said yesterday, as part of a new worldwide "local" strategy to put the fizz back into Coke.

"The office and the infrastructure will move from the UK now to Bahrain," Coke's Middle East and North Africa president John Guarino said.

The shift is part of the company's decentralisation under Australian Doug Daft, who took over the helm of Coca-Cola last Thursday after a disastrous year.

Sales stagnated, share prices dropped, products were ordered off the shelves in four European countries after Belgian children fell ill drinking Coke, and US black employees began a lawsuit alleging racial discrimination.

Today 6,000 jobs are being axed worldwide, 2,500 of them at Coke's capital in Atlanta.

The transfer from Slough, near London, to Manama, is part of the "strategic alignment of the company in terms of becoming more local and driving the business closer to the markets," Guarino said.

"We kind of lost our way for a while, we weren't connected with consumers, with our customers, with our bottlers," he said in an interview. "This is really saying we are local, it's still one product but its got to be connected locally."

Coca-Cola set up a Gulf office a decade ago in Manama as the soft drink giant returned to the Arab world after being excluded by the boycott over ties with Israel.

Last year the company announced it had taken the soft drink sales lead in the Middle East and North Africa, where Coke employs 20,000 people. Pepsi, which has operated in the area continuously over the last 40 years, disputed the figures.

"We are very comfortable with our figures," Guarino smiled.

There will be up to 100 jobs at the new HQ, but Guarino stressed Coke's overall divisional investment of more than \$200 million over three years on top of 500 million the previous five years.

"Bahrain has been very good to us," Guarino said. "The biggest market long term in this part of the world is Saudi Arabia ... so we are close to there."

A new bottling plant is to open in Algeria in May and new lines are being added in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank.

"In Jordan and Lebanon we are still number two, but gaining rapidly and that is where the bulk of our investments are going. We are going to accelerate that rate of spending in those markets to get the leadership." In the Gulf, Coke today claims more than 30 per cent market share.

"Within a couple of years we will be clear market leaders in some markets in the Gulf," Guarino predicted.

"In the whole of the Middle East and North Africa we are the market leaders. If you look at the Gulf, and the more traditional Middle East, there's where we have got to take more market share.

"In North Africa we are very strong. In Egypt we are over 50 per cent."

Guarino was to announce new investments in Pakistan this week.

"The exciting thing about this division is not only do we have the opportunity here in the Gulf and everywhere else to continue to take more of the share ... but we have some untapped markets" he said.

These include Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya and Sudan, all countries whose ties with the United States are at best awkward.

Guarino, 40, was senior regional manager for the six Gulf states until his appointment to divisional president on January 9. The division spans countries from Morocco in the west to Pakistan. — AFP

Share prices move range-bound on MSM



MUSCAT — The dull sentiment continued in the market and shares exhibited narrow range-bound movements. Banking shares edged up on slight buying support with Commercial Bank of Oman recording 3.4 per cent rise, the highest among bank shares. Among industrials, National Gas shares continued to be in demand following the announcement last week of a bonus issue of one for one coupled with a 20 per cent cash dividend. Bank Dhofar became the first listed bank to declare its financial results for fiscal 1999.

The bank has reported increased net profit to the tune of RO5.46 million, compared with 1998 figures. The bank has stepped up its proposed cash dividend by one per cent to 5 per cent.

Loans and advances by the bank have shot up sharply in the last quarter of the year with about RO12 million of the total advances growth of RO29.3 million being accounted in the last three months of the year.

Oman Arab Bank, a subsidiary of Ominvest, has on the other hand declared a 22.5 per cent drop in net profit to RO6.28 million. Despite a slight increase in net interest income, profit was pulled down by higher provisioning.

— Al Ahlia Securities Co SAOC

INDEX MOVEMENT	Yesterday	Change	% Change
MSM Index	221.17	1.53	0.70
Banking & Investment	272.75	2.93	1.09
Services	123.06	-0.19	-0.15
Industry	187.36	0.00	0.00

ADVANCE-DECLINE RATIO	Advances	Declines	Unchanged	Not Traded
	10	6	14	110

TRADING VOLUMES	Yesterday	% Change
Million RO	0.28	2.15
'000 Shares	213.25	-31.45

TOP GAINERS	Price	Increase	% Increase
Nat. Sugar Refining	0.760	0.030	4.11
Commercial Bank of Oman	1.540	0.050	3.36
Oman Chlorine	0.770	0.020	2.67
First Mazoon Fund	0.390	0.010	2.63
Oman & Emir (Oman)	0.480	0.010	2.13

TOP LOSERS	Price	Decrease	% Decrease
Alliance Housing Bank	0.820	-0.020	-2.38
Onic Holding	0.830	-0.020	-2.35
Muscat National Holding	0.470	-0.010	-2.08
BP Oman	2.900	-0.050	-1.69
Al-Batnah Investments 50%	0.710	-0.010	-1.39

VOLUME LEADERS	Price	No of Shares
Nat. Sugar Refining	0.760	39,000
Onic Holding	0.830	27,800
Commercial Bank of Oman	1.540	17,800
Oman International Bank	2.080	14,675
Oman Aviation	1.680	13,000

Muscat Securities Market share price bulletin for Tuesday, February 22

Company Name	TRADED SHARES	PREV. CLOSING	HIGH PRICE	LOW PRICE	CLOSING PRICE	DIFF.
Banks and Investment companies Sector	Index 272.75					Diff. +2.93
NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN	9600	3.050	3.150	3.050	3.110	0.060
ONIC HOLDING	27800	0.850	0.840	0.830	0.830	-0.020
OMAN INTERNATIONAL BANK	14675	2.060	2.080	2.060	2.080	0.020
OMAN & EMIRATES INV. (OM)	4200	0.470	0.480	0.480	0.480	0.010
MUSCAT NATIONAL HOLDING	1500	0.480	0.470	0.470	0.470	-0.010
Industry Sector	Index 187.36					Diff. 0.00
OMAN CEMENT	100	2.350	2.300	2.300	2.350	---
OMAN CHROMITE 50%	34	0.830	---	---	---	---
Services Sector	Index 123.06					Diff. -0.19
OMAN FISHERIES	7800	0.940	0.950	0.940	0.940	---
OMAN AVIATION SERVICES	13000	1.700	1.680	1.680	1.680	-0.020
PORT SER. CORPORATION	500	1.120	1.120	1.120	1.120	---
PARALLEL MARKET						
AL BATINAH DEV. & INV. HOLDING 50%	4900	0.720	0.710	0.710	0.710	-0.010
INDUSTRIAL BANK OF OMAN	7537	0.880	0.890	0.870	0.880	---
GLOBAL FINANCIAL INV.	5000	0.900	0.910	0.910	0.910	0.010
OMAN HOLDING INTERNATIONAL	1000	1.120	1.120	1.120	1.120	---
UNITED FINANCE	1508	1.050	1.070	1.070	1.070	0.020
AL MAWARID SECURITIES 50%	3129	0.760	0.760	0.760	0.760	---
BANK MUSCAT	9831	3.450	3.450	3.450	3.450	---
COMMERCIAL BANK OF OMAN	17800	1.490	1.550	1.520	1.540	0.050
ALLIANCE HOUSING BANK	3513	0.840	0.840	0.800	0.820	-0.020
THE ORYX JOINT INV. FUND.	9000	0.540	0.550	0.550	0.550	0.010
MUSCAT INDEX FUND JIA	300	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	---
THE FIRST MAZOOON FUND	6400	0.380	0.390	0.380	0.390	0.010
OMAN FIBER OPTIC	860	1.100	1.100	1.100	1.100	---
NATIONAL SUGAR REFINING	39000	0.730	0.760	0.760	0.760	0.030
OMAN CHLORINE	12400	0.750	0.770	0.770	0.770	0.020
SALALAH FLOUR	43	1.500	---	---	---	---
BP OMAN	11000	2.950	2.900	2.900	2.900	-0.050
TOPAZ ENERGY & MARINE	500	0.680	0.680	0.680	0.680	---
SHELL OMAN MARKETING	116	6.050	6.000	6.000	6.050	---
SALALAH PORT SERVICES	200	3.300	3.200	3.200	3.300	---

Trading Volume	277622
Traded Shares	213246
No. of Contracts	263
Market index / Diff. / Change	221.17 / +1.53 / 0.70 %

Rating firms highlight risks in Japan economy

TOKYO — Depending on whom you believe, Japan is either crawling out of its worst recession in half a century and building the base for a durable recovery, or sinking inescapably into debt.

Starkly different reports in recent days by two big international credit ratings agencies, Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service, highlight a split in views on the risks the world's second-biggest economy is facing.

Moody's announced last Thursday that it might downgrade government bonds issued in yen because of the explosion of public debt. But S&P overnight reaffirmed its top-notch rating on the view that the government can manage its debt burden.

Yet even if S&P's more benign view is true, the government will still come under pressure later this year to come up with a plan to bring debt under control through tax hikes or sharply reduced spending. And that raises concern whether the nation's fragile economic recovery could survive either course of action.

Moody's reawakened the markets to the nightmare scenario of a giant economy, addicted to fiscal stimulus and losing its punch, slipping so deep into debt that it cannot grow its way out.

The government has spent more than ¥120 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) since 1992 trying to revive the economy from the funk it tumbled into with the collapse of the nation's asset-price bubble of the late 1980s.

That has left Japan with a public debt soon to equal 130 per cent of gross domestic product — the worst in the industrial world.

S&P, by contrast, largely buys the government line that massive government spending and a year of near-zero interest rates leave the economy poised to recover under its own steam, allowing a prudent paring of debt in coming years.

Government debt is "manageable in the context of Japan's economic and external strengths", S&P said in affirming Japan's triple-'A' rating.

The government is gambling that a decade of deficit spending is about to pay off, with a recovery that will lay the groundwork for paying off the worst debt in the industrial world.

But financial markets, after bidding up the yen and Japanese stocks last year on signs of a strong recovery, now are focusing instead on expectations that Japan slipped back into technical recession in the second half of 1999.

Shrugging off the S&P vote of confidence, the yen yesterday slipped to six-month lows against the dollar and three-month lows against the euro as worries grew over Japan's ability to achieve a sustainable economic recovery.

A weaker yen, while helping Japan's powerful exporters by boosting the value of overseas sales, could eventually threaten the ultra low interest rates that have kept Japan's debt-service burden in check.

Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa candidly admits that 10-year bond yields, stuck below two per cent, are "extremely abnormal".

He also publicly frets that an economic pickup — rather than allowing the economy to simply grow its way out of debt — would push government bond yields up and compound the debt-service burden.

"It's going to come to a head sometime this year," said economist Matthew Poggi at Lehman Brothers. "If the economy doesn't recover, the government will have to make a choice about fiscal policy again."

Even one of the most vocal Japan bulls, Richard Jerram of ING Baring Securities, who blasted Moody's for threatening a second downgrade in two years when the economy has clearly improved, expressed hope that the move will prompt the government to outline a medium-term fiscal reform plan.

S&P cautioned that recent backsliding on economic reform could keep growth low and eventually threaten Japan's top-notch rating.

Faulting past stimulus packages as being larded with unneeded pork-barrel spending, it said government spending must more effectively boost confidence and attack the overcapacity that continues to plague the economy.

Miyazawa insists the government wants to wean the economy from its stimulus fixes later this year if growth picks up again. But economists note that pressure may build for yet another stimulus package, especially as Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi must call general elections by October. — Reuters

HSBC

Indicative deposit rates

	OMR		US DOLLAR
	Below 10,000	Above 10,000	250,000 & Above
Saving	2.750	3.000	4.063
Call	1.750	2.000	3.063
1 Month	5.000	6.000	5.340
2 Months	5.250	6.125	5.400
3 Months	5.500	6.250	5.460
6 Months	5.750	6.500	5.780
9 Months	6.000	6.750	5.970
12 Months	6.250	7.000	6.280

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Ship	Cargo	Arrv. Date
Delphinus Leader	Vehicles	23.02
Sinar Medan	Containers	23.02
Altair	Containers	24.02
USS Sullivans DDG	Visit	24.02
FNV Jean De Vienne	Visit	25.02
Gulf Harmony	Containers	25.02
Euro Express	Containers	26.02
HMS Inverness	Visit	26.02
HMS Sir Geraint	Visit	26.02
HMS Atherstone	Visit	26.02
HMS Bridport	Visit	26.02
Gulf Highway	Containers	26.02
Maykop	Veg.Oil	26.02
Global Pride	Containers	27.02
Hual Tribute	Vehicles	28.02
Louis Pasteur	Containers	28.02
Orient Patriot	Containers	28.02
Orient Spirit	Containers	28.02
Venus	Containers	28.02
Ibn Al Haitham	Containers	29.02

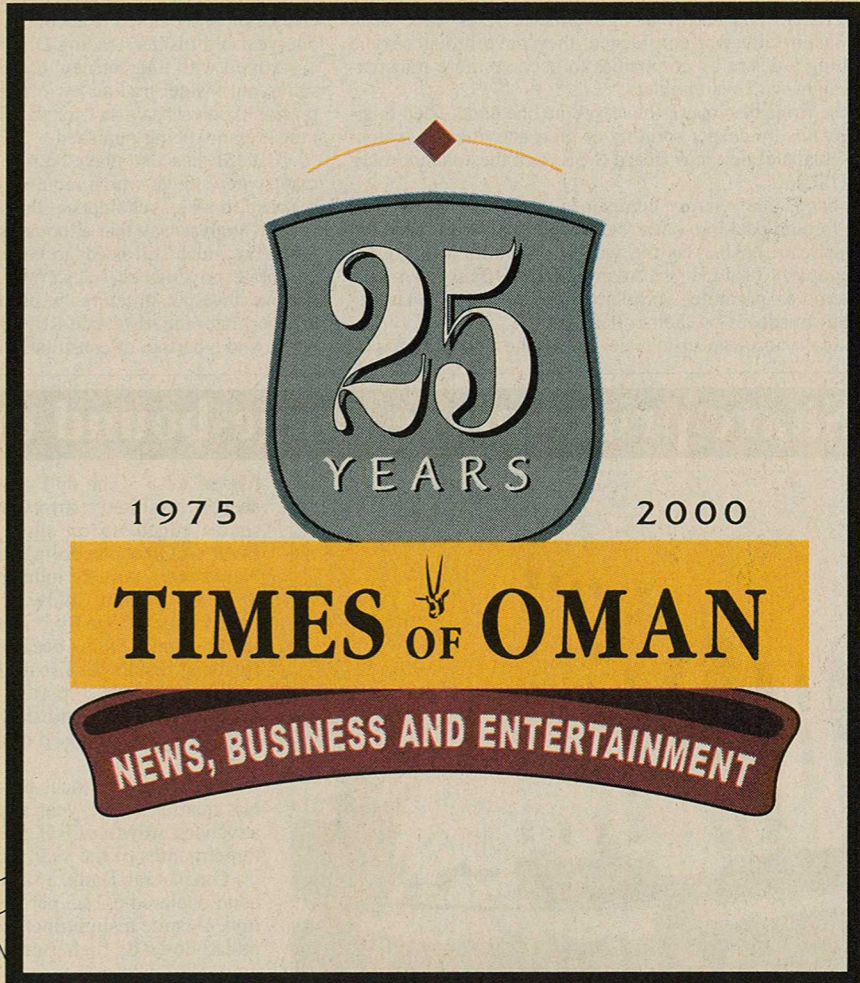
البنك الوطني العماني

NBO National Bank of Oman

Currencies	Rial Omani per one unit of foreign currency		Foreign currency per one Rial Omani	
	Buying	Selling	Buying	Selling
Dollar	0.381	0.388	2.58	
Euro	0.3777	0.3887	2.57	
Sterling	0.6130	0.6240	1.60	
DM	0.1931	0.1988	5.03	
S.Fr.	0.2372	0.2412	4.15	
D.Fl.	0.1714	0.1764	5.67	
F.fr	0.05758	0.05925	16.88	
Lira	0.000195	0.000201	4975.12	
Yen	0.003449	0.003490	286.53	
A.Sch	0.02745	0.02824	35.41	
D.K.	0.05100	0.05192	19.26	
N.Kr	0.04642	0.04742	21.09	
S.K	0.04421	0.04523	22.11	
Can.\$	0.2636	0.2675	3.74	
Aus.\$	0.2404	0.2449	4.08	
N.Z.\$	0.1878	0.1923	5.20	
Sing.\$	0.2245	0.2277	4.39	
Mal.R	0.0985	0.1028	9.73	
HK.\$	0.0492	0.0501	19.96	
Sp.Pes	0.00227	0.00234	427.35	
B.Fr	0.00936	0.00963	103.84	
Jord.D	0.537	0.546	1.83	
Ind.Rs	0.00863	0.00903	110.74	
Pak.Rs	0.00724	0.00759	131.75	
Sl.Rs	0.00507	0.00547	182.82	
Fin.M	0.06351	0.06537	15.30	
Cyp.	0.656	0.671	1.49	
B.Taka	0.00739	0.00779	128.37	
EGP	0.1126	0.1138	8.79	
Gulf currencies				
UAE Dh	0.1043	0.1054	9.49	
B.D	1.015	1.027	0.97	
S.R	0.1021	0.1032	9.69	
Q.R	0.1052	0.1063	9.41	
K.D	1.248	1.268	0.79	

Rates supplied by National Bank of Oman, Muscat.

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT



Schematic diagram of the Central Business District
* Not to scale

TIMES OF OMAN

Celebrating 25 years

Neem holds promise for Aids cure

NEVER before has science been confronted with an epidemic, in which the primary disease only lowers the victim's immunity (defence mechanism) and then a second, unrelated disease produces the symptoms that may result in death.

This primary disease was first recognised in 1981, when it invaded the western countries. It is known as Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Aids), which has posed a challenge to all scientist and doctors. Though its cause is unknown it is believed to be caused by a virus. Symptoms of Aids may develop for months and years, and include malaise, a low-grade fever, coughing, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle ache, weight loss, and enlarged lymph nodes in the neck, axilla and groin.

The groups of researchers from the leading

pharmaceuticals R&D and medical research centres all over the world are putting down their heart and soul to find out a cure for Aids. When they are nowhere around a full-proof system against this modern scourge, one Dr Prasanna Patsani a member of parliament from one of the eastern states, Orissa in India, claims that the Aids can be cured fully.

According to him, it is a simple but wonderful medicine rooted in the ancient ayurvedic philosophy. A person suffering from the Aids has to chant a "maha mantra" 108 times a day beneath a Neem tree continuously for 21 days and should sleep under it during the whole period of 21 days. The self-styled yogi claims that this can rid the human body of HIV

completely. He prescribes a medicine, too. The Aids patient should cut a hole in the trunk of the Neem tree and put 100 gms. of fine quality rice from the day one and seal the pit. On 22nd day the patient should open the seal and should eat the rice-cream, which is formed in 21 days for subsequent 21 days.

Dr Prasanna Patsani says this prescription is based on ancient system. According to him, he found this prescription written on an old palm leaf. He says that he found the priceless palm leaf at Mehendipur, a small village of old Cutack district of Orissa, one of the eastern states in India.

Late Vaidraj (an ayurvedic practitioner) wrote the palm leaf, whose name was Pundit Somnath Das. The symptoms mentioned in the palm leaf are

GREEN POWER



Dr Nirmala Kothari

(purifying nervous system) and *dhyana* (purifying mind).

Dr Prasanna Patsani's claim may be true because as such Neem has immuno-stimulatory properties. It can activate selectively the TH-1 component of the lymphocyte population, which enhances cell-mediated immuno-responses to subsequent mitogenic and antigenic challenges. The immuno-stimulatory properties of Neem are evidently responsible for its anti-HIV effect. It has been observed that HIV-positive person showed tremendous improvement when treated with Neem.

While studying in-vitro (under lab conditions) anti-HIV effect of extracts from different parts of Neem like leaves, bark, and seeds, it was found that

addition of Neem leaf extract to the viral culture significantly reduced the secretion p-24 viral protein when compared with the controls (without Neem leaf extract).

Dr Berve Sinousi (one of the scientists who identified the Aids virus) also believes that Neem extracts block production of viral proteins thereby stopping replication of virus. When he cultured human white blood cells infected with HIV and Neem extract, the production of viral protein dropped dramatically.

The bark extract was found to be the most effective. National Institute of Health, India has reported encouraging results of in-vitro test where Neem bark extracts killed the Aids virus. This can be

correlated with Dr Prasanna's prescription of putting rice into a pit of the Neem tree trunk for 21 days.

Since the trunk consists of different layers of bark, so the cream of rice after 21 days will be containing the extract of bark.

It is also a fact that the crude Neem extracts absorb the viruses, effectively preventing them from entering uninfected cells.

In full-blown Aids cases lesions of skin or burning sensation have been successfully treated with neem leaves and lotion containing Neem oil.

The above reports suggest that Neem based medicinal products may provide different drugs in the treatment of the Aids, in not very distant future. Success however, lies in considerable research and related financial support.

Gandhi's disciple guiding light for rural growth

By S.S. Anoop

THE life and work of one of Mahatma Gandhi's devoted disciples has found expression in a book authored by an American, who wants to spread his concept of sustainable management of natural resources throughout the world.

Manibhai Desai was hand-picked by Gandhi to promote community healthcare in the remote village of Urulikanchan in his home state of Gujarat in 1947. Today, seven years after Desai's death, Urulikanchan is recognised as a model for rural development not just for other Indian villages but for the rest of the world.

Connie Howard, Director of Special Projects at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, who met Desai and interviewed him during one of her many visits to India, drawn by his simple lifestyle and lofty aims, has decided to become a roving ambassador to spread Desai's philosophy and concept of rural management.

"My aim is to popularise Desai's philosophy — of treating every single person as the same regardless of their caste, religion, social status or gender throughout the world," Howard told India Abroad News Service.

Urulikanchan transformed itself into a self-sufficient unit through a series of employment generation methods including cattle rearing, wasteland management and financial empowerment of women. Desai's vision was development with little harm to the environment.

Howard's book on Desai's life and mission, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: The Manibhai Desai and BAIFF story*, is her chosen path to carry forward the philosophy. The book, released by Minister for Rural Development Sundarlal Patwa earlier this month, also chronicles the success story of BAIFF, a voluntary organisation set up to promote sustainable rural development by Desai in 1967, which has been Desai's flagship ever since its guiding light left them.

"The success of his programmes is largely dependent on the people who worked with him throughout his lifetime and carried forward his philosophy after his demise. BAIFF has been very true to his philosophy in carrying forward his good work," said Howard.

She has decided to set aside the proceeds from her book sales for BAIFF's welfare programmes, which have provided a sense of social security for millions of rural poor.

BAIFF is presently involved in over 12,000 villages covering seven Indian states. A million rural families have benefitted from the employment generation programmes.

The programmes hope to transform the villages into self-sufficient units — Gandhi's dream — through cattle development, tree-based farming systems, watershed development, community health programmes and empowerment of women.

The tree-based farming system is illustrative of Desai's concept of sustainable rural development. Technical guidance, seeds and organic fertiliser are provided to farmers for converting their land into productive orchards of mango, cashew and other fruit crops.

Hundreds of trees are planted on the borders of the orchards to serve as windbreakers and as a source of green manure, herbal medicine, fodder and fuel. The inner space between the trees is used for growing cereals and vegetables for immediate income generation.

"If Desai's philosophy and BAIFF's success story can be popularised in the South Asian region and throughout the developing world, India would be a leader in rural development and the 50 years of its rural management would lend it credibility," Howard said.

Howard, whose love for the country has seen her travel to India 13 times, said that in her interviews with over 500 people in India for her book she was surprised to find that "not a single person had anything remotely unkind to say about Desai."

Desai, born in a humble farming family in Kosmda village of south Gujarat in 1920, decided on the advice of Gandhi to dedicate his life to rural India.

His pragmatic approach to solving the diverse problems that bedeviled the rural poor brought him national and international recognition including the Padma Shree in 1968 for rural upliftment and community development and the Ramon Magsaysay award in 1982.

He was also honoured by the Agricultural Society of Thailand for sustainable development of natural resources.

"India is blessed with many leaders, but the state of Gujarat should be proud to have two shining stars on its forehead — Gandhi and Desai — which it can project to the rest of the world," Howard said. — *India Abroad News Service*

Ray of hope for widows of Varanasi

By Kritivas Mukherjee

WHILE the controversy surrounding the film *Water* rages on, the government of eastern Indian state of West Bengal appears to have decided to spare a thought for the subject of the movie — the fate of the destitute Hindu widows in the northern holy city of Varanasi, most of whom are Bengalis.

The government is awaiting a report from the state Women's Commission on the lives of the widows of Varanasi. Once the report comes in, the government plans to announce a rehabilitation programme for the Bengali widows residing in the pilgrim town in northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

The state government, however, says its rehabilitation programme for the widows of Varanasi has nothing to do with the controversial film as the committee to study the widows was formed last year. The government's stance aims to negate allegations that it is politicising a social condition.

Varanasi, Vrindavan and Mathura, all of which are in Uttar Pradesh, are among the most sacred pilgrim towns for Hindus. It has been the social practice for centuries for socially ostracised and economically deprived Hindu widows to go to these towns and spend the rest of their lives there.

Director Deepa Mehta's film *Water* revolves round the lives of these widows and reportedly tries to throw light on the moral corruption that abounded in the name of religion in early 20th century Varanasi.

State Social Welfare Minister Biswanath Choudhury told IANS that the first part of the report on the widows was expected today. He said the three-member commission was carrying out a survey among Bengali widows from the state residing in Varanasi, Vrindavan and Mathura to ascertain their number and living conditions. The team is headed by state Women's Commission chairperson Bela Duttagupta.

Choudhury said the government would try to ascertain why, even in this day and age, these widows had to leave their homes and hearths and head for the pilgrim towns. "If it is found that some of them (widows) had been forced out of their homes so that landed property could be usurped, the government will take steps to give them their land back," he said. Official sources said the government's rehabilitation package also included self-employment programmes for interested widows.

Home rule will restore N. Ireland potential

By Penny MacRae

FOREIGN investment and tourism, which have powered the Irish Republic's economic transformation, will never take off in Northern Ireland unless home rule is restored to the province, say private economists, business leaders and academics from both sides of the border.

"If we go back into limbo land, the economy would continue to do all right, but we'd have no sense of direction and we wouldn't realise our full potential," said Nigel Smyth, director of the Confederation of British Industry in Belfast, one of 13 people interviewed by Reuters.

"Uncertainty is no good for business whether for existing business or bringing business and visitors in," he said.

Northern Ireland, its fortunes stunted by years of sectarian violence, has a long way to go to catch up with the Irish Republic whose economy is expected to grow by close to a blistering nine per cent this year.

Hopes soared that the province might become a smaller 'Celtic Tiger' with the establishment of a new power-sharing government in Belfast two months ago.

That scenario, however, now looks at risk following the British government's suspension of Northern Ireland's coalition of majority Protestants and minority Catholics on the grounds that the Irish Republican Army had failed to give a clear commitment to disarm.

While reinstatement of direct rule from London means only a return to the status quo, it sends a bad message abroad, according to those interviewed.

"It tells the world that once more we have political problems," said John Stringer, head of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce. "People interested in inward investment are mostly American and very sensitive to the political situation."

Northern Ireland's economy has been hamstrung for three decades by what have been known as "the troubles". But since the IRA began its ceasefire in 1994, its economy has experienced a remarkable transformation.

Inward investment has risen, home-grown enterprises have sprung up and many of the new firms offer hi-tech, good quality jobs — all of which has become known as the 'peace dividend'.

The peace process last year leading up to the opening of the elected assembly resulted in an unprecedented burst of foreign investment. "In the

environment of an active and dynamic peace process, half of all North American software projects that came to the UK in 1999 ended up in Northern Ireland," noted Ann Shaw, chairman of Northern Ireland's Institute of Directors.

"Northern Ireland at peace is one of the most attractive inward investment locations in the European Union with an excellent infrastructure and communications and one of the lowest operating cost bases in Europe," she said.

Northern Ireland's economy urgently needs foreign investment.

Average income is around 80 per cent of the British average. Unemployment at 6.6 per cent is significantly higher than the national rate of 4.5 per cent. And its dependence on subsidies — three billion pounds a year — puts in the per capita leagues of East Germany and Italy's poor south known as the Mezzogiorno.

None of those questioned felt a resumption of the violence that racked the British province before the 1994 ceasefire was likely. "I think it is quite clear neither community wants it to happen," said Smyth.

But if hostilities did start again, the economic impact could be considerable. "It would do incredible harm," said Bill Jeffrey, vice-chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses in Northern Ireland. "The business community has been very long suffering. To return to that violence would severely prejudice the economy's potential."

In contrast, the rewards of a durable peace could be enormous with tourism seen as one of the biggest winners. "It's only contributing around 1.6 per cent to GDP while in the Irish Republic, the contribution is six to seven per cent," said Smyth.

Peace would also give the province a better chance of emulating the success of the Irish Republic in luring more "new economy" industries. The province needs high-tech investment to replace its struggling "old economy" sectors such as textiles and manufacturing. Indeed, with the south experiencing skilled labour shortages, the north with its well-educated workforce, is well-placed to benefit.

While reducing the British security presence could pose some economic hardship for the province short-term, "those influences would be absolutely swamped by the positive impact from foreign direct investment, tourism and financial aid from overseas," said Jim Power, economist at the Bank of Ireland in Dublin. "And, of course, the overriding thing would be business and consumer confidence which would improve dramatically."



SHE HAS THE PULSE, HE THE WATCH: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid showing his new watch to Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri as they wait for the country's parliament members led by parliament chief Akbar Tanjung at the presidential palace yesterday. Wahid met parliament members to discuss the recent country economic and political issues. — Reuters

Indonesia's Darusman is a man in the hot seat

By Victor Tjahjadi

ATTORNEY-General Marzuki Darusman is the man in Indonesia's hot seat, handling five politically-explosive cases which could make or break him and the government's reform efforts, analysts said.

Under intense pressure at home and abroad for swift and fair solutions to all five cases, he is unlikely to make it unless he seeks and wins the support of major power blocs and those inside his own office, they warned.

A soft-spoken but hard-nosed career politician who has in the past admitted to presidential ambitions, Darusman, 55, has shown no sign of backing down.

The five cases involve former president Suharto's alleged corruption, massive human rights abuses in East Timor and in Aceh, the \$80 million Bank Bali scandal, and the central bank's \$11 billion inappropriate loans.

Bambang Wijoyanto, of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, said Darusman will need iron nerves and perceived political neutrality if he is to get anywhere.

"He is sitting in the hot seat, so he must be able to take a stand. He has to just work with the president and cope with the messy legal system which he unfortunately inherited and try to change things from there," Wijoyanto said.

Darusman "must become as strong and independent" as US Attorney-General Janet Reno.

The odds against the cases boosting rather than busting Darusman's political career, are also weighted by Indonesia's complex politics, said political analyst Kusnanto Anggoro of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"He has a huge commitment to solve these problems ... but commitment alone is not enough since he is still hassled by political constraints from within the

government and his own office," Anggoro said.

"Let's use Suharto's case as an example ... Marzuki has reopened Suharto's case and named him as a suspect, but President Abdurrahman Wahid recently said that he would pardon Suharto if he returns the money," Anggoro said Darusman "needs enormous support from people in his own office" since formulation of policies to solve the cases will be decided by "second echelon men."

The eldest son of Suryono Darusman, a former Indonesian

ambassador to Mexico, Russia and Switzerland, the attorney-general is widely-respected as a reform-minded and critical human rights campaigner who headed the National Commission Human Rights before taking office in October.

But many question his long-standing affiliation with Suharto's one-time political machine, the Golkar party — despite having been excluded from the party for a five year period until 1997, for daring to air his own presidential ambitions.

Wijoyanto noted that Darusman still does not have the cooperation and support of either his own office or the national police.

And he questioned Darusman's ability to "break away from his own political ties," referring to his power-brokering position in Golkar as head of the party's faction in the upper house of parliament.

"Keep in mind that he started of as a politician and thus his attitude is that of a politician, and if he succeeds ... it could be used as an investment for his political career," he said. Meanwhile foreign envoys beat a track to Darusman's door, stressing they are relying on him to deal firmly with corruption and uphold the supremacy of law, particularly over the human rights violation in East Timor.

Since taking office, Darusman has met with US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, UN Secretary-General Kofi

Annan, US Ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, and British Deputy Foreign Minister John Battle.

Their message — speed up economic and political reform and uphold human rights by bringing those guilty to court.

After an Indonesian investigation named six Indonesian generals including powerful General Wiranto — in a report on last year's East Timor violence, Darusman said his office was "empowered to continue the investigation."

"And to eventually ... to indict and to bring the matter to the human rights court that will be established."

Anggoro and Wijoyanto said if Darusman pursues his goal and perhaps one day sits in Wahid's chair "he would have to get enormous support from all sides, particularly from Indonesia's Muslim community and the military."

Hrithik Roshan: All you asked for... is here!

HE is being hailed as the new star of Bollywood after just one movie.

That is the kind of charm and magnetism that Hrithik Roshan exudes in his debut movie directed by his eminent filmmaker father Rakesh Roshan, *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai*, which is credited with being the first real hit that Bollywood, or the Hindi film industry, has had in the past year.

Hrithik — the name refers to purity of the soul — seems to have all the qualities that Indian viewers want in their screen heroes. He is tall, ruggedly handsome, acts well and is a good dancer to boot. It is the last attribute — that was on ample display in the chartbusting title track of *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai* and throughout the film's song and dance sequences — that has particularly won over finicky audiences.

Hrithik Roshan grew up in Bombay, watching the early movies of his father, who was a leading man of the 1970s, before taking to helping him on the sets at the age of 14. He helped out director Rakesh Roshan in five of

his movies — *Khel*, *King Uncle*, *Karobar*, *Karan Arjun* and *Koyla*, learning everything there was to learn from the technical crew members with whom he worked closely.

"I have slept, eaten and worked with the crew, always travelled by train with them, never stayed in five-star hotels where the cast and dad stayed. That experience has taught me to value the contribution of each member of the unit," he is quoted as saying.

In fact, this unassuming star-kid, who claims to have little interest in clothes, his hair or his general appearance, says it took him time to settle down into his new status of a star-actor, so strong were his "assistant instincts".

Hrithik Roshan admits he has always been keen on joining the film industry but says it wasn't till he went to college that he discussed his plans with his parents. His father initially dissuaded him from becoming an actor, saying it was an unstable profession where "luck plays a vital role in shaping the course of



ALL-IN-ONE ACTOR: Hrithik with co-star Ameesha Patel in *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai*

your career."

Hrithik Roshan, however, remained committed to his goal and managed to persuade his father to let him join acting classes, promising him "I am your son, I won't let you down."

Hrithik was close to bagging his first movie when filmmaker Shekhar Kapur spotted him on the sets of *Koyla* and approached him for his next film *Ta Ra Rum Pum*. Hrithik asked for four months to prepare for the role but when he was ready to proceed with the project, Kapur had taken up the international film *Elizabeth* and shelved *Ta Ra Rum Pum*.

Rakesh Roshan was in the meantime finalising the script for *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai* and, after toying with the idea of starring top Bollywood heroes Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan in the lead role, decided to make the movie a launchpad for his son. Hrithik refused the role at first but came around to it eventually.

The movie is a love story that Rakesh Roshan describes as a thriller and a romance. It is about an aspiring singer who falls in love with a rich girl and has its

share of action in the form of drug smugglers, gang killings and a murder mystery. Its fabulous locations — islands off Thailand and New Zealand — have added to the glamour of the movie.

Hrithik Roshan says the most challenging shot in the film was an underwater session in Krabi islands, near Phuket, Thailand, when he held his breath longer than he could and was literally screaming for air when rescue divers reached him.

Hrithik Roshan, whose impressive debut has made him one of the hottest properties in Bollywood, says he is looking for a "great story and an honest person making it" for his future projects. He has already signed up several prestigious films including *Karan Johar's* second venture after the 1998 blockbuster *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, titled *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, in which he pairs with another newcomer Kareena Kapoor in a story of three generations. Then there is Vidhu Chopra's *Mission Kashmir* where he plays a militant and *Fiza*. — *India Abroad News Service*

We don't find any fault with president, says BJP

NEW DELHI — In an apparent damage-control exercise, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has said it respected President K. R. Narayanan and did not find any fault with him for his views on the commission to review the constitution.

"We don't find any fault with the president and we respect him," party vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy told reporters here on Monday, a few days after the party journal *BJP Today* published an article entitled who is above politics? Critical of the president's views on the review of the constitution.

The article said the presidential address to both houses of parliament had contained a proposal to review the constitution and this was debated and passed by parliament.

40kg heroin seized; three arrested

MADRAS — Three persons including two Sri Lankans, have been arrested and heroin weighing 39.5kg, valued at over Rs400 million, was seized from them by officers of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) from a car at Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu.

NCB zonal director T. Rajendran said here on Monday that all the three were produced before a court and remanded to judicial custody.

Rajendran said based on specific information, two persons, who were travelling by a private bus from the city to Udangudi, were intercepted by the NCB sleuths last night.

On questioning, the two — Mohammed Nowman (37) and Mohammed Tacharia (38) — admitted to carrying the contraband to be handed over to another person at Thisayanvilai bus stand.

The two also produced one black colour zipper suitcase kept in the bus dicky and a green trolley suitcase kept behind the last row of the bus.

On examination of these bags, the officers found 40 packets of heroin with foreign markings.

In the follow-up action, the third person, who was awaiting delivery of the contraband, was also nabbed, Rajendran said.

Cong. members behind Sonia: says Reddy

HYDERABAD — Senior Congress leader K. Vijayabhaskar Reddy yesterday asserted that all party-men were solidly behind Congress president Sonia Gandhi in her resolve to fight BJP, which, along with its allies, "was trying to impose its hidden agenda in the garb of constitution review".

Taking strong exception to the formation of the constitutional review committee, Reddy told reporters "this is sowing suspicion in the minds of the people that BJP is trying to fulfil its hidden agenda", he said.

"The true colours of BJP are now getting exposed and the people have understood its ulterior motive to tamper with the ideals incorporated in the constitution after a great deal of deliberation and thought by intellectuals", the Congress working committee member said.

Alleging that some disgruntled Congressmen, who left the party, are raising the foreign origin issue again at the instance of BJP to browbeat Sonia, he said it was a "dead issue" as Sonia was elected with a huge majority to the Bellary and Amethi parliamentary constituencies in the last elections.

No end in sight for doctors' strike

MADRAS — The strike by medics in Tamil Nadu entered the sixth day yesterday with the post-graduate doctors and house surgeons observing a silent protest in support of their 16-point charter of demands including two major demands of enhancement of stipend rate and banning sanction to any new private medical college in Tamil Nadu.

In Madras, the medics tied their mouths with clothes and formed a line and stood for nearly one hour to observe their silent protest for which a decision was taken last night by the executive committee of the Tamil Nadu medical students, house surgeons, dental and post-graduate doctors association spearheading the indefinite strike. The medics also took out a procession.

The association representatives have been invited for talks with Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi today to end the deadlock. — PTI

Exit polls predict absolute majority for BJP

13 killed in final round of staggered elections ★ Clashes, booth-capturing attempt in Bihar

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's ruling Hindu nationalists and their allies will win an absolute majority in two politically strategic states where elections were held yesterday, an exit poll said.

The exit survey was conducted by India's national television broadcaster on voting held in four states in the final round of staggered state elections.

It showed Vajpayee's BJP party and its allies would pick up 195 of the 324 assembly seats in eastern Bihar state while the ruling RJD party would bag only 64 seats there.

Sonia Gandhi's main opposition

Congress party was likely to trail with 20 seats, it said.

The first results are expected by Friday.

The exit poll also predicted a clean sweep by a BJP-led local alliance in Orissa state, giving the electoral partners 108 of the 147 legislative seats in the coastal province which was ravaged by a killer cyclone last October.

Another BJP-led coalition would retain their hold in northern Haryana state while the legislature in far east Manipur, a politically insignificant state, could see a hung verdict, the exit poll predicted.

At least 13 people were killed yesterday as the final round of staggered state elections wound up.

The autonomous Election Commission, however, said that despite the bloodletting the turnout of voters was up to 75 per cent yesterday.

Bihar police chief K.K. Jacob said that seven people had been killed at a polling booth in Majhulia village, about 250 kilometres (156 miles) north of the state capital Patna.

"Some men were trying to storm the booth to favour an independent candidate," Jacob said. "Police had to open fire and seven people were killed."

Another woman was killed in a clash between rival party activists in northeast Bihar.

The poll-related toll reached 10 in Bihar when gunmen on motorcycles sprayed bullets at a balloting centre killing two voters, officials said in Patna.

Police, who were out in thousands, were under shoot-to-kill orders for all three phases of voting in Bihar, where 30 people were killed in poll-related violence during the first two stages.

Re-polling was also held at 110 voting centres after the Election Commission found wide-

spread violence and vote-rigging.

As well as Bihar, Haryana, Manipur and Orissa states went to the polls.

In Manipur, three paramilitary troops died and seven others, including four civilians, were injured when guerrillas from the Kuki tribe ambushed a vehicle carrying a candidate from the state's ruling party.

The rebels staged the attack about 15kms east of the capital Imphal, a police spokesman said, adding that at least six incidents of booth capturing had been reported from the state.

"Due to a dearth of troops, we were unable to provide adequate security

cover in many of the vulnerable and remote centres where there is a considerable rebel presence," Manipur police chief L. Jugeshwar Singh said.

A poll conducted by *India Today* magazine indicated decisive victories for the BJP and its allies in Bihar, Orissa and Haryana over the incumbent state governments.

Tiny Manipur is not considered politically significant.

Some 96 million voters were eligible to take part in the state polls, which were staggered over three voting days to try to ensure adequate security.



PEACE BUS: A member of the Indian Border Security Force standing guard on the Indian side of the Wagha border that separates India and Pakistan yesterday on the first anniversary of the Delhi-Lahore bus service. The bus service was started by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee one year ago as a goodwill gesture.

Cinema hall attacked for screening of 'Hey Ram'

CALCUTTA — Youth Congress activists yesterday attacked a cinema hall screening Kamal Hassan's film *Hey Ram* in continued protest by the party's frontal wings against the film even as West Bengal Youth Congress leadership announced it planned to move the court seeking to stop its exhibition in the state.

Nearly 150 slogan-shouting Youth Congress activists gathered in front of a South Calcutta Theatre where the film was being screened and pelted stones, breaking window panes and lights and damaging decorative plants in protest against its portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in bad light.

The protesters tried to storm the theatre, but were prevented by the police. At this, they attacked the policemen, injuring three of them. The show, however, went on uninterrupted.

Seven Youth Congress activists were arrested in connection with the violence, police said.

Meanwhile, Youth Congress state president Subhankar Sarkar told reporters here that his organisation was consulting lawyers for legal action in a bid to stop screening of the film.

He said Youth Congress activists had been asked to abjure violent protests against the film.

"We have directed our boys not to indulge in violence over the screening of the film. We are consulting lawyers.

"We will take legal action, if necessary, for stopping the screening".

On Monday, activists of the Chhatra Parishad, students' wing of the Congress, held a demonstration in front of a theatre in north Calcutta where the film was being screened.

Later, the group marched in a procession to the nearby Shyampur police station and submitted a memorandum which alleged that the movie, revolving around the life and times of Gandhi, contained 'unsavoury things' about the Father of the Nation.

It also said comments on Bengali poet Jibanananda Das were 'objectionable'.

The film starring Kamal Hassan, Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukherjee was released last week in the city.

Expressing concern at the serial attack on theatres, eastern India Motion Picture Association (EIMPA)'s exhibition section chairman Pulak Mukherjee said the organisation's office-bearers would meet tomorrow to review the situation. — PTI

Lawyers urged to call off strike over foreign attorneys

NEW DELHI — The Law Commission has urged lawyers to call off a strike over the proposed entry of foreign attorneys and legal consultants into India as part of a liberalisation of trade in services.

The commission, headed by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, met Bar Council of India members on February 18 to address lawyers' concerns over the proposal.

The commission hoped the strike, set for tomorrow, is called off.

Lawyers have protested the proposed entry of foreigners into the Indian legal profession. The issue is part of a working paper which was prepared by the Law Commission in connection with a review of the Advocates Act, 1961, the commission said in a statement.

"The Law Commission does not see itself in an adversary position (*vis-a-vis* lawyers) and its main concern is to obtain the views of all concerned about its proposals," the statement said.

The commission told the Bar Council that it would move ahead on the working paper only after May 2000 after it receives the opinions of the council and other "interested parties".

It will then be sent to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs for the govern-

ment to act on the commission's recommendations.

It said it had circulated the working paper some time in August last year to legal bodies but had received no response, including from those "who are now agitating on the proposals".

In the paper, the Law Commission had pointed out that India was a part of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and within a period of five years from January 1, 1995, it faced the obligation of entering into periodic negotiations on liberalisation.

The Law Commission referred to the guidelines prepared by the International Bar Association with which the executive committee of the Bar Association of India was broadly in agreement.

The executive committee is of the view that the Indian legal system ought to integrate internationally under an appropriate regulatory system.

The system would ensure a general reciprocity of rights and non-discrimination.

Foreign lawyers and legal firms should be subject to the same disciplinary jurisdiction as Indian lawyers; and there should be greater opportunities for the future development of the entire legal profession in India.

Even under the existing law,

subject to the reciprocal arrangements with other countries, the foreign lawyers can be admitted as advocates in India, the Law Commission said.

The Law Commission suggested safeguards which could be adopted, noting that GATS allowed liberalisation to take place with due respect for national policy objectives and levels of development of individual members.

There shall be appropriate flexibility for developed country members for opening fewer sectors, liberalising fewer types of legal transactions, progressively extending markets and attaching conditions while making access to their markets available to foreign services suppliers.

The commission has also pointed out that most of the law firms in India are family controlled and very few firms provide "single window services," meaning services which not only include legal but also accountancy, financial and other advice to their clients.

"No one should assume that Law Commission of India is less concerned about the welfare of legal profession in India. Its only concern is that the legal community should prepare itself for the future challenges," the commission said. — *India Abroad News Service*

Japan issues fresh appeal to sign test ban treaty

NEW DELHI — Ryutaro Hashimoto, senior foreign policy adviser to Japanese Premier Keizo Obuchi, issued a fresh appeal yesterday for India to sign a global nuclear test ban treaty, but said the issue should not dominate bilateral ties.

Hashimoto was quoted by Indian news agencies as saying that relations between Tokyo and New Delhi would make "remarkable progress" if India ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

"If India is to take this symbolic decision, it will be able to join the international stream for non-proliferation... which would be mutually beneficial for India and also help in further strengthening bilateral relations with Japan," Hashimoto said.

However, he added that there was a "permanent desire" in Japan that relations with India should not revolve "on this single issue."

The indications from Tokyo are that India's signing of the CTBT would allow Japan to lift the remaining sanctions imposed after India's shock nuclear tests in May 1998.

Hashimoto, who was prime minister when the tests were conducted, also stressed that tensions between India and Pakistan — which conducted tit-for-tat tests days after India — were cause for concern throughout the world and not just in South Asia. — *AFP*

Bangla official language of W. Bengal from April

CALCUTTA — After umpteenth false starts, the West Bengal government has once again announced a deadline for adopting Bangla as the official language in the eastern state — Bengali New Year's Day in April.

Though the necessary notification on the official language status exists and Bangla is used in some government departments, English continues to be the language of official business for all practical purposes.

"But from Poila Baishak (the Bengali New Year), the use of Bangla would be made mandatory at all levels of the administration and for all sorts of communication," Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya said.

All bills, instructions and government transactions would be in Bangla once the relevant 1961 law is fully implemented.

Talk of adopting Bangla as the official language has been on for some time now.

But the fact that the state bureaucracy comprises mainly non-Bengali officers held up the matter.

Over the years the number of Bengali bureaucrats has declined, further hampering the state government's plans to officially adopt Bangla.

But this time the government

seems to have taken care of that problem by announcing that concessions would be considered in the case of non-Bengali bureaucrats.

However, the state has already made arrangements for training non-Bengali administrative staff and police officers for improving their Bangla reading and writing skills.

The Rabindra Bharati University in the city would house the language coaching centre for officials.

To ensure that use of Bangla is all-pervasive, the state government is also seeking to conduct proceedings in the Calcutta High Court in the language.

However, it appears headed for a tussle on the issue with the Supreme Court, which has shot down the proposal.

The government says it will see Bangla through in the high court also as the apex court does not have any constitutional authority to reject the state's proposal.

Bhattacharya announced that the government would soon constitute a committee comprising academics and scientists to suggest ways to make the use of Bangla more extensive in government functioning.

This committee will supplement the work of an already

existing official committee for the purpose.

He said Bangla was already in use in official work in the districts.

According to official sources, apart from having to deal with the case of non-Bengali bureaucrats, the state government would also have to tackle the problem of shortage of stationery in Bangla in its efforts to establish it as the official language.

There is a shortage of Bangla typewriters and computers. The state government wants to take the help of Bangladesh, which has Bangla as its official language, in this regard.

The state government decided to go ahead with making Bangla the official language after the demand was made by eminent Bengalis led by novelist Sunil Gangopadhyay, who perceived a threat to the language from English and Hindi.

As part of that 'Save Bangla' mission, the government also changed the name of Calcutta to Kolkata, as it is colloquially called, through a unanimous resolution adopted by the state assembly last year.

However, the new name is yet to take effect as the proposal is pending with the federal Home Ministry for ratification. — *India Abroad News Service*

Police case filed against Nadar in sex scam

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — A police case has been filed against former Kerala transport minister Neelalohithadan Nadar on the basis of a complaint of sexual harassment submitted to Chief Minister E. K. Nayanar by senior woman bureaucrat Nalini Netto.

Considering the nature of the charge against Nadar, who quit as minister following the furore caused by the sex scandal, investigations into the case have been entrusted to the crime branch, a top police officer said.

The police probe, headed by Additional Director-General R. S. Mooshahari, will be conducted along with the judicial probe already ordered into the case.

The complaint, handed over to Nayanar on February 9, was passed on to State Chief Secretary M. Mohan Kumar who in turn forwarded it to Director-General of Police B.S. Sastry in keeping with a Supreme Court

ruling that complaints of sexual harassment be handed over to investigating agencies.

The police case was filed under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code which says a person using criminal force with the intent of outraging a woman's modesty should be punished with a prison term of up to two years.

Federal Minister of State for Law O. Rajagopal has joined the legion of politicians and prominent citizens demanding Nadar's prosecution. He said it was not fair that certain quarters felt Nadar's resignation had brought the episode to an end.

"It is not an issue that can be resolved with the resignation of the accused," he said.

Advocate-General M.K. Damodaran advised the government to get a police case registered under Section 354 even though Nalini did not ask for any such action in her complaint to



NALINI: A matter of honour



NADAR: In the soup

caught in technicalities given the serious nature of the charge against Nadar.

Nalini's charge, which has rocked Kerala's polity, has brought the focus back on the Supreme Court guidelines on setting up complaint committees to deal with cases of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Despite the apex court verdict in 1998, not much has happened in Kerala with regard to setting up complaint cells at offices to deal with sexual harassment cases, according to legal sources. Now that a senior woman bureaucrat's charge has

resulted in a minister stepping down, the authorities are likely to consider setting up a complaint cell more seriously, they added.

One reason cited for not setting up the complaint cells is the likelihood of the forum being misused by women against their colleagues.

According to state Women's Commission chairperson Sugathakumari: "There is anxiety in the minds of employees that frivolous complaints would be made to settle scores."

The Women's Commission is, therefore, planning to convene a meeting of department heads and representatives of the employees' organisations to remove apprehensions.

The Kerala High Court has, meanwhile, adjourned hearing on a petition asking it to direct the state government to implement the Supreme Court's guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace. — *IANS*

Moroccan PM begins 4-day visit

NEW DELHI — Moroccan Prime Minister Abderehmane Youssefi began a four-day official visit to India yesterday with a call for closer ties.

"India is one of Morocco's biggest partners. I look forward to further strengthening our relations with India which we consider an area of great importance," Youssefi told reporters at the presidential palace here.

Youssefi arrived late on Monday, accompanied by a top-level business delegation.

During his visit, Youssefi is scheduled to meet President K.R. Narayanan, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and other senior leaders.

India and Morocco are expected to sign four agreements on cooperation in agriculture, communications and transport and establishing a joint business council. — *AFP*

CPM leader offers all help to shoot 'Water' in W. Bengal

VARANASI — A top Communist leader said yesterday the government of West Bengal will provide full security to the director of controversial film, *Water*, Deepa Mehta if she intends to shoot the film in the state. "The West Bengal government will extend all help and security for the shooting of *Water*," deputy leader of the Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) in lower house of parliament Basudeb Acharya said here.

Referring to the threats given by the pro-Hindu *Sangh Parivar* outfits that they would not allow the shooting of the film anywhere in the country, he said: "No one would be allowed to take the law in his hands in West Bengal".

"They (Sangh activists) will be strictly dealt with if they try to disturb the law and order situation in the state," he said.

Condemning the recent vandalism over the filming of *Water* in Varanasi, he said it was an "attack on the freedom of expression and democracy."

HC suspends order convicting former minister

MADRAS — The Madras High Court yesterday suspended a special judge's order convicting former Tamil Nadu minister T. M. Selvaganapathy in the "Pleasant Stay Hotel" case and sentenced him to one year rigorous imprisonment on February 2. Giving the interim direction, Justice I. David Christian also granted bail to the former AIADMK minister on furnishing a bond for Rs2,000 and surety for a like amount.

In his appeal against special judge V. Radhakrishnan's order, Selvaganapathy contended that it was against law and in the evidence, produced by the directorate of vigilance and anti-corruption, was based on misconceptions of facts and circumstances.

He alleged that the trial judge had acted upon surmises, general impressions and imaginary presumptions and concluded that he was guilty of conspiring with Rakesh Mittal and Palai M. Shanmugham, promoters of the hotel. The governor's order to prosecute him was also illegal and vitiated the entire trial and had erred both in law and in facts, he contended.

Nayanar asks PSC to clarify allegation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — The state Public Service Commission (PSC) had been asked to clarify reports in a section of the press that there were defects in documents it furnished before the Justice K. J. Joseph Commission over the creamy layer question in backward class job reservation, Chief Minister E. K. Nayanar told the state assembly yesterday.

Replying to a calling attention by Nalakat Soopy Indian Union of Muslim League (IUML) on the issue, Nayanar said the government's policy was to assure maximum benefits to backward classes without compromising on the recent Supreme Court verdict on the creamy layer issue.

"When the matter was brought to its notice, the PSC had informed the government it had not received any written complaints regarding defects in details provided to the Joseph Commission and that such allegations were baseless. Still, further clarifications had been sought from the PSC," the chief minister said.

The government had set up two commissions in the wake of the apex court asking the state to exclude the creamy layer from the ambit of job quota.

While the single-member Justice K. K. Narendran Commission had been asked to look into the reservation issue, with special focus on the creamy layer, a three-member panel, headed by Justice Narendran, was asked to ascertain community-wise representation in state services, he added.

Gujarat govt not to withdraw RSS circular: Minister

GANDHINAGAR — The Gujarat government has no plans to withdraw its circular, lifting the ban on government employees participating in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activities in the state, Minister of State for Home Haren Pandya said yesterday.

"The state government had taken the decision after extensive deliberations and there was no question of going back on its decision," the minister said here.

The opposition Congress on Monday staged demonstrations and tried to 'gherao' the assembly building on the opening day of the budget session, demanding continuation of the ban. The party legislators also disrupted the governor's address in the state assembly. — PTI

Rekha says her biography is 'completely false'

NEW DELHI — The author of a controversial biography on Hindi film actress Rekha says the book is a true account of her life, but Rekha herself has dismissed the biographical work as completely false.

The former diva of Hindi cinema who had her heyday in the 1970s and early 1980s and made a comeback to films last year with Sawan Kumar Tak's *Mother*, however, says she has no plans to sue the writer Mohan Deep for the biography, titled *Eureka*, even though she never allowed him to chronicle her life.

"Those who know me will realise how his account is completely false. I am totally different from his description. I am not a saint that I shouldn't be hurt by his impertinence. The

only reason I am not going to the court is that I believe in divine justice. He will get his dues sooner or later," the angry actress told the *Screen* trade weekly.

The biography, which is Deep's third after his writings on yesteryear screen heroines Meena Kumari and Madhubala, takes an incisive look at Rekha's life through a series of interviews with film personalities and other people who have been associated with her.

Deep, who claims to have done extensive research on the actress before writing the biography, told the *Asian Age* daily that "I have researched every bit of news and have proof to back it. It is my challenge to anyone in the

industry to prove any word in that book wrong."

Deep says his research revealed that Rekha's life was "more hot and vibrant than I had imagined it to be" and discloses that he chose her for his third book because "I think she is one of the most colourful actresses in Bollywood."

He points out that since he was "accused by several people of writing biographies of only those who are no more I decided to pick someone alive who is worth the trouble."

"Her life incorporates drama, love, suicide attempts, innumerable love affairs and there is even talk of her being a lesbian."

"I couldn't think of a more interesting person to focus on," he observes.

Rekha, who successfully co-starred with actors Amitabh Bachchan, Vinod Khanna, Jeetendra and Dharmendra during the peak of her career, was romantically linked to Bachchan and even appeared with him and his wife Jaya Bachchan in the 1981 love triangle *Silsila* that was rumoured to be true to life.

She later married a Delhi-based businessman who committed suicide, thus ending their brief marriage.

Deep claims Rekha had informed him through her secretary that she would cooperate with him by shooting photographs for the book if he would let her see a copy of it before it was released.

"Naturally no writer worth his salt would have done it. Nor

did I," he declared to the *Asian Age*. Rekha, who is back in action on Bollywood sets having recently completed *Bulandi* with Anil Kapoor and Raveena Tandon, which was among the first releases of the new year, has been quoted as saying that she does not want to give importance to the writer by suing him because the book "does not make any difference to me".

The actress is currently shooting for Prakash Mehra's *Meri Biwi Mujhe Chahiye* with Naseeruddin Shah and Arshad Warsi.

Still stunning despite being past her prime, Rekha last week featured on an online contest's list of the top ten most beautiful women of India. — *India Abroad News Service*



REKHA: Hurt and angry

'Cotton Mary' premiered in Bombay

BOMBAY — *Cotton Mary*, the new film from the Merchant-Ivory stable, had its Indian premiere in Bombay yesterday at a fund-raising event in aid of the cyclone-affected children in Orissa.

"We are premiering *Cotton Mary* in various cities of India to raise funds for various causes," said Ismail Merchant, who with American James Ivory, makes up the renowned production team that is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

Merchant said the team, which has generally worked in conjunction with screenwriter Ruth Praver Jhabvala, owed its success to the authors whose books it made into films.

"Our roots are our writers. Of course our actors are important, but without our writers we could not have made the films we did."

"In our writers and actors we have had the benefit of the best and the greatest talent," he said.

The literary adaptations tackled by Ivory-Merchant



THE TEAM: Ismail Merchant, Greta Scacchi and James Ivory

include Henry James' *The Europeans*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* and E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*.

"I am proud to be an Indian. As an Indian I have brought the two worlds — India and the West — together," Merchant said.

Cotton Mary is set in post-British colonial India of the 1950s and is the story of two Anglo-Indian sisters and their

tangled and complicated interactions with a British family stationed in Kerala.

Merchant said the film, which had its world premiere in London in November, took nine weeks to shoot and cost \$3.5 million.

"The film was shot entirely in Kerala. It was a wonderful experience working in Kerala."

Starring Greta Scacchi and Madhur Jaffrey, *Cotton Mary*

will premiere in Paris on March 8 and in New York on March 10.

The team's next project will be an adaptation of Trinidadian author V.S. Naipaul's first novel, *Mystic Masseur*.

"It will be shot beginning September in Trinidad and is based on the Indian community settled there. It will have a budget of five million dollars," he said. — *AFP*

Kerala Cong. leaders fight over unity plan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — One of the factions of the Kerala Congress has developed serious cracks over a plan to unite the four splinter groups.

Kerala Congress (B) vice-president Thomas Kuthiravattom says he has quit the party following a difference of opinion over its merger with the Kerala Congress (Jacob). Party president R. Balakrishna Pillai, however, maintains Kuthiravattom was expelled.

According to Pillai, the expulsion followed a decision to this effect by the party's executive committee as Kuthiravattom opposed a merger with the Kerala Congress faction led by T.M. Jacob.

Kuthiravattom feels the merger move is against the wishes and interests of the majority of party workers. Pillai counters the view saying Kuthiravattom has of late been isolated in the party and there are no takers for his stance.

Kuthiravattom says the majority of the party workers wanted to return to the mother organisation, the Kerala Congress faction led by K.M. Mani.

A meeting of Kerala Congress (B) leaders who agree with that view is to be held in Kottayam on February 27 to take a final decision.

Pillai says he stands for the unity of all four Kerala Congress factions, including the one led by



R. BALAKRISHNA PILLAI: 'Unity efforts will continue'

Education Minister P.J. Joseph which belongs to the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF).

"I have not approached either Mani or Jacob for merger talks. Kuthiravattom was entrusted with the task. He first held talks with Jacob and finalised a merger formula but he backtracked later," says Pillai, adding that he does not subscribe to the Kerala Congress (M) stand that the Jacob faction should be kept out of the unified party.

Observers say Kuthiravattom will return to the Kerala Congress (M) while the factions led by Pillai and Jacob would merge.

Pillai feels the merger of all four factions will result in the

birth of "a decisive political force". He says though the Joseph group may take some time to fall in line, the other three factions in the opposition could unite.

Pointing out that Mani seeks to keep the Jacob faction out of the united party, Pillai says: "But I am of the view that keeping Jacob out will not be in the interest of the party. Anyhow, my efforts towards unity will continue."

Reports today said Pillai's son and film actor Ganesan had of late been playing a key role in the unity talks and would enter politics with the launch of the unified party. — *India Abroad News Service*

Disasters hit 56m every year

NEW DELHI — Some 56 million Indians are hit by disaster each year but there is no long-term policy to prepare for and manage these natural and man-made calamities, according to a report released yesterday.

Policy makers, parliamentarians and the media were criticised in the report for paying too little attention to disasters, and poor coordination between government departments and civil society was blamed for ineffective responses when they strike. "India Disaster Report — towards a policy initiative", launched by the aid agency Oxfam and Oxford University Press, is a 385-page compilation of contributions by over 100 experts, including academics, government officials and field-level activists.

Oxfam said in a statement that, on average, disasters in India kill 5,063 people, affect more than 56 million people and cost some \$1.88 billion every year. "In many Indian states life is caught between the violent swings of nature," it said.

Floods hit 11.2 per cent of the land and 28 per cent is hit by drought.

More than half the land is vulnerable to earthquakes and the 7,516km coastline is whipped by cyclones that pummel the eastern coast state of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Last year nearly 10,000 people were killed when a "super cyclone" devastated the impoverished eastern state of Orissa.

The report's editors said in an introductory chapter that the Indian government's blueprint for disaster response, the Contingency Action Plan for Natural Calamities, was more reactive than preventative, emphasising relief rather than disaster reduction. — *Reuters*

Stripped of NSG cover, VIPs will lose palatial houses too

NEW DELHI — After being divested of the National Security Guards (NSG) cover, a dozen-odd VIPs are set to lose their palatial government accommodation as well.

Even those who continue to get NSG cover may not be entitled to a free house any more. Sources say the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is sending a detailed note to the Ministry of Urban Affairs asking it to cancel the allotment of government accommodation to all those who have been provided with it on the grounds of security alone.

The MHA's request is being sent as these VIPs were given accommodation on an out-of-turn basis on its recommendations from time to time.

Six former federal ministers — H. K. L. Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar, Jagdish Tytler, Arjun Singh, S. B. Chavan and Matang Singh — who are neither MPs nor hold any position in the government will get eviction notices shortly.

Incidentally, they all belong to the Congress and were given government accommodation.

Buta Singh and Rajesh Pilot who have also lost their NSG cover will, however, continue to retain their houses as they are MPs of the Lok Sabha. Pilot may be asked to vacate the ministerial bungalow and move over to a smaller house.

The MHA has also made it clear that even those who continue to get the NSG cover will have to fend for themselves for a stay.

Those who fall in this category include former Haryana chief minister Bhajan Lal, former Youth Congress chief M. S. Bitta and editor of a leading Hindi daily Ashwini Mimma.

The MHA feels that they need not stay in Delhi

at government expense for doing their work. If they want to stay here, they will have to hire their private accommodation, goes the argument.

It is, however, not yet clear whether chief ministers of some of the terrorist-prone states like Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab who enjoy NSG cover and have been given government accommodation in the capital, will be asked to surrender the same or not.

Jayalalitha and Kalyan Singh continue to get the NSG cover. But they have not been given houses.

Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh, Mayawati (Bahujan Samaj Party), and Home Minister L. K. Advani are under the NSG cover. But they are entitled to government accommodation as MPs.

One of those who gets NSG cover and is not an MP said that the PM's intervention was being sought alleging that the MHA is handling the issue in a "vindictive" manner.

"The NSG cover was given as we took some unpleasant decisions."

"Now it's being made out as if we did all that to enjoy some benefits," said a senior politician who is still under the NSG cover.

But the MHA is going ahead. It has also decided that static guards will not be provided to those who do not provide guard room to the security personnel in multi-storeyed buildings or their places of stay.

It has also been made clear that they will not be given privileges in the name of security such as driving their cars right up to the tarmac at airports. — *By arrangement with The Indian Express*

CVC asks for details on defence deals

NEW DELHI — The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) yesterday called for written submissions from serving defence officials and others who may have information or suggestions regarding major defence deals since 1985-86.

Asserting that highest priority was being given to the investigations sought by the Defence Ministry, a CVC statement here said the commission was anxious to submit its report to the government as early as possible.

Stating that early comments and suggestions would be appreciated, the commission statement said serving officers in the defence forces may give their observations after informing their immediate superiors so that there is no violation of the conduct rules.

The CVC has directed that written submissions should be sent to the commission secretary, S. N. P. N. Sinha.

The CVC investigations would cover the allegations of presence of agents in all identified major defence procurement decisions since 1985-86 after the then government had taken a decision abolishing the role of middlemen, the statement said. The investigation would cover all details pertaining to specific instances cited in the course of discussions in parliament and allegations levelled in the writ petition in Delhi High Court on the purchase of spares for the navy for over a decade.

While the CVC investigations will cover specific cases that have been referred to by the Ministry of Defence, many people may have information and ideas about specific instances covered by the CVC investigations, which they may like to bring to the notice of the CVC, the commission statement said.

The statement made it clear the submissions

could lead to the present system of defence procurement being reviewed and improved in order to plug loopholes and weak points.

The CVC statement apparently signalled that the commission has started its probe into the major defence deals since 1985-86 which include the staggering Rs63.30 billion deal for purchase of 30 multi-role jet fighters from Russia and purchase of Mig-29 aircraft and Mirage 2,000 jets from France.

The other major deals likely to come under joint CVC-CBI and Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) probe would include purchase of warships and spares worth billions of dollars from Russia.

Defence Minister George Fernandes recently ordered the investigation into all major defence purchases since 1985-86 to unearth any wrongdoing, such as the use of middlemen which has been banned by the government.

The CVC said the present system of procurement for defence may be reviewed in order to plug loopholes.

Fernandes has said in published remarks that the probe would set at rest doubts in arms contracts, noting allegations aired in parliament about charges of kickbacks in defence deals and that Rs300 billion had been spent on unnecessary purchases in the past.

He said the 1985-86 cut-off year had been decided because the decision to bar middlemen in defence deals was taken in the wake of the controversy surrounding the Bofors field gun deal, signed in 1986.

The controversy over the Bofors deal erupted in 1987 with allegations that the Swedish arms maker had paid bribes to middlemen to win the \$1.3 billion contract to supply Howitzer guns to the Indian Army. — *PTI, India Abroad News Service*

Jealous wife masterminds graphic designer's murder

NEW DELHI — A 27-year-old graphic designer was found battered to death in west Delhi in a sensational murder that police says was masterminded by a jealous wife.

Kulwinder Kaur, a divorcee, was murdered in her office on the company's weekly day off, while she sat in front of a computer working alone on a new project.

The body, which had stab wounds as well as wounds from blows inflicted on her head and face, was discovered by Sarabjit Singh, the owner of the company, Strategic Designs Pvt Ltd. minutes after the murder was committed, police said.

Kulwinder Kaur had been an employee of the firm, which designs advertisements, for the past three years. Singh's wife Gurbass Devi suspected he

was having an affair with Kulwinder Kaur.

Singh, also saw a peon in his company, Manoj Rai, leave the office in suspicious circumstances and alerted the police who later apprehended him and got a full confession from him.

Two other accomplices were also arrested while one is absconding.

Gurbass Devi has also been arrested.

According to police officials, Gurbass Devi allegedly hatched the plot to kill Kulwinder Kaur a month ago in a desperate bid to get rid of her.

Kulwinder's family said that Gurbass Devi had raised a furore over the close relationship between her husband and Kulwinder and used to drop in unexpectedly at the office to check up on them. Kulwinder often went to work on the company's weekly off, and used to return home late,

they disclosed.

Gurbass Devi reportedly hired Rai, agreeing to pay him Rs200,000 (\$4,651), to murder Kulwinder Kaur.

Rai roped in three of his friends and waited for the right opportunity to strike.

"Gurbass Devi allegedly paid Rs60,000 (\$1,395) to Manoj Rai for killing Kaur almost a month ago.

She apparently told them she would pay the balance amount of Rs140,000 (\$3,255) after the job was done," Uday Sahay, Deputy Police Commissioner, was quoted as saying.

The four killers reportedly attacked the unsuspecting Kulwinder while she was working, hitting her on the head with a wooden plank. They later stabbed her and hit her again with a heavy iron object lying in the office store. — *India Abroad News Service*

Care to take a ride on a brinjal?

HYDERABAD — Ever wanted to ride a car shaped like a brinjal, or a parrot's cage, or, better still, a helmet?

Well, at K. Sudhakar's whacky miniature vehicles museum in this southern city, you may just be able to do that.

A rare museum of such hand-crafted miniature vehicles is to be inaugurated here soon, according to their designer.

Sudhakar, proprietor of Sudha Cars, says he has chosen Hyderabad as the location for the museum because he belongs to this city and "it's one of the most happening places right now."

Sudhakar, whose whacky designs were inspired by a business trip in 1991 to New York where he saw a skating car promoting roller skates, has been designing vintage car replicas, fancy bicycles and motor bikes for the past 22 years.

He designed his first car — a replica of the Dune Buggy — when he was in high school in 1977.

It took him about nine months to create the replica, with a 1000cc engine and hand-made metal body, he says. The two-seater can run up to 100km per hour.

Sudhakar says he learnt the tricks of the trade from his guru, the late Baba Khan, a

local mechanic who used to modify cars, and has designed 47 cars, 42 bicycles and 22 motor bikes till date.

These include replicas of vintage cars such as the 1925 Rolls Royce, the 1913 Packard and 1905 Prosper Lambert and cars shaped like a helmet, a shoe, a Nikon F3 camera, a parrot's cage, and even a three-wheeler three-seater motor bike.

Besides unusual cars, bicycles and motor bikes, Sudhakar holds the Guinness Record for the world's smallest double-decker.

A 1939 Leyland model with a 1000cc engine, the double-decker is capable of touching a speed of 65 km per hour. The 10-seater bus, designed in 1995, took two-and-a-half years to finish.

Sudhakar also holds the record for creating the smallest train, powered by a 175cc engine, which is about 20 inches in height, 19 feet in length and runs 30km per hour.

The 'Chanu Express,' which is capable of carrying 20 children, was created in a record time of 20 days in 1997.

Sudhakar, who has had no formal education in mechanical or automobile engineering but feels he could have done better if he had one, said that he hopes to reach his target of making 100 unusual

vehicles in about five to six years.

The commerce graduate from Nizam College said that despite demands, he will not assemble designs for private individuals, as designing vehicles is just a passion and not a source of employment.

Sudhakar said he will request Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to help him out with the project. "The chief minister is trying to boost private tourism in the state and hopefully he will help me in this venture," he said.

"Since 22 years I have been doing it on my own. It's not about funds. Most of the cars just cost me Rs15,000 to 20,000 per piece, but they are very time consuming. And I expect not less than 2,000-3,000 visitors a day to the museum."

The 35-year-old bachelor, who spends four to five hours every day pursuing his hobby, is currently working on a hamburger car, a cup-and-saucer car and a pineapple car.

"My special creation will be a seven-foot-tall motorised walking elephant. And I am planning to gift a 'Janmabhoomi car,' named after the ambitious development programme launched by Naidu, to the chief minister next," Sudhakar said. — *India Abroad News Service*

Clinton pardons 1961 draft dodger

WASHINGTON — US President Bill Clinton has pardoned a black man who, as a student 40 years ago, fled to Britain rather than serve in an army that refused to call him "Mister," the White House said.

Clinton on Monday issued an executive order granting clemency to Preston King, who in 1961 was sentenced to an 18-month prison sentence for refusing to enlist in the army and fleeing the country while free on bond.

At the time, the draft board in the then segregated southern United States refused to call King "Mister," as white draftees were addressed, and he, in turn, refused to undergo a required medical examination for the draft until he received the honour.

Until the civil rights movement forced a change in the south, blacks were not referred to as Mister, but were called by their first name or simply, "boy."

King, who still lives in Britain, is now a professor of political science at the University of Lancaster and has written 15 books.

In 1958, King's older brother, Clennon, was sent to an insane asylum for trying to register at the totally segregated University of Mississippi. He was released years later thanks to the efforts of another King brother who became a civil rights lawyer.

Preston King is famous among civil rights advocates. Last year he said in a television interview that he would have served his country had the draft board treated him with the same respect given whites.

After graduating with honours in 1956 from the all-black Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, Preston King was given a deferment from military service to study at the London School of Economics.

However, two years later, his deferment was annulled after he went in person to an enlistment office in Alabama, Georgia.

Once the enlistment officers saw that King was black, all mentions of "Mister" were removed from draft bureau correspondence addressed him.

"Back then, titles were part of the segregationist regime," King said in a television interview in September. "They never called a black 'Mr' or 'Mrs' because it suggested they were human beings."

"Blacks were always 'boy' or 'girl' or 'auntie.' To deny this right was a crucial part of keeping blacks in a place of subjugation," he said.

Once he fled, King never set foot again in the United States, where he would have been arrested immediately.

Ten years ago, King wrote the US attorney-general seeking a presidential pardon.

The letter, he told NBC News last year, made two points: "One, I broke the law. Basically, I regret that I broke the law."

"There were circumstances, extenuating circumstances, and I think these circumstances have to be addressed." — AFP

Texas death row inmates surrender, release hostage

LIVINGSTON (Texas) — Two convicted killers, awaiting execution in Texas, released a female guard they had been holding hostage and surrendered quietly after a tense 13-hour standoff, state officials said yesterday.

Ponchai Wilkerson, 24, and Howard Guidry, 22, freed Jeannette Bledsoe and gave themselves up after being allowed to meet anti-death penalty activists, Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesman Larry Fitzgerald told reporters. Bledsoe, 57, was unharmed and authorities did not make any concessions to the two inmates, other than allowing the meeting which ended the standoff around 5am CST (6am EST/1100GMT), Fitzgerald said.

Wilkerson and Guidry were previously among seven death row prisoners who took part in a botched escape attempt at a jail near Huntsville on Thanksgiving Day in 1988. Only one inmate, Martin Gurule, got out but he later drowned in a nearby river.

Texas prison officials, hoping to prevent future breakouts, later began the phased transfer of most death row inmates to a new maximum security facility — the Terrell Unit — just outside Livingston, about 70 miles (110km) north of Houston.

Fitzgerald said Bledsoe was taking Guidry back to his cell just after 4pm CST (5pm EST/2200GMT) on Monday afternoon when Wilkerson somehow opened his cell door as they passed by. Armed with improvised weapons, the inmates grabbed the woman and took her to a recreation room where she was handcuffed.

Wilkerson and Guidry told prison officials they took the guard hostage to protest the strict regime they are subjected to in Livingston. — Reuters

Big buck Indian Americans not a lavish lot

NEW YORK — Indian American entrepreneurs together gross more than \$100 million annually in the US. But where do the big bucks finally roll?

Well, while the group is visible because of ethnic identity and accomplishments, it is certainly not noticed for conspicuous consumption.

Most Indian American entrepreneurs, be it in Silicon Valley or elsewhere in the US, drive up their spending on start-up companies. "It rises dramatically," one entrepreneur told India Abroad News Service, when success begins knocking on the door.

On an average, if the Indian American businessman begins by investing in two or three compa-

nies a year, putting in \$50,000 to \$100,000 in each, he hikes the investments to \$100,000 to \$250,000 and into 10 to 15 companies a year.

And when the millions roll in, Indian American entrepreneurs don't go out and buy a yacht or a Rolls, though they may go in for a Porsche. They get themselves a spacious home, not a lavish one, mind you.

"The first thing is a practical big home, a medium fancy car, not very flashy," said Sandeep Pandya of SP Asset Management who handles the wealth of several Indian American entrepreneurs.

"I think we are modest spenders relative to our earnings. We have a very nice house and

we buy autos based on their being good transportation vehicles," said Prabhu Goel, a successful entrepreneur turned private venture capitalist.

They worry immensely for their children, specially the entrepreneurs in their 40s and 50s. Ideally, they want to raise children who respect and imbibe both Indian and American mainstream cultures in the right doses and live by family values including hard work that parents try to set by example. "Focus is on making sure kids have good education and values. Family is very important."

But most hard-driving entrepreneurs find little time for their children and spouses. Working

long hours, husbands depend on their wives to give the time.

"What spare time?" shot back Prakash Agarwal of Neomagic, when asked how he spent his spare time. Stating that the time he had with his family was "not enough," Agarwal nevertheless added it was important to spend quality time. "You just have to work on it constantly and keep things in proper perspective and focus," he said.

For Mukesh Patel of Smartmodular, "Sundays are only for the spouse and children." Then there is Raj Mashruwala of Tibco, who spends quality time with his family "by doing activities we like together. Many of them are community service

activities."

Pandya, a successful entrepreneur, makes sure he follows more regular hours. "I make it a point to spend evenings and at least one full day on the weekend with my family."

Goel, who now works out of his home, spends much more time with his family. "While I was running my first company — my wife would do a lot for the kids and I would find what time I could with them. But since I sold off the company, I actually prioritise my kids and have cancelled my business meetings to be with my kids," Goel told India Abroad News Service.

When Talat Hasan started her first company, Prometrix, her first

daughter was just five months old. Surviving on just three hours of sleep a day, "It was probably the craziest time of my life," but Hasan quickly figured out how to prioritise and kept a reliable nanny.

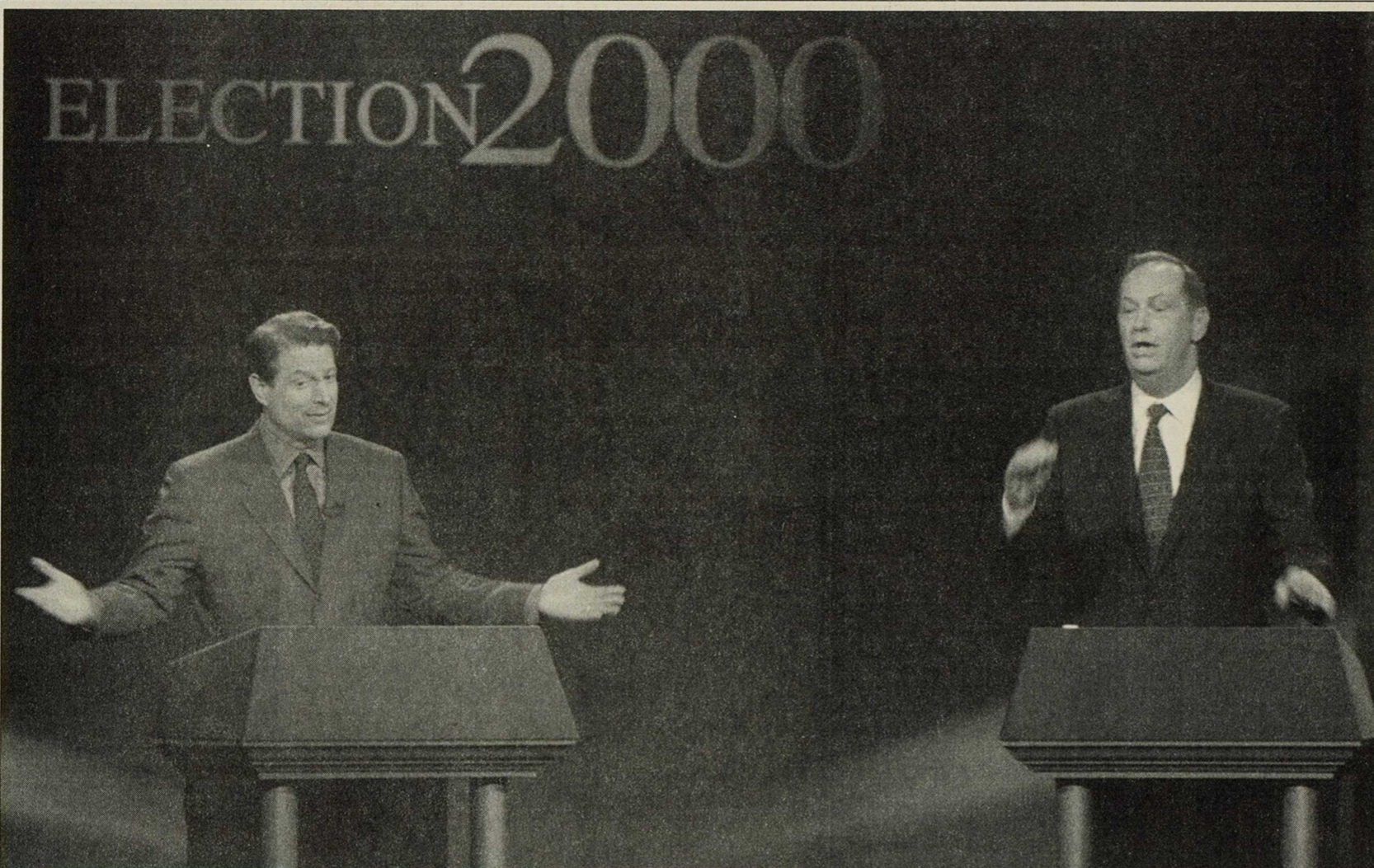
Their school-age children generally attend good public schools, but for higher education, most successful entrepreneurs send their kids to private institutions.

When writing their wills, the biggest dilemma is how much to set aside for children. It is a bigger issue than charity or investing, analysts say. Even in lifestyle, the question of how much wealth to expose kids to is primary.

"It's amazing how many travel by coach, not just because of the value but because they don't want kids to get too spoiled," one observer said.

Interestingly, most marriages of Indian American entrepreneurs, have been arranged and are lasting and "very stable," they say. Gender roles are quite defined and traditional, domestic issues discussed and decided between the spouses, but business matters are largely the husband's domain unless the wife is also an entrepreneur, as in Hasan's case.

"Family related decisions are always discussed, but business related decisions almost always not," said one entrepreneur. — *Indian Abroad News Service*



HEATED DEBATE: Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley, right, and Vice-President Al Gore making points during a debate in New York's Apollo Theatre on Monday. — Reuters

Bradley rips Gore, draws angry response from rival

NEW YORK — Former senator Bill Bradley, trailing in the polls and struggling to keep his White House bid alive, has denounced Vice-President Al Gore's record on race relations, drawing an angry response from his Democratic foe at their debate in a black neighbourhood.

"I think I know what is going on here," said Gore, glaring at Bradley as they stood on stage at Harlem's historic Apollo Theatre on Monday night. "You're sounding a little desperate because you are trying to build yourself up by tearing everyone else down."

Bradley pointedly declined to say if he believed Gore had the character needed to serve in the Oval Office, saying he would let the voters decide.

But he promptly added that if Gore won the Democratic presidential nomination, "I would support him." Bradley's press secretary Eric Hauser said afterward that the former New Jersey senator had long maintained he would endorse whoever became the Democratic nominee.

Bradley said he and Gore had

a different view of the Democratic Party and what its priorities should be.

He charged that Gore sought to eliminate affirmative action early in the Clinton administration and that while a member of Congress, voted against denying tax-exempt status to schools that racially discriminate.

Gore called both accusations "phony and scurrilous" and argued that Bradley was taking old congressional votes out of context. Gore represented Tennessee in the House of Representatives and then the Senate before becoming vice-president in 1993.

"You made personal attack after personal attack," Gore said. "The problem is these attacks don't solve any of the problems," ranging from inadequate health care to failing schools.

The 90-minute debate, televised nationally by CNN, had a festive atmosphere, with members of the audience breaking into cheers when they agreed with their favourite.

Bradley needs more than

cheers. Having lost to Gore in Iowa's January 24 caucuses and in New Hampshire's February 1 primary, he must chalk up some wins soon to keep his campaign afloat.

Both Democratic candidates are zeroed in on March 7, "Super on Tuesday," when New York, California, Ohio and a dozen other states hold presidential contests that will award nearly a third of the party's nominating delegates.

Polls now show Gore leading in every one of those 15 states. In fact, Bradley was within single digits in just four of them, New York, Rhode Island, Maryland and Connecticut, Bradley's campaign said on Monday.

Bradley, desperate for a victory — even an unofficial one said earlier on Monday that he intended to spend plenty of time and money next week in Washington state.

Washington state will hold a non-binding primary next Tuesday in advance of its "Super Tuesday" caucus. Bradley believes a good showing in the

non-binding primary would give him a needed and timely boost.

"I think we will do well on the seventh (of March)," said Hauser. "We have to, and we know that."

With urban affairs and race relations the subjects of Monday's night debate, Gore and Bradley argued who had the best record and proposals — on health care to education — on behalf of minorities and inner cities. Bradley, as he did last month at a debate in Iowa, criticised Gore for failing to ask President Bill Clinton to sign an executive order outlawing racial profiling by police.

Gore fired back, saying, "You know, racial profiling practically began in New Jersey," the state Bradley represented in the US Senate for 18 years.

Racial profiling is a controversial police practice of stopping motorists based on their race.

The Democratic rivals found common ground on the Confederate flag at the expense of the two leading Republican presidential candidates, Texas

Governor George W. Bush and Senator John McCain of Arizona.

Gore and Bradley denounced the flying of the Confederate flag, which they denounced as a symbol of racism and oppression, atop the South Carolina Statehouse.

Bush and McCain have refused to take a position on the state's flying of the flag, saying the people of South Carolina should decide whether it should come down.

With Bradley nodding in accord, Gore said: "The American flag unites us. The Confederate flag divides us."

Although Bradley is far behind Gore in the polls, he is slightly ahead of him in money, thanks largely to a strong showing in the final quarter of 1999 when his campaign was riding relatively high. As of January 31, Gore reported he had \$8.1 million cash on hand, while Bradley had \$8.9 million.

Their next debate is set for March 1 in California, their final showdown before "Super Tuesday." — Reuters

Millionaire off the air

LOS ANGELES — The Fox network has cancelled a rerun of ratings sensation *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire* and dropped plans for any more such specials after learning that its TV groom was accused of violence by a past fiancée, a spokesman for the network has said.

According to court documents posted on the Internet by TheSmokingGun, TV groom Rick Rockwell was accused of slapping and threatening a former fiancée, a model named Debbie Goyno, after she tried to break off their engagement.

TheSmokingGun reported that Goyno in 1991 obtained a restraining order against Rockwell, 42, — the wealthy bachelor who married nurse Darva Conger in front of 16 million viewers at the end of *Millionaire* — in Los Angeles Superior Court.

Fox spokesman Tom Tyrer said the network cancelled a planned rebroadcast of the wildly successful *Millionaire*, scheduled for last night, after the allegations surfaced. The network also pulled promotions and radio advertisements for the show.

"Fox has become aware of information regarding Mr Rockwell's past," the network said in a statement. "In light of that new information, the network feels that to rebroadcast the special would be inappropriate and consequently we have removed it from our schedule."

Tyrer added that Fox was "not planning to proceed with any specials of this kind in the future."

Rockwell, a former stand-up comedian who apparently made his millions in real estate, was on



FIRST MILLIONAIRE COUPLE: File photo of Darva Conger and Rick Rockwell. — Reuters

his honeymoon in the Caribbean and could not be reached for comment by Reuters.

Tyrer said Rockwell has issued a statement acknowledging he was the subject of a restraining order but denying that he ever committed an act of violence against Goyno.

A source at Fox said future such broadcasts had been cancelled because the network had screened Rockwell extensively and still had not found out about the restraining order — proving the difficulties inherent in such programming.

The show, broadcast last Tuesday night, featured Rockwell choosing a bride from among a group of 50 women who paraded by him in swimsuits and wedding gowns. Rockwell chose 34-year-old Conger, an emergency room nurse from Santa Monica, California, and married her at the end of the show.

The show — a cross between a beauty pageant and a quiz show — drew a total of 16 million viewers in the midst of the February sweeps, when ratings are used to gauge future network advertising rates. — Reuters

Top court rejects plea against electric chair execution

WASHINGTON — The US Supreme Court yesterday rejected an appeal arguing that use of the electric chair to execute death-row inmates is unconstitutional cruel and unusual punishment.

The high court in a brief order without a ruling denied an appeal by an Alabama death-row inmate who challenged the use of the electric chair on the grounds that it was an impermissibly cruel process that inflicted unnecessary pain and suffering.

His lawyers argued that use of the electric chair was similar to torture, violating basic standards of decency, and that it excessively burned the bodies of condemned prisoners, causing disfigurement.

Alabama, Nebraska and Georgia are the only states that still require electrocution to carry out executions. The other 35 states with the death penalty use lethal injection or give the inmate a choice in deciding the method of execution.

The Supreme Court last year agreed to hear a similar case from Florida, but had to dismiss it in January after the legislature made lethal injection the state's primary method of execution.

The Alabama case involved Robert Lee Tarver Jr, 52, who was convicted for the 1984 robbery and murder of a rural convenience store owner.

The Supreme Court earlier this month issued a stay of execution just hours before Tarver was

to be put to death. In yesterday's action, the court lifted the stay, clearing the way for the execution to proceed.

Of the nine court members, the four most liberal justices — Justices John Paul Stevens, David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer — said they would hear the appeal. But five voters are needed to grant review.

Tarver's lawyers argued that Alabama's electric chair has a recent history of botched executions and consistent mutilation of the bodies of the prisoners.

"If Mr Tarver is electrocuted in Alabama's electric chair, his death likely will be slow and excruciating, his body burned and mutilated," his lawyers said in the appeal.

In a 1983 execution, the electrode on the inmate's leg caught fire, and smoke and sparks were seen coming from his head, they said.

The inmate was still alive after two jolts of electricity, and finally put to death after a third surge of electricity.

The lawyers said Alabama's problems with the electric chair stemmed from both human mistakes and mechanical failures.

They said evolving standards of decency now prohibit electrocution, and they criticised Alabama for using an "antiquated electric chair."

State officials have defended their use of the electric chair as constitutional. — Reuters

Bush accuses McCain of smear campaign

DETROIT — George W. Bush accused John McCain of portraying him as anti-Catholic yesterday as voters in Michigan began casting ballots in a primary that may effectively decide the Republican presidential nomination.

McCain, a senator from Arizona, desperately needs to win in this heavily Catholic state after losing to the governor of Texas in the South Carolina primary on Saturday by 11 percentage points. A Reuters poll issued on Monday night predicted a photo finish.

If McCain falls short, Bush may steamroller his way to the nomination as the campaign goes national in the next two weeks leading up to March 7, when a dozen states are set to hold Republican primaries.

The Reuters poll of 907 likely Michigan voters, conducted on Sunday and Monday by Zogby International, found McCain leading 44-41 per cent, with 6 per cent backing talk radio host Alan Keyes and the rest undecided.

When these undecided voters were asked which way they leaned, the result became: McCain 48, Bush 46, Keyes 6 per cent. With a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percentage points, the race remained a statistical dead heat.

Arizona also was holding a primary yesterday but it is assumed McCain would carry his home state.

Bush is being backed by the Republican Party establishment and the political machine of Michigan Governor John Engler. In a close race, that effort could make the difference.

But the primary is open to Democrats and independent voters, who may make up as much as half the electorate, giving McCain some hope. Bush, eldest son of former president George Bush, accused the McCain campaign of telephoning Michigan voters and telling them he was hostile to them because of his visit in South Carolina to Bob Jones University, a Christian fundamentalist college that bans inter-racial dating and is militantly anti-Catholic.

"There's some phone calls going out that have accused me of being anti-Catholic, paid for by the Senator McCain campaign. This is a man who said he's going to run a positive campaign," Bush told reporters in Royal Oak.

"This is a campaign ad paid for by John McCain. It's about as low as it gets. I thought comparing my trustworthiness to (President) Bill Clinton was low, but calling me an anti-Catholic bigot ... I don't appreciate that kind of campaigning. That's shameful politics." Bush declared.

At a town hall meeting in Traverse City in upstate Michigan on Monday, McCain accused Bush of "character assassination". "My friends," he said, "reject this negative campaigning, reject this character assassination, reject the low road to the presidency and support those who want to take the high road. You deserve a lot better than the trash that's on your television set and over the radio."

— Reuters

Algae offer alternative energy source

WASHINGTON — Hydrogen from algae cells could become the world's next alternative fuel, after researchers patented their discovery of how to harness photosynthesis to produce energy from sunlight and water.

Hydrogen is currently extracted from natural gas, a non-renewable fossil fuel, but researchers at the University of California at Berkeley discovered how to make algae produce hydrogen at will, the American Association for the Advancement of Science announced at its annual meeting on Monday.

"I guess it's the equivalent of striking oil," said UC Berkeley plant and microbial biology professor Tasios Melis, one of the team of researchers. "It was enormously exciting, it was unbelievable."

Two institutions have taken out a joint patent on the new metabolic switch technique which involves suppressing production of sulphur by the algae. Without sulphur, oxygen production is halted and the algae's anaerobic cells are prevented from burning stored fuel in the normal way. This allows the algae's photosynthesis technique to be switched off, so that the cell's stored energy is used to produce hydrogen as the byproduct.

"Hydrogen is so clean-burning that what comes out of the exhaust pipe is pure water. You can drink it," said Melis, who made the algae discovery along with postdoctoral associate at UC Berkeley, Liping Zhang.

"What has been lacking is a renewable source of hydrogen," Melis said. He explained that the researchers passed liquid algae cultures into stoppered one-litre glass bottles with no sulphur present, allowing the culture to consume the oxygen.

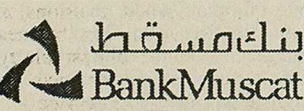
After 24 hours photosynthesis and normal metabolic respiration stopped, causing the algae to use up stored compounds and to bleed off hydrogen just to survive. "It was actually a surprise when we detected significant amounts of hydrogen coming out of the culture," Melis admitted. "We thought we could get trace amounts, but we got bulk amounts." — AFP

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Suns rally past Spurs for sixth straight victory

SAN ANTONIO — With superstar Tim Duncan out for almost three quarters, the NBA champion San Antonio Spurs were beaten down the stretch by the Phoenix Suns on Friday.

Rodney Rogers got 22 points off the bench and Tom Gugliotta added 15 of his 21 after intermission as the Suns pulled away late for their sixth straight victory, 98-89.

Duncan left the floor with 11:08 remaining in the second period after scoring four points in 13 minutes. Fellow "Twin Tower" David Robinson picked up the slack with 31 points and 18 rebounds in 41 minutes.

But the Spurs wilted without their top option in the final period, making just six baskets. Making matters worse, San Antonio also lost reserve guard Antonio Daniels with 9:12 left.

"Tim has a lower abdominal strain and Antonio has a sprained left wrist," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich added. "It hurts to have this happen. Losing Tim probably had some effect."

"We really didn't change that much on defence after Duncan went down," Gugliotta said. "I can't say that it didn't make our defensive job a little easier and took a little pressure off. But tonight David Robinson had to be the focal point of their offence and he didn't have anybody else to step up and complement him."

In Denver, Nick Van Exel and Bryant Stith sparked the Nuggets as they handed the Sacramento Kings their second overtime loss in as many days, 123-117.

Coming off on Sunday's OT loss at home to Portland, the Kings looked to be in control with a 101-92 lead with 4:06 left.

But Van Exel and Stith each hit a pair of 3-pointers over the final 3:32 of regulation to force overtime. Stith, who had 21 points, converted a driving layup with 1:51 left in the extra period to put Denver ahead for good, 116-114.

Antonio McDyess had 29 points and 13 rebounds and Van Exel 27 points and 15 assists as the Nuggets got their third win in their last four games. Chris Webber posted 25 points and 15 rebounds for Sacramento, which has dropped eight of its last 12.

At Detroit, the Miami Heat fell out of first place for the first time since November 11 on a 95-87 loss to the Pistons.

Miami centre Alonzo

Mourning missed only four minutes after breaking his nose early in the fourth quarter. Mourning had surgery yesterday but said he'll be ready when Miami hosts New Jersey on Wednesday.

Playing their fourth game in five nights, the Heat completed a 1-3 road trip including embarrassing setbacks to the lowly Bulls and Nets.

Terry Mills helped bury his former team with six of Detroit's 10 3-pointers. Grant Hill had 24 points.

In New York, Patrick Ewing had 15 points, 12 rebounds and a key basket and block in the final two minutes as the Knicks nearly blew a 21-point lead but beat the Los Angeles Clippers 87-76 to pass Miami for first place in the Atlantic Division.

Latrell Sprewell played point guard in New York's "Big Backcourt" and had a season-high nine assists along with 16 points and seven rebounds. He sealed the win with four free throws in the final minute.

At Indiana, Reggie Miller hit two foul shots with 14 seconds left as the Pacers turned back the Dallas Mavericks 94-93 to extend their winning streak at Conseco Fieldhouse to 20 games.

The Pacers escaped with the win when Michael Finley's off-balance jumper from the top of the key hit off the front of the rim with one second remaining.

Indiana feasted at the foul line, making 18-of-19, compared to just 7-of-9 for the Mavericks. With Rik Smits missing his fourth straight game due to back spasms, Jalen Rose stepped up for the Pacers with 28 points.

At Utah, Armen Gilliam was inexplicably left wide open beneath the basket and made an uncontested layup with 2.9 seconds left to lift the Jazz to their fifth win in six games, 96-94 over the Atlanta Hawks. Karl Malone led Utah with 25 points.

In Cleveland, Wesley Person nailed a 3-pointer at the end of regulation to force overtime and the Cavaliers remained unbeaten all-time against the Vancouver Grizzlies with a 109-108 victory.

Person scored 11 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter. Neither team led by more than two points in overtime. Vancouver had one last chance with 12 seconds to go but Bob Sura stripped Michael Dickerson of the ball in the lane. — Reuters

Euro 2000 hopefuls get serious with friendly tests

PARIS — Preparations for this summer's European Championship finals start in earnest yesterday with a raft of important friendlies as England, world champions France, holders Germany and Italy all facing important tests.

France and Germany in particular are both in a period of some transition, even if the French have kept faith with almost all of their France 98 stars despite a rocky qualifying campaign in which Les Bleus just kept the wheels on to oust Ukraine and Russia.

Germany have lost something of their virtually unbeatable aura since an ageing squad disappointed in the World Cup.

Ever-optimistic England, much to their post-1966 chagrin, have tried but failed to create such an aura and have watched as the Germans have racked up three title wins, aided by a semifinal win on penalties four years ago at Wembley.

On paper the two most appetising fixtures are England's clash at Wembley against Argentina — shades of France 1998 and a win on penalties for the South Americans — and

Germany's game in Amsterdam against Euro 2000 co-hosts Holland.

England, who will face the Germans as well as Romania — who beat them at France 98 — and Portugal, in the summer, expect to grab their chance with both hands under the enthusiastic leadership of Kevin Keegan having come in through the back door of the play-offs.

And despite rumours of a rift between Manchester United midfielder David Beckham and club boss Sir Alex Ferguson, who dropped the star for Sunday's win at Leeds, Keegan says Beckham is the man to unlock the door against Argentina and his men's Euro rivals.

Keegan refused to get drawn into the United row.

He said: "I don't know what happened at the weekend, so I'm not going to comment. But as far as I am concerned he's going to play on Wednesday."

"From a purely selfish point of view, because he didn't play on Sunday he couldn't get injured," said Keegan.

Beckham will be looking to get the better of Diego Simeone at

Wembley having been sent off in the penalty shoot-out World Cup defeat in Saint Etienne for kicking the midfielder.

Keegan has other worries as Coventry's Steve Froggatt (ankle injury) and Liverpool's Steven Gerrard are both unfit.

However, Aston Villa defender Gareth Barry is set for a 19th birthday debut following some fine showings on the left of Villa's three-man defence.

Argentina are England's last opposition before Keegan names a provisional 35-man squad for Euro 2000 but he insists there will be no "mass experimentation".

The South Americans are set to field 10 of the team that featured in Saint Etienne but cannot call on River Plate's Javier Solari (Copa Libertadores commitments) and injured playmaker Marcelo Gallardo.

Roger Lemerre's France host Poland in Paris having come through some difficult moments in the qualifiers and warned that "the final squad places are still up for grabs. There is room for others to come through and nobody has an automatic right to a place. They have to prove themselves."

Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit echoed that sentiment.

"It's not the best bunch of individuals which is important but the best team."

The French will rely on their rock-solid defence and hope to solve their striker conundrum with Monaco's David Trezeguet showing the best domestic form and looking to establish himself ahead of Lyon's Tony Vairelles, Sylvain Wilford of Bordeaux and back-in-favour Stephane Guivarch of Auxerre.

Real Madrid's Nicolas Anelka is not in the squad as he battles injury problems but Lemerre said last week he has not been forgotten.

The French have been handed a tough group in the Euro 2000 finals being drawn against the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Denmark.

Poland, under new coach Jerzy Engel, should not pose a big obstacle as they rebuild having seen England push them out of a play-off spot.

Germany will meanwhile hand Lothar Matthaus a world record 144th cap as coach Erich Ribbeck believes his reading of

the game and maturity will help bring on a squad containing attacking Wolfsburg midfielder Zoltan Sebesenc, the only new face. Matthaus so far holds the record jointly with former Swedish keeper Thomas Ravelli.

With strikers Marco Bode of Werder Bremen and Bayer Leverkusen's Ulf Kirsten injured Ribbeck has called back another veteran in Hertha Berlin's 32-year-old Michael Preetz, the top scorer in the Bundesliga last season.

Dietmar Hamann of Liverpool and Christian Ziege are set to run the midfield with Milan's Oliver Bierhoff leading the line.

The Dutch have shown poor form of late, with nine draws, two defeats and a win over Peru their post-World Cup fare.

Coach Frank Rijkaard has called up Feyenoord playmaker Paul Bosvelt for a debut at the age of 29.

Italy, European champions in 1968, have had to shuffle the pack as coach Dino Zoff has lost skipper Paolo Maldini and fellow defender Paolo Negro for Wednesday's friendly against Sweden in Palermo due to injury.

Zoff announced only one replacement for the two men — calling up Juventus hardman Mark Iuliano.

Italy only topped their qualifying group by a point after two draws against Belarus and a home defeat against Denmark, who finally came through the play-offs.

In the finals the Italians will face Turkey, Sweden and co-hosts Belgium.

In other matches, Ireland take on a Czech side who showed the hottest form anywhere on the continent in the qualifying programme in Dublin, while Belgium host Portugal in Charleroi and Yugoslavia are in action in Colombia.

Elsewhere, Spain face Croatia, who failed to make the finals after coming third at the World Cup, in Split.

The Croatians will have to spend their summer pondering what might have been as neighbours Yugoslavia and Slovenia clash in Group C, which also contains the Spaniards and Norwegians.

Norway, meanwhile, face Turkey away. — AFP



COOLING DOWN: England and Manchester United midfielder David Beckham lays back on the Wembley turf as he warms down after a squad training session. — Reuters

Keegan hopes for positive fan support

LONDON — Coach Kevin Keegan was told yesterday he can expect a positive response from England fans beginning a new tradition as they attempt to help rid the nation of its hooligan image.

Keegan has called on the 80,000 crowd who will be heading to Wembley for today's friendly with Argentina to give their full backing to the team by wearing red clothing.

The England manager believes it will help ignite the passion among the supporters, as well as signify their unity to the team in the build-up towards this summer's Euro 2000 championships.

But more importantly England fans are hoping to project a positive image of themselves on the road towards Holland and Belgium rather than the tainted scenes of hooliganism that has been so prevalent in the past.

England Members Club spokesman Mark Perryman, a key figure in the Euro 2000 working group, said: "All this is part of the campaign towards the championships."

"The ambition for the England fans is to come away from Euro 2000 with a better reputation than the one we arrive with — which in all my time has not happened." — AFP

Clock turns full circle as Matthaus set for history

BERLIN — Lothar Matthaus will become the world's most capped footballer by playing his 144th international against the Netherlands today — 20 years after starting his international career against the same opponents.

By appearing in the friendly in Amsterdam he will overtake former Swedish goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli's total of 143 games — a mark he has shared with the Swede for the last few months.

Matthaus was only 19 when he first wore the West Germany shirt, in a group match at the 1980 European Championships in Italy.

His side were leading the Dutch 3-0 when he came on for Bernard Dietz in the 73rd minute.

The teenager who was to mature into the greatest German player since Franz Beckenbauer did not impress on that particular day, and was responsible for conceding a penalty. Still, Germany won the match 3-2 and went on to win the tournament.

Although the Germans and the Dutch are not exactly the best of friends in the football world, Matthaus' childhood



MAKING HISTORY: German national soccer player Lothar Matthaus, right, receives a shirt with the number 144 from team coach Erich Ribbeck prior to a news conference in Huizen. — Reuters

hero was a Dutchman who played against West Germany in the 1974 World Cup final. "Johann Cruyff was the best player of the 1974 World Cup," Matthaus, who was 13 then, recalls.

"He was so elegant, so inspired in midfield and so dan-

gerous in front of goal."

Matthaus has played against the Netherlands seven times — and only been on the losing side once, at the 1988 European Championships in Hamburg.

Everything started well as he opened the scoring from the penalty spot. But the Dutch won a famous semifinal victory by 2-1.

After the match, Ronald Koeman did little for the German-Dutch relationship when he rubbed his bottom with Olaf Thon's shirt.

Matthaus was there too when Frank Rijkaard spat at Rudi Voeller in another memorable incident at the 1990 World Cup.

But that was not enough to spoil his exciting Italian adventure. Wearing the captain's armband, he led his men to a 2-1 win before savouring the finest 90 minutes of his prolific career with a 1-0 victory over Argentina in the Rome final. "I would have rather celebrated my record in Germany, or even in Italy or Croatia, where the fans like me," Matthaus said ahead of Wednesday's match.

"In the Netherlands, they don't like the Germans, and they don't like me. But it will be fun, even if I'm whistled and booed by 30,000 people. That's always good for motivation."

Playing in a hostile atmosphere will be nothing new to Matthaus, who is often perceived as somewhat arrogant and is few fans' favourite, even in Germany.

"He behaves as if he were born a star and could allow himself

everything," authoritative news weekly *Der Spiegel* once wrote, explaining why the man, despite his remarkable achievements, never was a German idol.

Fritz Walter, Uwe Seeler and Beckenbauer played less matches for Germany but they won more hearts. Even at club level, Matthaus has plenty of experiences with Dutch players. In his Inter Milan days, he was naturally taught to hate AC Milan, then at their peak courtesy of their formidable Dutch trio of Marco van Basten, Rijkaard and Ruud Gullit.

"Those three were just about the best football had to offer then," said Matthaus, modest enough not to add himself to that list. He would be forgiven if he did. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Matthaus had few rivals. Then a playmaker, he had everything — the skills, the speed, the vision, the timing, not to mention that typically German aptitude for fighting until the final whistle, whatever the circumstances.

Feeling homesick, he left Italy in 1992 and returned to the only German club tailored to his measurements — Bayern Munich. — Reuters

Trouble brewing for Zoff

MILAN — Italy were preparing for yesterday's friendly against Sweden with a simmering row between Alessandro Del Piero and Filippo Inzaghi, a leaky defence and a few question marks in midfield.

The match in Palermo will help coach Dino Zoff pick his squad for the European championships in Holland and Belgium next June.

However, all is not sweetness and light in the Italian camp, particularly after Sunday's spat between the two Juventus strikers at Venezia.

Del Piero hadn't scored in the course of play for 70 weeks when he found himself unmarked with an open goal as Inzaghi broke through on the right.

But instead of passing, Inzaghi managed to score a more difficult goal for himself and then snapped up another two minutes later which he could also have left for his struggling teammate.

Del Piero admitted his frustration to the Italian press yesterday, saying: "It's true, I did feel bad about it. But it's in the

past now and one incident isn't going to ruin our rapport."

But he added: "I'll make just two considerations: it's just as well we were 2-0 up and it's just as well he scored."

As whether he would now pass to Inzaghi if a scoring opportunity arose, he said cautiously: "If I thought the moment was right."

Del Piero will be on the bench in Palermo, as Zoff announced a starting line-up yesterday of AS Roma's Vincenzo Montella, who like Inzaghi scored a hat-trick last weekend, alongside Inter Milan's Christian Vieri.

Francesco Totti, like Del Piero, will have to sit out the start.

Zoff's defence has meanwhile been hit by injuries to skipper Paolo Maldini and Paulo Negro, while goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon is coming off an error-ridden 4-3 defeat with Parma on Sunday.

Zoff watched Italy slump to a 3-2 defeat to Denmark after leading 2-0 in a Euro 2000 qualifier last September and then lose 3-1 to Belgium in a friend-

ly, also at home, two months later.

"We've been letting in a few goals too many recently," he told reporters at the squad's training base near Florence. "And we've particularly let in a lot of goals at home."

"The match against Sweden will help us understand whether certain mistakes are going to be repeated or not."

As for Buffon, Italy's World Cup winning keeper from 1982 said:

"His recent mistakes don't worry me, but they should teach him something. It's not easy to be a goalkeeper... and this is an important period for him."

"Hard times are what make you grow up," he said.

Zoff will also try some experiments in midfield, partly following last-minute injuries to Diego Fuser and Antonio Conte.

AC Milan Ivan Gattuso and Roma's Eusebio Di Francesco will take over from them, while youngsters Stefano Fiore and Alessio Tacchinardi are coming in for veterans Demetrio Albertini and Dino Baggio. — AFP

Blood spilled as Team NZ take 2-0 cup lead

AUCKLAND — Team New Zealand took an imposing 2-0 lead over *Prada Challenge* in the America's Cup yesterday after *Prada* crewman Massimiliano Sirena suffered a head injury early in a disastrous second race for the Italians.

Team New Zealand, seeking to become the first non-American boat to successfully defend the cup, won the second race by a demoralising two minutes and 43 seconds over *Prada*.

The loss dented Italian hopes as they try to become the first Europeans to win the cup. They desperately wanted to level the first-to-five series after the slick New Zealanders won their first race on Sunday by a telling 77 seconds.

But their cause was damaged immeasurably by twin disasters shortly after the start when the Italians sailed over what they thought was a large plastic bag with ropes attached, which slowed them considerably and led to Sirena's injury.

"I don't think it's bad luck, it's something that can happen," a disappointed *Prada* skipper Francesco de Angelis told

reporters. "It put a different position the rest of the race."

Prada beat Paul Cayard's *AmericaOne* in the challenger elimination series finals to ensure no American boat would contest the cup for the first time since 1851.

New Zealand skipper Russell Coutts completely outlasted *Prada* in pre-start manoeuvres to win the start by 18 seconds, an ominous sign for the Italians.

Then the sheet of plastic wrapped around *Prada's* keel, forcing them to tack away in an attempt to shake it loose.

"When you have a drop in the boat speed of one-and-a-half knots, you realise something is wrong," *Prada* tactician Torben Grael said. The *Prada* crew then tried to clear the bag with a long, carbon fibre pole. Sirena was hit when the pole was being brought from below deck. Blood stained the aft starboard side of the silver-hulled *Prada* as crew rushed to bowman Sirena's aid.

Sirena was taken from *Prada* on to one of the Italian syndicate's tender boats — which is allowed under regatta rules — where a team doctor put seven

stitches in his wound. De Angelis said the injury was not serious.

The Italian boat called *Luna Rossa* stopped dead in the water as the crew worked to clear the plastic from the keel. Mainsail trimmer Piero Romeo was even lowered overboard and under the hull in an attempt to remove the obstruction.

The plastic eventually worked clear but de Angelis watched helplessly as *New Zealand* built a decisive lead of two minutes and 19 seconds by the first mark of the six-leg, 18.5 nautical mile race in the Hauraki Gulf.

The Italians gained slightly over the next two legs but *New Zealand* stretched their lead back out over two minutes over the closing two legs to suggest again that they have a faster boat.

"We realise *Luna Rossa* had some bad luck today and will come back strongly," *New Zealand* skipper Russell Coutts said.

Prada was clearly the best boat in the Louis Vuitton Cup challenger series, which began in October and fought back from the brink of defeat to beat Cayard's *AmericaOne* 5-4. — Reuters

Raymond survives

OKLAHOMA CITY — Sixth-seeded Lisa Raymond beat Cara Black of Zimbabwe in a marathon first-round match at the \$170,000 IGA Superthrif Tennis Classic on Monday.

Raymond, ranked 29th by the WTA, outlasted Black 6-3, 6-7 (7-5), 7-6 (7-4) in a match lasting 2 hours, 32 minutes.

Eighth-seeded Sarah Pitkowski of France also advanced with a long 6-3, 6-7 (9-7), 6-1 win over Lubormira Bacheva of Bulgaria in a match lasting 2:25.

Raymond beat Black twice last year and appeared ready to rout the 43rd-ranked player this time, jumping to a 5-0 lead in the first set. Black rallied with two service breaks in that set and won the second-set tiebreaker to force the third set.

Black took a 5-3 lead in the final set and was serving for match point with a 40-15 advantage. Raymond broke Black's serve to make it 5-4 and both players held serve to get to the final tiebreaker.

The tiebreaker score was 3-3 when Raymond scored the lone ace of the match to go up 4-3 and she then scored three of the next four points for the victory. — Reuters

Prayad rules Filipino Open

From Our Correspondent

CARMONA (Cavite) — In the final reckoning, it was the stocky shotmaker from Thailand who held his ground and survived the four-day ordeal at the Manila Southwoods' Masters Course.

Prayad Marksang made an early run of birdies to seize control, thwarted the bids of his pursuers with an impeccable short game before watching American Mike Cunniff flub a five-foot birdie putt on the 72nd hole to snatch a one-shot victory on a closing 71 in the rich Casino Filipino Open golf championship here on Monday.

That he did it in the face of overwhelming odds — strong winds, testy pin placements, fast greens, scorching heat and a pack of talented contenders breathing down his neck like wild stallions after he took charge in the fourth hole in a typical Southwoods scenario — spoke well of the character and poise of Thailand's premier golfer.

But in his moment of triumph, Marksang said he was just lucky to have overcome the odds although his scorecard showed the brilliance in the man, who spiked his 34-37 round with four saved pars in five times that he overshot the green.

His 283 aggregate, which

included rounds of 72 and a couple of 70s, netted him the top purse of \$32,300, the victory snapping a three-year drought that started when he won his third Asian PGA Tour title in Lexus International back home in 1997.

"I was just lucky considering the tough condition of the course and the great field. But I really believe that a one or two-under would be enough to win," said Marksang, the first Thai to play in the British Open last year, through an interpreter.

Cunniff drilled in back-to-back birdie putts inside six feet from No. 15 to move within one off Marksang but the 40-year-old winner of the Asian PGA Order of Merit title in 1997 missed a tying birdie-putt on the 18th. He settled for a 73 and a share of second place with three others at 284.

"I lined the ball wrong, I knew I'd miss it the moment I stroked the ball down," said Cunniff.

Unlike the other players before him, Marksang was virtually unshaken as soon as he wrestled the lead with a six-under total after four holes on back-to-back birdies from No. 3 and though he was caught at the helm with Japanese Tatsuhiro Ichihara on the 12th on a two-stroke swing

(birdie-bogey), Marksang proved steadier by salvaging a run of gutsy pars before watching Ichihara fall back with a weak chip shot on the 17th for bogey.

Ichihara closed out with a 69 to tie the Cunniff and American Ted Purdy (70), who ran out of holes in his fightback from four shots down. They each received \$14,886.67.

Danny Zarate emerged as the best Filipino with a joint fifth place finish at 285 after a 70 as he tied Singaporean Mardam Mamat (69) and American Ahmad Bateman (68). Each got \$7,000.

So unpredictable was the final round that even Frankie, nine strokes behind at the start of the day, suddenly bounced back into contention when he rattled off three birdies from No. 2 and went on to fire a 67 in a big rebound from a disastrous 77 on Saturday.

He wound up with a two-under 286 to salvage a joint share of fifth with Cassius Casas (69) worth \$4,112.80 each.

The other Filipino finishers in this event sponsored by Casino Filipino and held under the auspices of the Asian PGA Tour were Richard Sinfuego (72-287-13th), Gerald Rosales (71-288-17th), Mars Pucay (75-293-34th), Dan Cruz (72-296-49th), Ramon Brobio (75-299-62nd) and Rey Pagunsan (73-300-69th).

Enqvist sails past Voinea

LONDON — Swedish fourth seed Thomas Enqvist whipped Adrian Voinea 6-1, 6-4 to reach the second round of the \$800,000 London Indoor Championships yesterday.

The world number 12 wasted little time on centre court at the 6,000-capacity London Arena, overpowering his Romanian opponent with thunderous groundstrokes and accurate serving.

Voinea never got into his stride in the opening set as Enqvist moved him around the court before applying the killer blow. The Romanian held his own serve a little better in the second set but could not stay with the Swede who plays Karol Kucera in the second round.

Speculations rife after Tendulkar quits coveted post

NEW DELHI — Sachin Tendulkar's shock decision to relinquish the Indian cricket captaincy after the upcoming home series against South Africa is being closely dissected amid intense speculation over who will be the next occupant of the hot seat.

Did his falling brand value have something to do with Tendulkar's decision to give up the cares of captaincy, which had apparently affected his batting?

Or did Mohammed Azharuddin's recall to the team, reportedly against Tendulkar's wishes, force his hand?

The *Times of India* suggested in a front-page commentary that the master batsman's exit may have been hastened by "the falling value of Tendulkar the brand."

"His own performance and that of the team may have brought down his USP (unique selling proposition) somewhat in the eyes of the endorsement seekers," the newspaper said.

On the disastrous tour of Australia, Tendulkar gave the impression that he was not enjoying his cricket and was under pressure with his every move put under the microscope by expert television commentators, the newspaper said, adding he did not seem to be cut out for the rigours of the captaincy.

One critic had compared Tendulkar's attitude as captain to that of a schoolboy at a board examination.

Tendulkar said he was resigning the captaincy owing moral responsibility for the team's failure in Australia, where it was thrashed 0-3 in the Tests. He denied his decision was linked to Azharuddin's recall.

But *The Hindustan Times* saw a clear link between Azharuddin's recall and Tendulkar's decision, noting that had he wanted to quit, he could

have announced it when the team returned from Australia. "The timing is not as impeccable as we have come to associate with Sachin Tendulkar's batting," it said. No one knows the reason for the acrimony between Tendulkar and Azharuddin, if indeed there is any.

"Is Indian cricket going to be a never ending shuttle between Azharuddin and Tendulkar?" *The Indian Express* asked in its lead editorial.

Even if Azhar temporarily returns to form, the dependence on him displayed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) "reveals the bankrupt state of Indian cricket under its administration," it commented.

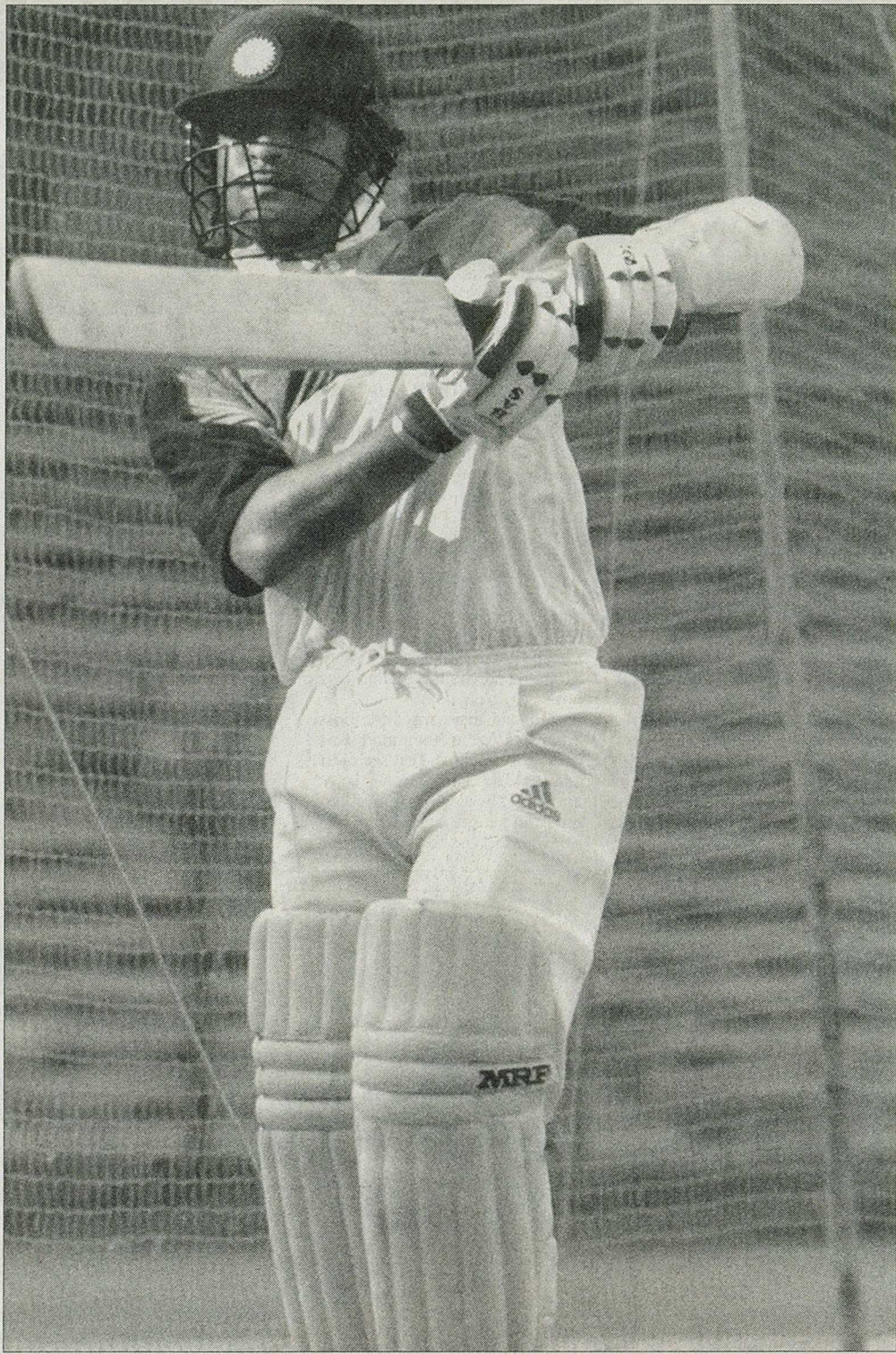
As it turns out, Azharuddin will not play the first Test against South Africa, which he has been forced to miss due to a thumb fracture.

Speculation over who will be Tendulkar's successor is intensifying, with prospective candidates and their credentials for the job under close media scrutiny.

Tendulkar yesterday suggested that his vice-captain, Saurav Ganguly, or Ajay Jadeja could get the job. But while Jadeja still has to justify his claim for even a permanent berth in the Test side, whether Ganguly has what it takes for the job is also under doubt despite his fine showing with the bat in Australia. A third candidate could be Bangalore batsman Rahul Dravid, who has an image as an articulate and thinking cricketer.

It is the second time that Tendulkar, arguably the world's best batsman despite his poor run in Australia, will be going out as captain of the team. Tendulkar has captained India in 23 Tests winning four and losing seven and drawing the rest. In 67 One-dayers in which he was captain the team won 22 and lost 38.

— *India Abroad News Service*



AT NETS: India's Sachin Tendulkar bats during net practice in Bombay ahead of the first Test between India and South Africa scheduled to begin tomorrow. — Reuters

Wasti stakes Test claim

RAWALPINDI — Opener Wajidullah Wasti staked his claim for a Test spot with a chancy 85 as the Pakistan Board XI made 191 for three on the second day of a three-day match against Sri Lanka here yesterday.

Wasti, who played one match in both the Test and One-day series in Australia recently, benefited four times from uncharacteristically sloppy Sri Lankan fielding.

Earlier Sri Lanka, resuming at 162 for five, were dismissed for 278. PCB XI was given a solid start of 122 runs by openers Wasti and Naveed Qureshi.

Naveed, discarded after playing one Test against Zimbabwe in the 1998-99 season, impressed during his 66. He hit 12 boundaries.

Wasti was out in the last over of the day, hitting 12 boundaries and a six in his 183-ball vigil.

The 22-year-old from Peshawar hit twin centuries in the Lahore Test against Sri Lanka in

last year's Asian Test championship.

Yesterday, Wasti was dropped twice by wicketkeeper Romesh Kaluwitharana when on just 14.

At stumps, Younis Khan was not out on 10.

When play resumed in the morning with Sri Lanka still at the crease, Arjuna Ranatunga and Kaluwitharana extended their sixth wicket stand to 76.

Kaluwitharana was smartly caught by wicketkeeper Rashid Latif off Mohammed Akram for 36.

Former Sri Lankan skipper Ranatunga then fell to a well judged catch by Younis Khan off Irfan Fazil off 47.

Mohammed Akram also staked a claim for a Test place with four for 91 while teenage pacer Fazil finished with five for 120.

Akram took five wickets against Australia in Pakistan's humiliation at Perth but was not selected for the tri-series. — *AFP*

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka	3-45-1, Taimoor Khan 8-2-15-0, Wajidullah Wasti 1-0-2-0
R. Arnold c Taufiq	..11
b Mohammad Akram	..11
S. Jayasuriya c Irfan b Shafiq Ahmed	..60
T. Dilshan lbw b Irfan Fazil	..5
A. de Silva c Wasti	..1
b Mohammad Akram	..1
M. Jayawardene c & b Irfan Fazil	..39
A. Ranatunga c Younis b Irfan Fazil	..47
R. Kaluwitharana c Latif	..36
b Mohammad Akram	..36
U. Chandana not out	..31
R. Herath b Irfan Fazil	..0
N. Zoysa c Bazid b Irfan Fazil	..13
R. Pushpakumara b Mohammad Akram	..0
Extras (b-1, lb-4, w-1 nb-29)	..35
Total (74 overs, all out)	..278
Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-46, 3-48, 4-126, 5-137, 6-213, 7-237, 8-237, 9-266, 10-278	
Bowling: Mohammed Akram 24-3-91-4, Irfan Fazil 28-1-120-5, Shafiq Ahmed 13-	

India down Malaysia; S. Korea stay on top

KUALA LUMPUR — India beat Malaysia 2-1 thanks to a botched penalty stroke by Malaysia's Kuan Shanmuganathan in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament at the National Hockey Stadium here yesterday.

Kuan, two goal star of Malaysia's unprecedented 2-1 win over Germany earlier in the competition, had his flick from the spot in the 50th minute saved by Indian goalkeeper Jude Menezes, who had been feckless in earlier matches.

Malaysia were trailing 1-2 at that time and were at full throttle in search of the goal to draw level. But that equaliser proved elusive as India rode out what was now a familiar Malaysian tendency to fight back from a slumping position. Malaysia took the lead in the 11th minute when Suhaimi Ibrahim scored a lovely field goal from a pass for Saiful Azli Rahman. India, preferring calculated attack to spontaneity, hit back with their first penalty corner in the 19th minute when Baljit

Singh Dhillon cracked the second half looking menacingly for goals to appease their partisan fans. Kuan was in the thick of the fightback and stepped up readily for the stroke in the 50th minute when Nayak stick checked Suhaimi.

He missed, and that was the tenor of the Malaysian fightback until the final whistle.

The result did not have any effect on the prospects of each in making it to Saturday's final towards which table topping South Korea and second placed Pakistan had done the early running.

Meanwhile, South Korea maintained their table topping position beating Canada 2-1 yesterday. The Koreans looked set

for an easy win after going two ahead inside eight minutes.

Kim Kyung Seok shot them into the lead in the 3rd minute when he whipped in from the right flank after weaving into the circle and opting to shoot from a tight angle rather than pass.

Five minutes later, compatriot Hwang Jong Hyun replicated the move, this time from the left flank, the boldness of the attempt at a shot at goal with little or no angle to aim at taking the Canadian defence by surprise.

But the Koreans grew complacent after this early lead and Canada took advantage of the lull to come back into the game. In the 23rd minute skipper Peter Milkovich converted their second penalty corner to cut the Korean lead.

Heavy rain delayed the start of the second half and clearly dampened both sides appetite for a battle in the second period. On the contrary, Germany battled back from two goals down to draw 2-2 with New Zealand. — *AFP*



AZLAN SHAH HOCKEY: Malaysia's Kevan Raj tries to get past India's Baljit Singh Saini, right, and Baljit Singh Dhillon during the Sultan Azlan Shah hockey tournament in Kuala Lumpur. — Reuters

PDO's Tariq in devastating mood

MUSCAT — A hurricane hauled by Tariq Farooqi and a five-wicket haul by Mohammed Arshad Ali carried the PDO Cricket team to a winning position in the Al Anzari A.O. Smith sponsored 'E' Division game of the His Highness Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal Memorial League Cricket Tournament against Radisson SAS Cricket team at the PDO ground.

Batting first the PDO openers, Tariq Farooqi and Srinivas (49) played havoc with the Radisson bowlers scoring 148 runs between them in 18 overs.

Later Feroz Khan (21) ran himself out after adding 36 runs for the second wicket and with Patrick Roache staying with Tariq until the end of 25 overs PDO amassed a total of 233 runs for 2 wickets. Tariq's unbeaten 133 runs came from only 80 balls with the help of 10 fours and a six.

The Radisson openers suc-

cumbed to Firoz very cheaply and then Mohammed Ali mesmerised the hoteliers with a tantalising spell in which he claimed 5 wickets for 17 runs. Tariq also bagged 2 wickets as Radisson were dismissed for a miserable score of 107 runs in 16.4 overs.

At the OAC II ground Hatat DHL Cricket team restricted OIB 'I' to 117 for 8 wickets in 25 overs in the another 'E' Division game. Kamran Farooq (50) top scored for OIB 'I'. For Hatat DHL CT, Nasser Haider was the most successful bowler with three-wickets and Khalid Ghulam supported him with 2 wickets, both the bowlers conceding 13 runs each.

The Hatat openers Nadil Yousof and Khalid Moosa went on the rampage adding 45 runs in only 4 overs and after Nadil left having scored 25 runs in a short stay of 14 balls, Khalid with Abdullah Mohammed Akbar (16 not out) continued the plunder to add the remaining 73 runs in 5.2 overs in their unbroken stand.

Khalid remained not out on 56 coming from 31 balls with the help of 6 fours and a six.

At the OAC IV ground in a 'G' Division game, the Granherne Cricket team openers Samir Sankaran (35) and Solomon Jayakumar (37) gave a good 13- over 90-run start to their side.

Later Al Awal Cricket team's Syed Junaid Mukhtar caused a flutter claiming four quick wickets to have them in trouble at 101 for 4 wickets in the 15th over.

Dhananjay Ingle however rescued his side with a 30 ball innings of 51 runs containing 6 fours and a six as Granherne reached 191 for 8 wickets in 25 overs. The Awal openers Arif Gill (49) and Syed Junaid's opening stand yielded 75 runs in 7 overs and after both departed in the space of 3 runs, Ashfaq (55) and Ilyas Qureshi (40) then batted stubbornly to add 88 runs in 11 overs as the Awal side got past Granherne's score with 6 wickets and 20 balls to spare.

Brief scores
At PDO: PDO Cricket Team 233 for 2 wickets in 25 overs (Tariq Farooqi 133 not out, Srinivas 49, Feroz Khan 21) beat Radisson SAS CT 107 all out in 16.4 overs (Jacob Varghese 31, Mohammed Arshad Ali 5 for 17, Tariq Farooqi 2 for 13, Feroz Khan 2 for 33).
At OAC II: OIB 'I' 117 for 8 wickets in 25 overs, Kamran Farooq 59, Madhu Bhatnagar 32, Naveed Mazhar 20, Nasser Haider 3 for 13, Khalid Ghulam 2 for 13, lost to Hatat DHL C.T. 118 for one wicket in 9.2 overs, Khalid Moosa 56 not out, Nadil Yousof 25.
At OAC IV: Granherne CT 191 for 8 wickets in 25 overs (Dhananjay Ingle 51, Solomon Jayakumar 37, Samir Sankaran 35, Syed Junaid Mukhtar 4 for 34, Samiuddin Petkar 2 for 30) lost to Al Awal CT 194 for 4 wickets in 21.4 overs (Ashfaq 55, Arif Gill 49, Ilyas Qureshi 40, Syed Junaid Mukhtar 26).

Tendulkar should have waited, says Wadekar

PUNE — Indian skipper Sachin Tendulkar should have waited for some more time before offering to resign from the captaincy, former chairman of the national selection committee Ajit Wadekar said on Monday.

He told newsmen after a joint function of Pune Telecom and the State Bank of India in the city, that Tendulkar — alone cannot be blamed for the failure — during the Test and the triangular series in Australia.

"It is good that as a captain, he has shouldered the responsibility of the team failure. I don't think any other captain has done it before. But I personally feel that he should have waited for some more time before taking such a steadfast step," he said.

Wadekar said: "It is for the selectors and others to realise exactly that the captain is as good as the team and if the team is not good then the captain alone cannot do anything and that is exactly what went wrong for Sachin".

Wadekar, the first captain under whom India won the series away from home, felt Bengal southpaw Saurav Ganguly could be a much better captain, if Sachin's resignation is accepted.

"He did a pretty good job when he captained the side at Toronto and he could be tried out. He is also good in both types of cricket — One-day and Test matches," Wadekar said.

On the newcomers, Wadekar said: "Jaffer should have been given a chance much earlier about two years back. Same was the case with Amol Mjumdar and Jatin Paranjpe.

"Jaffer is good opening batsman but what he needs is to improve on his fielding. Kaif resembles the younger Azhar of playing with the wrist." — *PTI*

England players to get performance-related pay

HARARE — England's leading cricketers are to receive performance-related payments from this summer, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Monday.

ECB chief executive Tim Lamb and chairman of selectors David Graveney said the shake-up of the pay structure was aimed at improving the results of the national team who have slid to second bottom in the unofficial world Test rankings.

The ECB will announce on March 1 the names of the players who will be signed on new contracts similar to those adopted in Australia and South Africa.

"If the England team are winning then the players that make up that team will receive higher rewards," said Lamb.

"Within the remuneration

package for those contracted to England, a significant proportion of it will be performance-related pay.

"In addition to a basic salary, there is quite an attractive additional amount of money which is available to recognise success and on top of that there are the win-bonuses which have been provided by the sponsors in the past."

Lamb and Graveney have recently arrived in Zimbabwe for discussions with England coach Duncan Fletcher and captain Nasser Hussain over which players should receive the contracts.

The move by the ECB has long been urged by critics who claim that England players operate in a 'comfort zone' with no extra incentive to turn in consistently high-level performances.

Lamb stressed the performance-related pay would be based entirely on the results achieved by the team as a whole and would not be awarded on an individual basis.

He said the ECB had budgeted an extra £750,000 (\$1.20 million) for player remuneration this year.

Graveney emphasised the contracted players would still be available to play for their counties.

Opportunities to play county cricket are likely to be limited, though, as England face the most packed summer schedule in their history, with seven Test matches and 10 One-day Internationals against Zimbabwe and the West Indies.

"These guys will play county cricket," said Graveney. "If you

compare our system with South Africa and Australia, there's no suggestion in their set-up that centrally contracted players don't play for their states or their provinces - and the same applies with us."

Graveney, in consultation with Fletcher and Hussain, has a total of 16 contracts to offer to England players, although it is thought the final number will be slightly less as the ECB are unwilling to gamble on younger, less proven talent.

The contracts will be for six months with the possibility that the most senior players may be rewarded with one-year deals.

"We want players to aspire to a contract," explained Lamb. "That is why the total financial package is going to be reasonably attractive." — *Reuters*

Daryll Cullinan doubtful starter

BOMBAY — With less than 48 hours remaining for the commencement of the India-South Africa two-Test series at the Wankhede stadium here, the visitors have a problem on their hands.

Daryll Cullinan, their regular two-down batsman, is recovering from a hamstring problem which forced him to retire hurt after a cursory stay at the crease in their tour opener against the Board President's Eleven which ended on Monday.

The player, who represents Gauteng (formerly Transvaal) and will be 33 on March 4 — the third day of the second Test at Bangalore, is responding well to treatment, team manager Ghulam Rajah said yesterday.

A final decision is to be taken only tomorrow whether Cullinan, who showed his prodigious talent with a first class cen-

tury when he was only 16-year-old, would be fit to play in the first Test. It will be a huge blow for the visitors' hopes if the 55-Test veteran, with ten Test hundreds under his belt since making his debut against India at home in the 1992-93 'friendship series', is ruled out of the series opener here.

He is one of only three visiting team's batsmen — apart from opener Gary Kirsten and one-down Jacques Kallis — having an average of plus-40 in Tests, often considered as a benchmark to distinguish a class batsman at the highest level of the game after a lengthy career.

Meanwhile, only two members of the visiting team, vice-captain Shaun Pollock and left-arm spinner Nicky Boje, turned up for a hit at the nets yesterday morning at the Wankhede Stadium. — *PTI*



OUA TROPHY: Abdul Aziz receiving the OUA Trophy from G.S. Nair as Ghallah captain Bob Dibben looks on.

Aziz clinches OUA trophy

MUSCAT — Abdul Aziz Ali Moosa had an excellent run at the Ghallah Wentworth, which saw him win the glittering OUA Trophy. The competition was played under the Stableford system of scoring over 18 holes. The front nine saw some very good scoring, notably from Ian Day (19 Points), Bob Dibben also with 19 points and Abdul Aziz with a tremendous 21 points.

The question was could he keep it going on the back nine. The answer was a very definite yes, he could.

Although not scoring as well as he had done on the front he managed to hold it together and scored 19 points on the back nine.

The early leader in the clubhouse was Nigel Charles with a fantastic score of 22 points on the back nine, which was enough to beat Bob Dibben into third place

on countback. Abdul Aziz completed his victory with a bogey 5 on the last to gain two points that was enough to take him away from Nigel.

The prizes were presented by G.S. Nair, retail operations manager for Oman United Agencies LLC.

The Muscat Ladies Open Competition will be this weekend.

Full results:
2 Clubs: Mohammed Noor and Peter Sidgwick
Nearest the Pin: Peter Sidgwick
Longest drive: Ali Said
Best front 9: Ian Day (19 points)
Best Back 9: Tim Holt (18 points)
3rd Place: Bob Dibben (38 points)
2nd Place: Nigel Charles (38 points)
Winner: Abdul Aziz Ali Moosa (40 points)

Jelena Dokic makes U-turn

SYDNEY — Australian tennis women's No.1 Jelena Dokic changed her mind yesterday, and said she would after all play in the Olympics in September.

Eight days ago the 16-year-old said she would boycott the Games in revenge for an article in a Melbourne newspaper.

But yesterday she said in a statement her annoyance over the article, which appeared during the Australian Open, was not worth denying herself the opportunity to play in her hometown Olympics.

"I'm obviously upset with the Melbourne *Herald Sun*, but I shouldn't have directed this frustration at the Olympic Games," the statement said. Last week she said she felt "betrayed".

"I didn't feel like I was supported, no-one got behind me, and that really hurt me. I feel betrayed, ruined," she said then. — *AFP*

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TIMES SPORT

Promoters mum on Graf wedding
BERLIN — Steffi Graf's promotional company was unable to throw any light yesterday on a BBC report that the German would marry Andre Agassi on her birthday in June. "No, we don't know anything about it," a spokesman for Steffi Graf Sport GmbH said when asked whether Graf would marry world number one Agassi on her 31st birthday. BBC reported Graf would tie the knot on her birthday on June 14. — Reuters

Wednesday, February 23, 2000

Kiwis aim for better show

DUNEDIN — New Zealand claimed yesterday day they could bounce back from the battering they took in the opening match against Australia in the remaining four One-day cricket Internationals.

New Zealand crashed to a five-wicket loss after a weak innings of 122 in the second One-day in Auckland on Saturday. The first match was abandoned because of rain.

"It was a bad performance and we're not denying that," New Zealand's top One-day batsman Nathan Astle said before the third One-day at Carisbrook today.

"But that's the first one we've had for a long time and we've played pretty consistent One-day cricket from the World Cup until now.

"We're still pretty happy, it was just one of those days where we didn't bat well.

"There's no worries in the

camp yet."

Astle said he would look to make amends for Saturday's first ball duck on a ground where he scored 95 just over a year ago to help New Zealand beat South Africa by three wickets.

New Zealand recently punished some loose bowling to inflict a 5-0 series win over the West Indies, but Astle knows the Kiwi batsmen, including fellow opener Craig Spearman who may get his last chance to retain his place today, will have to wait for the rare bad ball against Australia.

"We've got to be a little bit more patient, which we weren't in the first game, and we've got to be selective with our attacking shots," Astle said.

Another Kiwi under scrutiny is experienced wicketkeeper Adam Parore, who returned after an injury layoff on Saturday to score a duck and miss a catch and

stumping chance he should have taken.

Pace bowlers Warren Wisneski and Simon Doull are likely to again fight out the 12th man duties after both were rested for recalled offspinner Paul Wiseman in Auckland.

New Zealand: Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, Craig Spearman, Roger Twose, Chris Cairns, Craig McMillan, Chris Harris, Adam Parore, Scott Styris, Daniel Vettori, Warren Wisneski, Simon Doull

Australia: Steve Waugh (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Mark Waugh, Matthew Hayden, Michael Bevan, Damien Martyn, Andrew Symonds, Shane Lee, Shane Warne, Brett Lee, Glenn McGrath, Ian Harvey, Damien Fleming

Umpires: Steve Dunne, Doug Cowie.

Third umpire: Evan Watkin — AFP

Lanka cricket board resigns

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka's cricket board resigned en masse yesterday, officials here said, plunging the already crisis-ridden administration of the game into deeper turmoil. The interim board appointed by Sports Minister S. B. Dissanayake in June last year to manage the controversial Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka stepped down over differences with the minister, officials said.

They said a dinner organised by the interim committee to thank those involved in the hosting of last month's Under-19 World Cup tournament was abruptly cancelled yesterday following the latest controversy with the minister. However, officials said interim chairman of the cricket board Rennie Wijetilleke tendered his resignation and was followed by the other members of the ad hoc panel appointed to manage cricket administration. — AFP

Pakistan squad to be picked today

KARACHI — The Pakistan cricket team for the first Test against Sri Lanka will be named today, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Lt-General Tauqir Zia has said.

However, the general said Azhar Mahmood and Shoaib Akhtar will not be considered for selection for the Rawalpindi match to be played between February 26 and March 1 at the Pindi Cricket Stadium.

"Azhar has been advised six-week rest while Shoaib is out of commission for two weeks. Naturally, the players who can replace them are Waqar Younis, Mohammed Akram, Shahid Nazir etc."

He said there was little possibility that Azhar Mahmood would be fit for the three-Test series that concludes on March 16 at Karachi. "In all probability, he is out of the entire series."

Shoaib broke down after

bowling five overs in Gujranwala because of a groin injury while Azhar's appearance in Lahore ended only after one over because of a back strain. The PCB chief, when pressed on the likely team, said: "I think Wajahatullah Wasti will definitely play in the Tests."

Asked if he was hinting at the exclusion of Aamir Sohail, he diplomatically parried the question. He added that the training camp will begin at Lahore "in which all the senior players who were rested for the One-dayers have been invited."

The general confirmed that Ijaz Ahmad, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Waqar Younis, Shahid Afridi and Mohammed Wasim have been asked to attend the camp.

The general said skipper Saad Anwar and Intikhab Alam will be asked to attend the advisory council meeting to be held at the Qaddafi Stadium. He added that their views will

be given serious consideration "but the final decision will be made by the advisory panel."

The general said Inzamam will join the camp today morning since he had left for Malaysia on a business trip. He said the board wanted Inzamam to play in the three-dayer but because of his commitments, that was not possible.

The general brushed aside claims that the board was taking a U-turn from their much-publicised rebuilding process of the team by recalling the senior players.

"We are rebuilding the team for the 2003 World Cup. Test cricket is not on the agenda but we would definitely like to get a few youngsters who could perform well in Test matches also."

Lt-General Tauqir observed that the youngsters were being wrongly criticised for the 3-0 defeat in the One-day series.

"We lost because the seniors didn't perform and because of poor planning. How can you field first after winning the toss? The decisions were mind-boggling," he said, adding: "The youngsters shouldn't be blamed for seniors' failures."

The general said skipper Saad Anwar was also under pressure arguing that he was appointed captain at the eleventh hour. "He was made captain because we had no option left. Moin Khan let us down by declining the offer."

"Moin is still our first choice and next time he will not be offered the captaincy but will be told to captain the team. If he has to play in the team, it has to be on my terms and conditions," the general said.

The PCB chief indicated that there might be a change in the captaincy after the series against Sri Lanka for the tours of Sharjah and West Indies. — Internews



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