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Cables of greetings

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam on the national day of his country, wishing him good health and long life and the people of Brunei Darussalam further progress and prosperity. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to the president of Guyana on his country's independence day, wishing him good health and long life and the people of his country further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Sultanate's consent for Arab meet convened deposited

CAIRO — The Sultanate deposited the document of its approval pertaining to the regular convening of the Arab summit, with the Arab League here yesterday. This was done in an audience Esmat Abdel-Meguid, Arab League secretary-general, gave to Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al Hinai, Sultanate's ambassador to Egypt and its permanent representative to the Arab League. The Sultanate is the third country to take this step before March 2001 — the date of the first regular summit to be held in Amman.

"Depositing the documents is confirmation of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's support to the activation of the joint Arab action in the interest of the Arab nation," Hinai said in a statement to ONA. The Sultanate undertook strenuous efforts in this direction, especially during its chairing of the 114th council session and the five-member committee, thanks to the directive of His Majesty, the ambassador noted.

Holding the Arab summit on a regular basis is a positive step for the joint Arab action in the coming era, regionally and internationally, the ambassador emphasised, and added that the Arab leaders would discuss the causes of the Arab nation on a regular and systematic basis. — ONA

Clinton hit by another pardon row

NEW YORK — Former US president Bill Clinton was drawn into another murky controversy, denying he knew that his brother-in-law, Hugh Rodham, had been paid for helping obtain presidential pardons. Rodham, the brother of former first lady Hillary Clinton, admitted receiving money for helping secure a pardon for Glenn Braswell, a businessman under investigation for tax evasion and money-laundering, and commutation of a prison sentence for a convicted drug trafficker, Carlos Vignali. Rodham's lawyer Nancy Luque said he had returned the money, as much as \$400,000, according to media reports, but denied any wrongdoing. "Hugh Rodham has done absolutely nothing wrong. He has returned these fees solely because his family asked that he do so," the statement said.

The money was returned at the demand of former president Clinton and Hillary Clinton, now a Senator for New York, who denied any knowledge of the payments. "Yesterday I became aware of press inquiries that Hugh Rodham received a contingency fee in connection with a pardon application for Glenn Braswell and a fee for work on Carlos Vignali's commutation application," Clinton said in a statement. "Neither Hillary nor I had any knowledge of such payments. We are deeply disturbed by these reports and have insisted that Hugh returns any money received." Clinton's statement was released as the *National Enquirer*, a supermarket tabloid, was preparing to publish a detailed report on the payment in its next edition. — AFP

US jets hit Iraq again

Bush warns Saddam

WASHINGTON — US warplanes struck Iraqi air defences in a northern "no-fly" zone yesterday, the first such raids since US and British jets attacked radar and communications sites near Baghdad last week, the US military said.

Yesterday's raids, which the US European Command said were in response to Iraqi anti-aircraft fire and radar targeting near Mosul, came as Washington and London struggled under criticism from the Arab world to develop a new policy toward Baghdad.

All of the US jets returned safely to their base in Turkey after the raids, the European Command said. Sources in London said British aircraft were not involved in yesterday's strikes.

US President George W. Bush warned yesterday that the United States would not allow Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to develop weapons of mass destruction or threaten Iraq's neighbours.

Bush told reporters in his first formal press conference as president that US policy was designed to send a message to the Iraqi leader.

"We will not tolerate you developing weapons of mass destruction and we expect you to leave your neighbours alone," said Bush, in remarks directed to Saddam Hussein.

He said there would be a "consequence" if Iraq was found to be developing weapons of mass destruction.

Bush considered last week's strikes "a success," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer yesterday. But Pentagon and navy officials said that fewer than half of the US Navy "smart" bombs, costing more than \$300,000 each and launched from afar, struck their targets on Friday.

Officials said that most of the misses were by navy precision-guided bombs dropped by F/A-18 jets from the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman in the Gulf.

The "AGM-154A" Joint Standoff Bombs are dropped from up to 80km away and glide to their targets using satellite guidance from space.

The bombs cost more than \$300,000 each and are much more sophisticated than guided bombs used in the Gulf War.

The standoff bombs, which use satellites to pinpoint targets, were first used in Nato air

attacks against Serbia in 1999.

One of the officials, who asked not to be identified, said many of the guided bombs missed their radar site targets by up to 100 yards (metres) or more in some cases, but that guided missiles and other remaining bombs were much more successful in damaging air defence communications links.

The officials said the misses were apparently due to software problems or possible damage to bombs before or when they were loaded onto attack jets.

An Iraqi defence spokesman said that the Iraqi anti-aircraft system yesterday fired at US and British fighters which "violated Iraq's airspace, forcing them to retreat".

"American and British planes, coming from Turkey with Ankara's support, violated Iraqi airspace... and fled back to their bases in Turkey, under fire from the Iraqi anti-aircraft system," the spokesman said.

Baghdad also said it had fired missiles at US and British planes in the southern no-fly zone, causing the planes to retreat from Iraqi airspace.

In Moscow, General Leonid Ivashov, head of international relations at the Russian Defence Ministry, said the attacks were "a new defiance of world opinion," the Interfax news agency reported.

The general described the raids as a "barbaric and inhumane" treatment of the Iraqi population, adding: "There was no military justification for the strikes."

He said, "Countering this evil deed needs the consolidated efforts of the entire world community."

UN complacency toward the strikes "could lead to an escalation of the part of US President George W. Bush's team towards other countries," he warned.

Meanwhile French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine called yesterday for a system of international monitoring to replace the current UN sanctions regime against Iraq.

"We need to move away from a policy of sanctions toward a policy of international vigilance and international control as far as the Iraqi regime and its illegal programmes are concerned," Vedrine said.

"What we really need today is a policy that no longer makes the Iraqi population suffer." — Reuters, AFP

Bosnian Serbs convicted in landmark trial

THE HAGUE — The United Nations war crimes court yesterday convicted three former Bosnian Serb commanders in a landmark prosecution of rape and sexual enslavement as crimes against humanity.

The three received sentences ranging from 12 to 28 years for raping, enslaving and torturing Muslim women and girls in 1992. The case was the first before the Yugoslavia tribunal to deal with rape alone and to treat it as a crime against humanity, a charge second only to genocide in severity.

"Rape was used by members of the Bosnian Serb armed forces as an instrument of terror," presiding Judge Florence Mumba said as she delivered the verdict after an eight-month trial.

"The three accused are not ordinary soldiers whose morals were merely loosened by the hardships of war... they thrived in the dark atmosphere of the dehumanisation of those believed to be enemies," the judge said.

Prosecutors said the three took women and girls as young as 12 to a variety of "rape houses" for a string of brutal beatings and assaults. The crimes took place in the summer of 1992 after Bosnian Serb forces overran the town of Foca in southeastern Bosnia.

The trial chamber sentenced 40-year-old Dragoljub Kunarac to 28 years in jail, 39-year-old Radomir Kovac to 20 years and Zoran Vukovic, also 39, to 12 years.

The three, leaders of Bosnian Serb forces during the overthrow and occupation of Foca, were charged with 36 counts of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war, including 10 rapes.



CONVICTED: One of the convicts, Dragoljub Kunarac, left, meeting his lawyer in the courtroom yesterday. — Reuters

Yesterday's judgement, in the ninth trial to be completed since proceedings began in 1996, is expected to be closely studied by women's groups.

Prosecutors said they were gratified by the convictions and sentences and pleased that the court had seen the systematic abuse as part of a general attack against the Muslim population.

"What sets this apart is that this is a case in which we have a large rape camp organisation... This is the first case of sexual enslavement and the only one with sexual assaults

and no murders," said leading counsel Dirk Ryneveld.

The eight-month trial called 63 witnesses, including many of the women who had suffered in the nightmarish summer of 1992.

Many testified behind a screen with their voices muffled for fear of retribution from other indicted men still at large.

But they had to come face-to-face with their attackers in court.

When Serb forces overran Foca the men and women from the mainly Muslim pop-

ulation were separated, the men detained in a local prison, the women in a sports hall and various hotels and houses which served as brothels for the invading troops.

Many women were so forcibly abused they suffered permanent gynaecological harm. One woman, identified as witness 75, was raped for three hours by 15 men. Two teenage girls were held for months by Kovac as personal sex slaves before being sold.

Serb soldiers would drop by the Partizan Sports Hall to pick their victims from the 72

women, children and elderly people held there from July to August 1992.

One knife-wielding man threatened to gouge a 15-year-old victim with a crucifix, forced her to drink alcohol — an insult to her religion — and made her assume a Serb name as he raped her.

"I remember he was very forceful. He wanted to hurt me. But he could never hurt me as much as my soul was hurting me," she told the court.

Kunarac and Kovac, who received the stiffest sentences, kept young women and girls at the quarters as domestic servants and sex slaves.

Kunarac organised the transfer of women to other soldiers, while Kovac raped, beat and subsequently sold his charges, including a 12-year-old girl.

"You have shown the most glaring disrespect for the women's dignity and their fundamental human rights... on a scale that far surpasses even what one might call... the 'average seriousness of rapes during wartime'," Mumba told Kunarac.

However, a group of Bosnian Muslim women denounced the sentences as "unjust and humiliating".

"We are shocked with the verdict. Justice has not been done, as the three received a minimum punishment for what they have done," Nezira Zolota of the Sarajevo association of female ex-detainees said.

Some of the Foca rape victims contacted by Zolota were "seriously shaken" after hearing the verdict, she said. However, they refused to talk to reporters.

The ICTY decision "actually minimised the sufferings of the victims," Zolota added. — Reuters

India extends Kashmir truce

NEW DELHI — India yesterday extended its ceasefire against separatist militants in Kashmir for three months, but warned it would take firm action against any group that continued with violence. Pakistan however, dismissed it as a bid to mislead the world.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said the unilateral truce — effectively just a suspension of combat operations — would be extended until the end of May to give all parties in the conflict time to work for peace.

It was the third time India has renewed the ceasefire since it came into force on November 27, but the first time it has been extended for more than one month.

However Vajpayee stopped short of addressing demands from opposition parties and separatist leaders in Indian-held Kashmir that the ceasefire be accompanied by confidence-building measures to create a genuine peace process.

Announcing the new truce in parliament, Vajpayee spelled out

an uncompromising message to rebel groups who have carried out spectacular attacks during the past three months.

"I wish to make it abundantly clear that the peace process is only for those who wish to benefit from it. We will not let this process be derailed, diluted or misused," he said.

"Law and order shall be maintained. Those who think that our security forces are less determined today to put an end to terrorism are only deluding themselves."

Vajpayee again called on Islamabad to rein in rebel violence, and reiterated India's position that it was prepared to

hold talks with Pakistan to find a lasting solution in Kashmir.

Islamabad dismissed Vajpayee's latest extension of the ceasefire in Kashmir as another attempt to mislead world opinion.

"The announcement made today by the Indian prime minister on an extension of the period of 'non-initiation of combat operations' by Indian forces in occupied Kashmir is yet another attempt by India to mislead world opinion," a foreign office statement said.

"Instead of responding positively to the initiatives taken by Pakistan for the reduction of tension and the commencement of a peace process on Kashmir, India has repeated its old allegations against Pakistan," it said, referring to Vajpayee's reiteration that Islamabad should rein in militants operating in Kashmir.

India also "sought to malign the freedom struggle" being waged by the people of Kashmir against the "terror and violence unleashed by the Indian forces," the statement said. — AFP

Prospects low on eve of Powell's ME visit

JERUSALEM — US Secretary of State Colin Powell arrives in Israel and the Palestinian territories tomorrow facing twin challenges: working with an Israeli government sure to be more hardline on the peace process, and with a Palestinian population angry from months of clashes with Israel.

While he is the highest-ranking US official to visit Israel or the territories since the explosion of violence in late September, the new administration of George W. Bush has made clear that Powell does not intend to bring — or come back with — any peace plan.

The approach is in marked contrast to that of former US president Bill Clinton, who despite criticism at home and abroad pushed until nearly his last minute in office to clinch a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

"I have the impression that this administration is more realistic," said former defence minister Moshe Arens, who recently visited Washington as an envoy from hardline Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon. "Unlike the previous administration it doesn't think it's under the spell of any illusions about the Middle East," Arens said. "He's a new secretary of state, and his visit is only natural in the coordination of policy between two allies."

Powell arrives in Israel from Egypt and is expected to hold talks with Sharon, defeated caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Israeli President Moshe Katsav, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Gaza before leaving on Sunday.

During his election campaign Sharon, who is still working to form a new government, drew the line at many of the key compromises made by Barak during peace talks, ruling out any Palestinian control in Jerusalem and the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

Adviser to Arafat, Nabil Abu Rudeina, said the US must come up with a new peace initiative and constrain Israel to pick up negotiations where they left off. — AFP

3 Grammys for bad boy Eminem

LOS ANGELES — Bad boy rapper Eminem, who has delighted and disgusted millions of music fans with graphic song lyrics, added three Grammy Awards to his collection on Wednesday, with the coveted album of the year award still to be announced.

The 28-year-old blue-eyed blonde-haired performer won two Grammys in the untelevised portion of the Grammy Awards, and the rap album award during the subsequent televised ceremony. His album *The Marshall Mathers LP*, a nod to his real name, is also tipped to win the top album prize.

"Well, what should I say first?" Eminem said after receiving the rap album Grammy for the second consecutive year. "First of all I want to thank everybody who could look past the controversy and see the album for what it is and what it isn't."

He also thanked his young daughter Hailie Jade, and took the opportunity to plug his back-up rap group D-12, whose members came out on stage with him.

Outside the Staples Centre, where the awards were handed out, about 200 representatives from gay, women's and religious groups held a "Rally Against Hate" to draw attention to lyrics they perceived as promoting homophobia and domestic violence.

CBS, which broadcast the event, aired a public service announcement featuring Judy Shepard, the tearful mother of murdered gay

college student Matthew Shepard, discussing the impact of name-calling and violence against gay youth.

The album of the year category will be announced at the end of the three-hour ceremony, just after Eminem performs his hit duet *Stan* with openly gay English pop veteran Elton John.

The Eminem controversy has overshadowed the Grammys.

Foo Fighters leader Dave Grohl, whose band won two Grammys, told reporters that Eminem seemed to be the theme of the ceremony.

"What's going to happen? The suspense is killing me," he said sarcastically. Eminem, whose real name is Marshall Bruce Mathers III, won the rap solo Grammy (*The Real Slim Shady*) during the untelevised ceremony. He shared the Grammy for rap performance by a duo or group (*Forgot About Dre*) with Dr Dre, his mentor.

Dr Dre, whose real name is Andre Young, also won producer of the year during the untelevised portion.

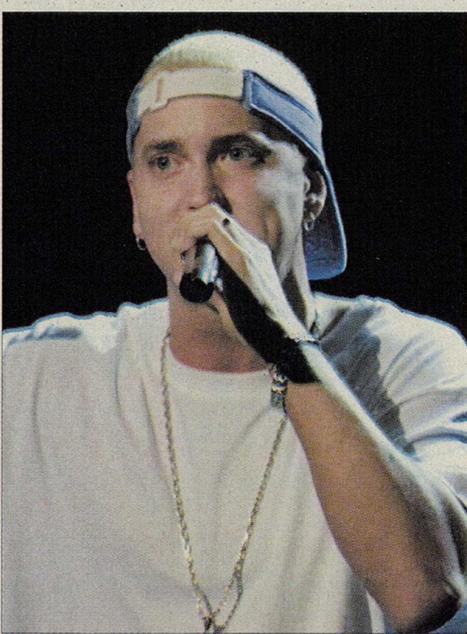
Pop diva Madonna kicked off the televised ceremony by performing *Music*, the Grammy-nominated title track from her latest album. Dressed in black trousers and black tank-top proclaiming *Material Girl*, she cavorted enthusiastically around a car bearing the licence plate *SNATCH D*, a reference to the gangster film directed by her new English husband, Guy Ritchie.

The first award of the televised ceremony went to soul ingenue Macy Gray as her mournful ballad *I Try* won the female pop vocal performance Grammy, the first of Gray's brief career.

Jazz-rock duo Steely Dan, Grammy-free for their 30-year career, won the pop vocal album category for *Two Against Nature*, their first release in 20 years. During the untelevised ceremony, they won the pop performance Grammy for the track *Cousin Dupree*.

Earlier, Radiohead won the second alternative Grammy of their career, this time for *Kid A*. The band's guitarist, Ed O'Brien, expected Eminem to win the album of the year prize. "We all feel that he's made the most culturally significant album, whether it's good or bad, and he's a very talented rapper," O'Brien said. Steely Dan member Walter Becker was less enthusiastic, describing *Marshall Mathers* as a "novelty record," but a good one.

Other performers included R&B trio Destiny's Child, whose female empowerment anthem *Say My Name* won two Grammys, and Irish rock band U2, who won a rock Grammy for *Beautiful Day*. The acts performed those respective songs. There were several other double winners at the non-televised ceremony, including rock band the Foo Fighters, banjo musician Bela Fleck, blues giant B.B. King and R&B singer D'Angelo. — Reuters



TOP SHOT: Eminem performing the song *Stan* at the 43rd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — Reuters

OMAN/MIDDLE EAST



EXERCISE: Air Vice-Marshal Mohammed bin Mahfoudh Al Ardhi, commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, yesterday visited the military exercise site at Sultan bin Saif Camp. The exercise, which began on February 19, is part of preparations for the Omani-British exercise Al Saif Al Sarie-2. The commander and the senior RAFO officials who accompanied him were briefed on the progress of the preparations. They also acquainted themselves with the work of the commands and units participating in the exercise, representing the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman and the Sultan's Special Forces.

S. Arabia set to receive 2m Haj pilgrims

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's two holiest sites, is mobilising to cope with more than two million Muslims from around the world for the annual Haj pilgrimage to Makkah starting in early March.

According to official figures, 762,649 Muslims had already arrived in the kingdom by Tuesday, most by air. The arrival deadline to join the Haj is February 28.

Custodian of the Holy Mosques King Fahd bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia has paid for 2,500 pilgrims, 1,000 of whom are Palestinians wounded in clashes with Israel in the Palestinian territories, to travel on the Haj.

King Fahd has ordered that all government departments "double their efforts and mobilise all necessary material and human resources for the success of the Haj."

The Haj Ministry has mobilised more than 50,000 volunteers to help government departments, police and civil defence teams ensure the Haj runs smoothly.

The kingdom's national carrier, Saudi Arabian Airlines, will fly in around 750,000 pilgrims in total, a 17 per cent increase on last year's Haj.

Saudia has signed an agreement with Iran's Haj organisation to carry some of the 600,000 Iranian pilgrims expected, 30 per cent up on the average number.

All the same, the authorities face the major task of ensuring safety for the huge crowds which gather in Makkah and the surrounds for the culmination of the rituals.

A 2.7 billion riyal (\$720 million) project launched in 1997 was completed near Makkah last year covering the installation of 40,000 fire-proof tents, giant water reservoirs to fight fires, cooling systems and sanitation facilities.

Old tents which caught fire easily and gas stoves have been banned since a 1997 disaster when 343 pilgrims were killed as a blaze started by a stove swept through a tent camp in Mina, near Makkah.

But in 1998, at least 118 pilgrims died and more than 180 were injured in a stampede during the "Stoning of Satan" ritual, also in Mina.

The site in Mina is where Ibrahim, his wife Hajar and their son Ismael are said to have thrown seven stones each at the devil when he appeared before them.

The Health Ministry is also expected to mobilise up 14 field hospitals and 9,000 doctors and nurses along major roads and assembly points.

Furthermore, the authorities have set up a huge abattoir with a workforce of about 46,000 people, including veterinary surgeons, to look after and oversee the slaughter of beasts during the Feast of the Sacrifice (Eid Al Adha) festival.

Last year saw the slaughter of almost 640,000 sheep, goats, cows and camels during the festival that marks the end of the Haj, one of the five pillars of Islam, obligatory for all Muslims sound of body and able to pay for the trip.

The Islamic Development Bank, part of the pan-Arab Organisation of Islamic Conference, organises the delivery of the meat to needy Muslims throughout the world.

18 killed in Syria building collapse

DAMASCUS — At least 18 people were killed and 36 injured when a four-storey building collapsed late on Wednesday near the northwestern Syrian town of Idlib, the local police said yesterday.

The police added that two persons were still missing and that rescuers were continuing to search for survivors in the locality of Ariha, near Idlib, 33.5km north of Damascus.

According to the official Sana agency, the building had been constructed without authorisation. — AFP

UN calls for aid to Palestinian refugees

AMMAN — The UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees appealed to donor countries yesterday for a \$37.2-million contribution to alleviate the hardship of those in its care.

The head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Unrwa), Peter Hansen, told a meeting here that the plight of refugees had significantly worsened since the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, broke out nearly five months ago.

"What we are trying to do by our appeal is to contain the worst immediate damage" suffered by the 575,000 Palestinian refugees who live in the camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hansen said at a news conference in the Amman-based agency's headquarters.

It is the Unrwa's second such appeal since the intifada against Israeli occupation erupted in September. The funds will be used for emergency food, economic and medical aid to the refugees over the next three months.

"We have generally seen, I can say without exaggeration, over the last five months more destruction in physical, social and economic terms than has been seen under the seven years of the first intifada", which lasted from 1987 to 1994, Hansen said.

"We have seen much of what had been achieved in the past slipping away", he said, explaining that, for example, the 98.9 per cent vaccination rate for children achieved in the Gaza Strip and West Bank before the start of the intifada is now down to 85 per cent.

He also reported an increase in a variety of diseases and in the incidence of stillbirths.

The issue of employment was also central to the informal meeting.

"Unemployment levels in the occupied territories have grown from 11 per cent in September 2000 to 40 per cent today, with alarming consequences on the level of poverty", an Unrwa statement said.

"Poverty has become endemic, and half the pop-

ulation in Gaza and one third in the West Bank lives below the poverty line", Hansen explained.

Israel has imposed a military blockade on these two areas since the beginning of the latest Palestinian uprising on September 28.

The closure, which prevents Palestinians from working in Israel and limits the ability of Palestinians to travel between Arab-run areas, has caused the Palestinian economy to plummet and poverty rates to skyrocket.

Unrwa said its employment creation programme intends to address this issue by "providing wages for the poorest" and by creating "540,000 job opportunity days" in the Palestinian territories to "employ labour in school construction, shelter rehabilitation and repair of damaged infrastructure in camps". Part of the aid requested is also aimed at providing food and cash subsidies for about 200,000 families, as well as post-injury rehabilitation, the statement added.

After the meeting, Hansen said he expected positive results. In November, donor countries responded well to a similar 40-million-dollar appeal by the UN agency.

"Donors recognise that there is a very serious problem", the UN commissioner said, adding they have "a very strong sense that Israel should facilitate the delivery of assistance rather than putting obstacle in its way".

The Israeli authorities are regularly accused of blocking relief aid sent to the Palestinian territories by foreign countries.

Hansen also reminded the donors that this appeal was only an additional demand and that the agency's budget, also financed by donors, faced a 65-million deficit for 2001.

Hansen has often warned that the Unrwa might have to reduce its activities if donor countries failed to pay what they pledged. There are some 3.7 million Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and nearby Arab countries, who were made homeless by the fighting that followed the creation of Israel in 1948. — AFP

New PSC board takes oath today

MUSCAT — The oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected office-bearers of Pakistan Social Club will be held at 6.30pm at the Pakistan School Muscat hall today.

The board members headed by Mian Mohammed Riaz, president, will swear in before Karam Elahi, Pakistan's ambassador to the Sultanate.

1,200 sheep disappear in Syrian storm

DAMASCUS — A fierce sand storm has hit the Syrian desert leaving 1,200 sheep missing and cutting routes to cities in the area, officials said yesterday.

They said the storm, the most severe in more than 40 years, also caused breathing difficulties for dozens of people who were rushed to hospital in Palmyra city, some 250km north east of Damascus.

The storm, which has raged for the past two days, disoriented the sheep which strayed away from their shepherds. — Reuters

15,000 seek Bahraini citizenship

MANAMA — Around 15,000 people living in Bahrain, nearly half of them stateless, are seeking citizenship in the Arab Gulf state, an official said in remarks published yesterday.

Interior Ministry Undersecretary for Immigration and Passports Sheikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa said that 8,000 people from 24 Arab and foreign countries and 7,000 stateless people had applied for Bahraini passports.

Sheikh Rashid was speaking to *Al Ayam* newspaper after giving Bahraini passports on Wednesday to 80 people, covering 38 families who had applied for full Bahraini citizenship. Bahrain has an estimated population of 666,000, one-third of whom are foreigners.

Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa earlier this week ordered the Interior Ministry to take the necessary steps to grant Bahraini passports to over 1,000 people who had been born and raised in Bahrain.

The decision covers people whose families had come to Bahrain from neighbouring countries, mainly Iran, to work and later settled in the island state. — AFP

Sharon bid on unity govt under fire

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon's bid to forge a broad government to tackle Middle East peace came under fire yesterday from Labour Party activists opposed to joining up with far-right parties.

The rightist Likud Party leader, who defeated Labour Prime Minister Ehud Barak in a February 6 election, hoped to have a government in place for the visit this weekend by US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

But the centre-left Labour Party, Israel's largest political bloc, was thrown into turmoil by Barak's decision on Tuesday to step down as party head and retire from politics.

The announcement sparked a battle for Labour's leadership and internal bickering over whether Labour should demand the key Finance Ministry instead of the defence portfolio Sharon, 72, had planned to give Barak, 59.

"We demanded today the foreign affairs post and the finance post and not the Defence Ministry, despite my view (on the issue)," said Labour cabinet member and negotiator Dalia Itzik.

Sharon had reportedly offered elder statesman and Nobel peace laureate Shimon Peres the defence portfolio.

A power-sharing deal with Labour is perhaps Sharon's only hope of forming a stable coalition that will enable him to deliver on an election promise to push peacemaking forward with the Palestinians in the face of violence.

However, Labour is also deeply divided over whether it should join a government likely to include the ultra-nationalist National Union and Yisrael Beitenu parties.

"There are a few more questions that must be answered," Itzik told Channel Two television.

"Only the Labour central committee will approve yes or no to a unity government," she said, referring to a planned meeting of Labour activists on Monday to ratify a putative alliance in time for a Likud deadline.

In the midst of all the political wrangling, Sharon met a team of advisers on Wednesday to prepare for talks with Powell, who took office a month ago with US President George W. Bush and embarks on a four-day Middle East tour on Friday.

Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and Justice Minister Yossi Beilin met other Labour members opposed to an alliance with Likud, underscoring the deepening split over whether to join forces.

The Labour Party whip, Ofir Pines-Paz, accused Sharon of playing a double game by courting both Labour and far-right parties that oppose peacemaking with the Palestinians.

"The nation wants unity between Labour and Likud. The nation doesn't want unity with Gandhi," he told Israel Radio, referring to the nickname of National Union head Rehavam Ze'evi, whose party favours the voluntary transfer of Arabs.

"Entering a government with Gandhi and (Yisrael Beitenu head) Avigdor Lieberman is a red line for a unity government," Pines-Paz said. He said at least half of Labour opposed an alliance with the two parties. — Reuters

3 injured in West Bank violence

NABLUS (West Bank) — Two Palestinians and an Israeli were injured when sporadic violence flared in the West Bank yesterday that kicked off with a bomb and continued into the night with a gunfight, Israeli and Palestinian sources said.

A Palestinian husband and wife were injured when Israeli forces shot at the village of Qusra in the northern West Bank after an Israeli bus came under fire in the area, residents and hospital officials said.

One of the victims, Muntasser Mahmoud Awad, 20, was taken by the Israeli Army, while his wife Jawaher was hospitalised in Nablus suffering bullet wounds to her hand, they said.

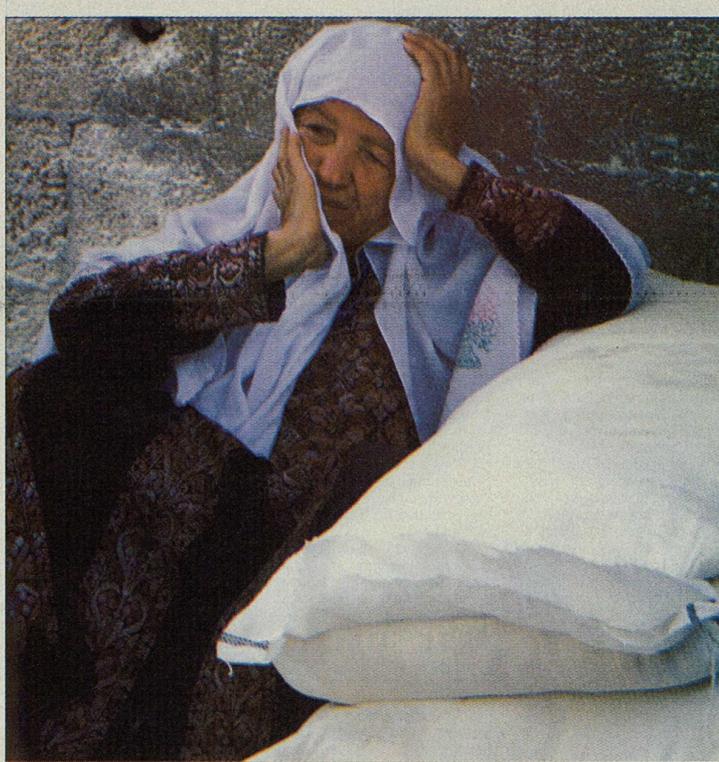
The Israeli Army said that a bus and troops had come under fire near the Jewish settlement of Migdalim near Qusra southeast of Nablus, but that there were no injuries. It did not say whether soldiers had returned fire.

In the southern Gaza Strip, a powerful bomb exploded the flashpoint city of Hebron, while in Jerusalem Palestinians shot and wounded an Israeli driver, the Israeli police and army said.

As darkness fell, a gunfight erupted between an Israeli Army base and the Palestinian town of Beit Sahur near Bethlehem, witnesses said.

Witnesses said Palestinian gunmen and soldiers exchanged gunfire and that Israel also responded by firing five explosive shells, setting fire to a Palestinian house. There were no immediate reports of serious injuries.

Israel accused Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's faction Fatah of setting the bomb near Hebron. The bomb exploded near an area where some 400 zealous Jewish settlers live in heavily guarded enclaves, the army radio said. — AFP



FALLEN ON HARD TIMES: A Palestinian woman leaning against sacks of flour at the UN distribution centre at the Jabali camp in the Gaza Strip yesterday. Food shortages have affected people living in the Gaza Strip since the violence started in October 2000. — Reuters

D-8 summit to discuss trade, economic ties

CAIRO — Leaders from eight developing Muslim countries are to gather here on Sunday for a summit aimed at promoting trade, economic and technological cooperation in their grouping of 800 million people.

Spanning Africa, Asia and Europe, the so-called D-8 group comprises Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan as well as Turkey, which has one foot in Europe.

"We just want to share our experience. We want to make trade partnerships," Imtiaz Ahmed, counsellor at the Bangladeshi embassy in Cairo, said when asked about the goals of the one-day summit.

Since the last summit was held in Dhaka in 1999, Bangladesh and its prime minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, have had the task of organising the gathering in Cairo, preceded by a foreign ministers meeting on Saturday.

The D-8's goal is to forge ahead with building an economic bloc through reducing trade barriers, enhancing cooperation in trade and economics, technical assistance, as well as alleviating poverty, Ahmed said.

Ahmed said that with its 800 million people, the D-8 has the potential to be a far bigger bloc than the 15-nation European Union, which is now just under 400 million people.

The D-8, proclaimed in June 1997 during its first summit in Istanbul, has assigned to each member country an area of expertise to build on, Ahmed and Egypt's Middle East News Agency (Mena) said.

Bangladesh works on rural development and poverty reduction, Egypt handles trade, Iran targets information technology, Pakistan studies fisheries, Indonesia deals with education and workers training, Malaysia specialises in finances, Nigeria works on energy and Turkey on industrial production.

Despite having Islam as a common religion, the D-8 countries have to straddle a wide geographic sweep, a broad gap in political views and systems, and big differences in the sizes of their non-Muslim populations.

For example, around half of Nigeria's 120 million people are Christian, including its President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Although Turkey shares a border with Iran, it has a secular government and turkey-oriented economy, while Iran is an Islamic republic and frequently denounces the "imperialist" West.

And although both Turkey and Egypt have an alliance in common with the United States, Ankara has raised fears in Cairo — not to mention other Arab countries — about its military cooperation pact signed with Israel in 1996. — AFP

WEATHER

Clear to partly cloudy skies over the Sultanate with a chance of early morning mist/fog patches over Al Wusta region and along the coastal areas.

Winds: Over coastal areas Gulf of Oman winds will be southwest light at night becoming northeast light to moderate during day and over the rest of the Sultanate winds will be south to southeasterly light to moderate.

Sea state: Slight along Oman coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25m.

Muscat

High 10:06pm — High 09:30am
Low 04:06am — Low 03:55pm
Sunrise 06:34am — Sunset 06:07pm
Relative humidity: 65 to 95 per cent.

Salalah

High 09:58pm — High 08:23am
Low 03:28am — Low 03:14pm
Sunrise 06:46am — Sunset 06:29pm
Relative humidity: 75 to 95 per cent.

TEMP MAX MIN

Seeb 27 21
Khasab 27 20
Mad'ha 29 20
Burmami 29 18
Ibri 31 18
Fahud 30 16
Sohar 26 18
Rustaq 30 19
Sumail 32 20
Haima 30 15
Nizwa 31 19
Saig 23 14
Babal Shams 10 04
Bahla 30 16
Adam 30 17
Ibra 30 17
Sur 34 23
Masirah 29 20
Marmul 29 15
Thumrait 33 14
Salalah 26 22
Qairon Hairiti 21 13
Al Halaniyah 25 17
Jabal Samhan 22 13
Saiq Qamar 23 14

Temperatures recorded in other cities: Muscat 26, Abu Dhabi 24, Dubai 24, Sharjah 25, Ras Al Khaimah 27, Doha 22, Manama 18, Riyadh 17, Makkah 29, Madinah 23, Jeddah 25, Kuwait 19, Sanaa 28, Aden 27, Mukalla 26, Baghdad 18, Beirut 15, Amman 09, Damascus 13, Cairo 18, Tehran 07, Karachi 28, Bombay 29, Ankara 0, Geneva 07, Brussels 07, Frankfurt 05, Paris 09, London 09, New York 07, and Tokyo 14.

Prayer Timings

Dhuhr 12.25
Asr 03.44
Maghrib 06.12
Isha 07.37
Tomorrow	
Fajr 05.19

EVENTS

- The Sixth Muscat International Book Fair being held at the Oman International Exhibition Centre until March 2.
- 'Inspirational Oman', exhibition of landscapes, seascapes and portraits by Heather Butler-Rawfinson at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat, will conclude today.
- The Ministry of Higher Education, in association with the Unesco, will host the world educational — University of the 21st Century — conference from March 17 to 19.
- First annual conference at Sultan Qaboos University Language Centre on March 21 and 22.
- International exhibition on agriculture, fisheries, food and related services at the Oman International Exhibition Centre in Seeb from April 2 to 5.
- The second evidence-based medicine workshop will be held at the SOU Medical College from April 4 to 6.
- Comex 2001, the annual IT and telecom exhibition, from April 22 to 25 April at the Oman International Exhibition Centre.
- Second Gulf Internet security conference on April 24 and 25 at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat.
- Gulf higher education exhibition (Ghedex 2001), organised by Oman International Trade and Exhibitions (OITE), at the Oman International Exhibition Centre from April 30 to May 2.
- Trainex 2001, the technical and vocational training exhibition, from April 30 to May 2 at the Oman International Exhibition Centre.
- Human Resource Development and the Knowledge Economy Conference on May 1 and 2, at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat.
- Gulfeco, Gulf Environment Exhibition, from June 4 to 6, at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat.
- Entrepreneur Conference (Eco) on June 5 and 6, at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat.
- Sixth Muscat International Fair from October 22 to 26, at the Oman International Exhibition Centre.
- First Gulf small and medium-sized forum on October 23 and 24, at Hotel Inter-Continental Muscat.

OMAN RADIO

07.00	Opening the Holy Quran, Preview of Morning Programmes and Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty
07.15	News Bulletin
07.30	Good Morning Oman
08.30	Melody Time
09.00	The World of Piano Music
10.00	Light Classical Music
11.00	News Highlights
11.05	Music in a Lighter Mood
12.00	Preview of Afternoon Programmes and News Headlines Pharmacies on Duty
12.03	The Holy Quran (Friday Prayers Timing)
12.15	The Eternal Message of Islam
12.30	New Horizons
12.45	Words in Action
01.00	News Headlines
01.02	Weekend Special
01:57	Weather Forecast and TV Programmes
02.00	Chosen Ones
02.30	News Bulletin
02.40	This Place has a Story
02.58	Weather Forecast and TV Programmes
03.00	Preview of Evening Programmes
03.02	Easy Listening Music
04.00	Jazz Rhythm
05.00	Country Notes
06.00	News Headlines
06.02	Odes to Joy
06.30	News Bulletin
06.40	Weather Forecast and Pharmacies on Duty
06.45	Business Report
07.00	Soul Train
09.45	The Holy Quran
10.00	News Summary, Preview of Morning Programmes, Pharmacies on Duty, Close Down, National Anthem

MUSEUM

Natural History Museum, Al Khuwair
Tel: 604957
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

Oman Museum, Information City, Qurum, Telephone: 600946.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

Children's Science Museum, Shati Al Qurum area, Qurum, Tel: 605368.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

Armed Forces Museum, Bait Al Falaj, Tel: 312655, 312646.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 8.30am to 1.30pm. Friday closed.

Oman-French Museum, Muscat Police Station, Tel: 736613.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

Bait Al Zubair, Tel: 736688.
Email: bazubair@omantel.net.om
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9.30am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

National Museum, Ruwi, Tel: 701289.
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

Sohar Fort Museum, Tel: 844758
Opening times: Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.
Friday evening only.

PAKISTAN/ASIA

Many cases standing against Sharif, says NAB official

ISLAMABAD — In case he returns to Pakistan, exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif should hope to land in the wheels of the same legal juggernaut he once managed to escape.

Several court cases are standing against the disgraced leader, and "proceedings on these can start if Nawaz Sharif returns to Pakistan", an official of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has said.

Raja Bashir, appointed NAB prosecutor-general this week, however said: "But I don't know whether or not he is coming back."

He said the hearing in the pending references against Nawaz Sharif would resume under the relevant law, if needed. Action can be taken against an accused at any time, if there is a case against him, the prosecutor-general said.

Asked whether there was any case against Sharif's wife Kulsum Nawaz at any stage, he professed ignorance according to a report carried by *The News*. "But I am not saying that there is no reference against her", he was quick to add.

"We proceed in a very fair manner and go by the law. We scrutinise the cases sent to us to determine whether it is right or wrong to send them to accountability courts," he said.

Military government has maintained that Sharif was allowed safe passage in return for his consent to stay away from Pakistan and its politics for up to ten years.

They have also said the president has pardoned Sharif's jail term, and sent him in exile.

Although Sharif himself has remained silent, key members of his family have denied the existence of any such deal, particularly the exile clause.

Family and party sources have persisted Sharif will return, although they have been silent on any timeframe or modalities in this regard.

Suggestions that Sharif will return have not made the authorities any happier, who have made clear they have no intention to allow either Sharif or Benazir Bhutto, another former prime minister, back into politics.

A report recently said Sharif's younger brother Shahbaz Sharif was considering to return to Pakistan. But authorities made their position crystal-clear earlier when they took a Sharif teenager, who returned to take his exam, into custody.

Benazir, living in self-exile since her conviction during the Sharif era in a graft scandal, has also threatened with a revolutionary change, but has accused the government of trying to block her return.

Ex-lawmakers may pay for indulgence with property

ISLAMABAD — For some members of Pakistan's suspended parliament, the price of some time spent in the deluxe Parliament Lodges will be confiscation of their properties.

The municipal authorities of the capital city of Pakistan have decided to proceed for confiscation of the property of more than 50 suspended senators and members of National Assembly (MNAs) for non-payment of the rent of these lodges, says a report.

In fact, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has already served notices on the suspended parliamentarians for the recovery of their dues.

Earlier, the CDA magistrate, who also has powers of revenue collector, issued notices to these suspended parliamentarians asking them to deposit their arrears within 15 days.

The CDA also sent letters to the deputy commissioners (DCs) of the districts of the recovery of Rs4.3 million, which these suspended MNAs and senators owe the CDA.

CDA sources say there were initially 700 to 800 parliamentarians who had not paid their dues to the CDA for last nine years.

However, most of them paid after the takeover by the military government.

The total arrears towards suspended and former MNAs and senators stood at Rs8.6 million before October 12, 1999.

An official said the assistance of relevant district administrations was being sought to take legal action against the defaulters. These DCs would issue notices to the defaulters and recover dues under revenue law.

He said notices had been served twice on these parliamentarians through deputy commissioners of their relevant areas but most of them had not responded. — *Internews*

North Korea threatens to end nuke, missile freeze

SEOUL — North Korea threatened yesterday to end its freeze on missile launches and nuclear development, blaming what it called the "brigandish" attitude of the new US administration.

Making its strongest official attack yet on the Bush administration, the isolated communist state said it would not be forced into giving up its arms.

A North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said the United States had not kept a 1994 accord under which the communist state froze its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

The spokesman, in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, warned that a missile launch moratorium begun in September 1999 would be abandoned unless the US government moved towards a permanent agreement.

There was no immediate US reaction, but South Korean military officials, quoted by Yonhap news agency, expressed concern that the threats could hinder progress in military talks between the two Koreas.

The United States brokered the 1994 accord with North Korea to end its nuclear development in return for economic aid and two new light water reactors that produce less weapons grade plutonium.

US officials have admitted Washington came close to ordering military action over North Korea's nuclear programme before the accord.

But the North Korean spokesman said the accord had not been kept, with the 2003 date for completion of the reactors now unreachable and no agreement to deliver substitute oil this year.

"If (the US administration) does not honestly implement the agreed framework as (of) today, there is no need for us to be bound to it any longer," said the spokesman.

He added that North Korea had agreed to end missile launches if it could get compensation and alternative satellite launch facilities.

North Korea fired a rocket over Japanese territorial waters in August 1998 that sparked international alarm. Pyongyang said it was a satellite launcher. Japan said it was a Taepo-dong 1 ballistic missile.

The North is also accused of selling missile technology to other US opponents such as Iran and Syria.

"The new US administration is not poised to seriously study the issue," said the spokesman who highlighted how North Korea was ready to ease

US security concerns.

"As there is no agreement between (North Korea) and the US, we will not be bound to our pledge related to the missile issue: raised during the previous US administration."

The spokesman said the policy of the government of President George W. Bush of seeking reciprocity for better relations sought to make North Korea "totally disarm itself first."

He warned: "The US is seriously mistaken if it thinks that Pyongyang will accept its demand."

The statement said the United States had shown its "aggressive and brigandish true intention to stop the DPRK-US relations from developing in the direction of reconciliation, cooperation and improved ties."

North Korea has sought better relations with the United States since

the 1994 accord.

There have been talks on economic relations, weapons proliferation and US soldiers missing since the 1950-53 Korean War, which has never been formally ended. The United States still has 37,000 troops in South Korea guarding against a new invasion.

Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went on a historic visit to Pyongyang last November and met the North's supreme leader Kim Jong-il.

She said Kim indicated that North Korea was ready to permanently end missile tests. But the two sides could not close a weapons proliferation agreement to allow president Bill Clinton to make his own trip to Pyongyang.

Now the Bush administration has signalled a harder line though it has

insisted it supports the rapprochement with the communist state championed by South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung.

The US administration has used the threat of rogue missile strikes from states like North Korea to justify its proposed National Missile Defence (NMD) shield.

There are indications that South Korea feels the tougher line in Washington could make its rapprochement with the North more difficult. But it has pledged to continue close cooperation with the United States and Japan.

South Korean military officials expressed fears that if the North renewed its weapons programmes, the trust built up since a historic inter-Korean summit last month could be lost. — *AFP*

Urging calm at home, Wahid heads to Mideast



OFF TO MIDDLE EAST: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid is escorted to his plane with Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri, right, looking on at the Halim airport as he departs for a two-week trip to the Middle East and Africa yesterday. — *Reuters*

JAKARTA — Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid left here yesterday on a two-week trip to the Middle East, urging people to be calm and professing himself unworried about possible moves to unseat him during his absence.

"Be calm," Wahid said, when asked if he had a parting message for the Indonesian people. "There is nothing going on. Mrs Mega is here."

He was referring to Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who accompanied Wahid to the aircraft before his departure from Jakarta's military airport at 8.45am.

Wahid, accompanied by Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab, will travel first to Yemen, and then to Dubai, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria and finally to Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj pilgrimage.

He is scheduled to return to Jakarta on March 7.

Defence Minister Mohammed Mahfud, who was among those seeing Wahid off, predicted that the political pot would keep boil-

ing during Wahid's absence.

"I am sure there will be elements who will try to stir things up, may be there will be elements who will try to sharpen the conflict between the executive and the legislature."

But, he said, "all of this is still relatively normal, and not dangerous."

An hour before the president departed, some 100 anti-Wahid students demonstrated near the airport, the Detikcom online news service said, but were apparently unnoticed by the presidential party.

Megawati yesterday chaired a routine cabinet meeting, at which ministers said the main topic had been a looming fuel price hike.

The US State Department advised Americans to avoid non-essential travel to Indonesia, warning that more unrest and violence could erupt there at any time.

Meanwhile, fires raged in the riot-torn Indonesian city of Sampit on Borneo island yesterday as police discovered more bodies from days of brutal clashes between Dayak

tribesmen and Madurese settlers, pushing the death toll over 100, reports said.

A worker at Sampit's Public Hospital, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "more than 80" corpses had been received there since fighting broke out on Sunday.

While police in the city said 30 people had died, police officers outside the city put the toll at 57 and the state-run Antara news agency quoted unidentified sources as saying more than 100 had died since Sunday.

"Dayaks armed with machetes and axes are wandering the streets searching for Madurese. When they find them (Madurese) they hand them over to security forces to be evacuated," Sampit's newly-installed police chief Adjutant Commissioner Petrus Hardono said.

He said five more bodies had been found overnight, raising the total killed to 30.

An ethnic Chinese Sampit resident who lives on the city's main street, said that Dayaks were "still setting fire to dozens of Madurese homes" late yesterday. — *AFP*

Former Indian soldiers due in Pakistan on peace mission

LAHORE — They were trained for war, but having completed their war-making careers fruitfully, they are now embarking on a crusade for peace.

As parts of their efforts, organised in the name of the India-Pakistan Soldiers' Initiative for Peace (IPSIP), a 21-member team of former Indian military officers headed by Admiral (ret'd) L. Ramdas will cross over to Pakistan today.

Their eight-day visit aims to explore ways and means for lasting peace between India and Pakistan.

During their stay in Pakistan, the visitors will meet retired senior military officers, politicians and intellectuals from this side of the border.

Their meeting with Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf and the foreign secretary is also expected.

The delegation will attend a discussion tomorrow being arranged by the English Speaking Union's Lahore chapter at Punjab Club. Retired Pakistani military officers and diplomats will take part in the discussion. The guests will witness a pony show at the Fortress Stadium in the evening.

The team will proceed to Islamabad on February 25. On February 26, they will have meetings with Gen (ret'd) Mirza Aslam Beg, former Azad Kashmir president Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan and Tehrik Istiqlal chief Air Marshal (ret'd) Asghar Khan.

Afterwards they will attend a reception by M. P. Bhandara.

The Indians will visit Taxila Museum and later on Abbotabad, where they will be received by Pakistan Navy's former commander Admiral (ret'd) Khalilur Rahman. They will have lunch at Abbotabad famous Infantry Centre Mess.

On February 28, the delegation will attend a discussion in Islamabad on impediments in Pakistan-India relations and suggested solutions.

They are likely to attend a meeting of the Pakistan-India Forum for Peace and Democracy and Pakistan Peace Coalition in Islamabad. The Indians will return Lahore on February 28 and attend a discussion at the HRCP offices on March 1. — *Internews*

Sleuths focus on wife of Estrada

MANILA — Investigators looking into alleged corruption by deposed Philippines president Joseph Estrada said yesterday they were turning their attention to his wife and mistresses after finding massive withdrawals from the former first lady's bank accounts.

The ombudsman's office said Luisa Ejercito, who is contesting the senate elections in May, withdrew 109 million pesos (\$2.3 million) from a branch of Citibank NA on February 1, shortly before the internal revenue bureau froze her family's accounts.

The couple could be charged for perjury for failing to declare these assets. They declared end-1999 assets of 35.9 million pesos last year, said deputy ombudsman Margarito Gervacio.

"As we could not determine where this money came from, considering the fact that this is grossly disproportionate to the legitimate income ... the presumption of the law is that this is ill-gotten," he added.

The ombudsman had subpoenaed at least 11 banks including Citibank to turn over the records of all accounts held by the first family as well as Estrada's acknowledged mistresses. Estrada himself is accused of amassing \$400 million in unexplained wealth.

Ombudsman Aniano Desierto said Estrada's acknowledged mistresses are not being investigated, but added that there was evidence some of them had millions of pesos deposited in their accounts. They are considered

as possible "recipients of the assets," Desierto said.

Gervacio said Ejercito could theoretically be charged alongside her husband, for "plunder" referring to massive graft. This is a non-bailable offence punishable by death.

Estrada was impeached for allegedly embezzling state funds and taking bribes from gambling bosses last year, but prosecutors failed to win a conviction at the Senate that would have thrown him out of office when pro-Estrada senators suppressed bank evidence.

A popular uprising spurred by a growing corruption scandal and the apparent collapse of the corruption trial toppled him last month.

He has since challenged the legality of the succession and invoked immunity from suits. The Supreme Court has ordered the government not to file criminal charges against him for 30 days to give the judges time to resolve the legitimacy of his successor President Gloria Arroyo.

Lawyers who had filed the corruption complaint criticised the ruling yesterday. The lawyers group Ouster said its members are "bewildered, bothered and befuddled" that the court needed a month to resolve whether Estrada remains president or not.

It warned in a statement that the ruling "is a source of instability, and certainly aids those who want to undermine the newly-installed government and the gains of the people in overthrowing a corrupt president." — *AFP*

Woe for Mori as LDP lawmaker quits over graft

TOKYO — A senior member of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) resigned from parliament yesterday over corruption allegations in a move that could further weaken Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's shaky grip on power.

Masakuni Murakami, a veteran upper house lawmaker, submitted his resignation to the president of the upper house of the Diet (national parliament) and it was accepted, a parliamentary official said.

Murakami, 68, is suspected of receiving bribes from KSD, a scandal-tainted mutual aid foundation for owners of small and medium-sized industrial businesses which has been accused of offering cash for influence.

KSD's former head Tadao Koseki told prosecutors the organisation had paid rent for one of Murakami's political offices in return for him asking questions in parliament promoting KSD's interests, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper said yesterday.

"The reason for his resignation is that he is sorry for having caused much trouble to parliament and the public over the KSD problems," LDP lawmaker Mikio Aoki told reporters.

"It is very unfortunate but I respect his decision," Aoki said.

The LDP elder statesman had already resigned as the chairman of the LDP members' association in the parliament's upper house in January when his

aide Takao Koyama was suspected of receiving more than ¥10 million (\$86,200) from KSD. The resignation could prove a devastating blow to the premier as Murakami is one of the five senior LDP lawmakers who decided behind closed doors last April to appoint Mori to the top job following the death of former premier Keizo Obuchi.

"Murakami's resignation is the latest and most serious blow to the prime minister who is struggling very hard right now to stay in power," said Tetsuro Kato, professor of political science at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo. "Since Murakami is one of the very few LDP lawmakers who gave birth to the Mori cabinet, the public will see his resignation as yet another sure sign suggesting Mori's own resignation will come in the near future," Kato said.

"With Murakami's resignation, Mori will be further cornered," he said. Mori has been savaged by the media and opposition leaders for continuing to play golf after learning about a submarine tragedy off Hawaii that left nine Japanese missing presumed dead.

Yesterday, former foreign minister Kabun Muto called on Mori to resign, saying he should voluntarily step down after parliament passes the crucial fiscal 2001 budget bill in late March or April. — *AFP*

Jehangiri to hear Benazir appeals

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's judicial edifice has appointed its second most senior judge to hear the appeals of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto against her conviction in a corruption case.

Justice Mohammed Bashir Jehangiri, second only in seniority to the chief justice of Pakistan, will head a bench that starts hearing from February 26 of appeals filed by Benazir and spouse Asif Ali Zardari against their conviction in the infamous SGS case.

The bench is also likely to take up the two applications filed by Benazir Bhutto seeking inclusion of transcripts of cassettes containing alleged conversation between Justice Malik Qayyum and former accountability chief Saifur Rehman in the court's record.

Benazir's other application pertains to legal opinion of prominent jurists of different countries about her conviction by an accountability court during Nawaz Sharif government.

Led by Justice Malik Qayyum, the court had awarded five-year jail term to Benazir Bhutto in the SGS pre-shipment inspection award reference.

But a recent *Sunday Times* expose suggests the judge was under pressure by the then government to find Benazir and spouse guilty. — *Internews*

Japan refuses to abolish capital punishment

TOKYO — Japan yesterday vowed to keep the death penalty, and rejected requests by a visiting human rights committee of the Council of Europe to meet inmates on the death row, an official said.

Justice Minister Masahiko Komura met the head of the committee delegation Gunnar Jansson, who is on a fact-finding mission to prepare a report on Japan's capital punishment and conditions for death-row inmates.

Komura cited a government poll in December 1999 which found 80 per cent of the respondents supported capital punishment following a string of

heinous crimes in recent years.

"When 80 per cent of the public say the death penalty is imperative, it should be maintained," Komura told Jansson, according to a Justice Ministry official. "It is difficult to consider abolishing it."

Japan and the United States are the only two countries retaining capital punishment among the six nations with observer status at the 43-nation council which is based in Strasbourg.

Komura said Japan maintains the death penalty for historical reasons, its own view on life and the belief that death row inmates must pay for what they

have done with their own lives, Jansson later told reporters.

"I understand completely his answers. But I cannot share his views," Jansson said, adding Komura expressed "no thought of abolishing the death penalty".

Komura rejected calls to temporarily halt executions, which are carried out by hanging in Japan.

"The nation's court rulings handing down the death penalty are based on an extremely thoughtful judgment," Komura said. "And the actual executions are also based on careful considerations. As the result, there is little need for the moratorium." — *AFP*

Transport panel meets after 14 years

KARACHI — A committee set up 14 years ago to deal with transport issues of the largest metropolis of Pakistan has finally sat together to discuss the subject matter.

Its existence came to light last week, when the provincial minister for transport proposed a city transport board to restructure the transport system in the city, and to remove bottlenecks causing traffic congestion during peak hours.

It then surfaced that a Transport Operation Committee was appointed on April 22, 1987 to deliberate revamping of Karachi's transport system. — *Internews*

Filing of papers for local polls ends tomorrow

ISLAMABAD — Filing of nomination papers for the upcoming local bodies elections in 21 districts of Pakistan concludes tomorrow.

The Election Commission has announced that no extension in the February 23 deadline will be allowed for nomination of papers for the second phase of elections to local bodies.

Polling for the village-based bodies will be held on March 21 in 21 selected districts of the country.

In the first phase in December similar elections were held in 18 districts, with official turnout claims of 35 to 50 per cent among the nine million registered voters.

The government plans to complete the elections in all of the country's 105 districts by July 2001 as part of its programme to empower people at the grassroots level.

In a move to broaden the electorate, the

government has lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years. Political parties have been barred from the local elections, but party members are allowed to run.

On February 24, information regarding all the nomination papers received would be publicised, and objections would be invited from voters on February 26 and 27.

Scrutiny of nomination papers and publication of names of validly nominated candidates would be carried out from February 28 to March 5. Appeals might be disposed of by appellate authorities simultaneously, starting from February 29.

Appeals against acceptance or rejections of nominations papers would be entertained on or before March 8. The disposal of appeals would be carried out on or before March 10. The last date for the withdrawal of candidature is March 11.

Lists of contesting candidates with symbols allotted to them would be published on March 12, and results would be announced by the returning officers on March 27.

The six categories of seats, to be contested in the election, included general Muslim seats, Muslim women seats, seats reserved for peasants and workers, seats reserved for women peasants and workers, seats reserved for minority communities and Nazim and Naib Nazim.

Of the 21 districts that would go to polls in the second phase of the local elections under the devolution plan include, five are in the North West Frontier Province, two in Balochistan, five in Sindh, and nine in the largest Punjab province.

The NWFP districts to go to polls include Kohat, Hangu, Karak, Mardan and Swabi. — *Internews*

WORLD

Man charged with 'haunting' murder

SYDNEY — A man has been charged with the murder of a nine-year-old schoolgirl in 1986 — a crime that has haunted the public imagination here for 15 years — police said yesterday.

Michael Anthony Guider, 50, appeared briefly in a Sydney court after police charged him with murdering schoolgirl Samantha Knight, who disappeared from her Sydney home on August 19, 1986. Guider, wearing green prison-issue clothes and sporting a flowing beard and collar-length grey hair, remained silent during his appearance before a Sydney magistrate, who ordered him to reappear before the court in May.

According to police evidence tendered to the court as a preliminary indication of the case against Guider, he occasionally babysat the child he is now accused of killing.

Police say Guider admits to taking pornographic pictures of and giving stupefying drugs to children.

Outside the court, Samantha's mother, Tess Knight, made a brief statement to the media. "We would like to say thank you to the investigation team and thank you to everyone for their ongoing interest in this matter," she told reporters. "At this moment it is before the court and we can't comment any further." Samantha Knight disappeared without trace from her Bondi Beach home. Hundreds of police were drafted into a nationwide search and record rewards were offered, but all to no avail. The investigation was reopened in 1998 after police received information that the girl they believed murdered may in fact have still been alive. People around Australia had reported seeing her, and detectives released two computer-enhanced images of how they imagined Samantha would look at 21.

Then, in August 1999, detectives achieved what they describe as a breakthrough in the case, details of which cannot be published at this stage in the court proceedings. Over the decade and a half since her daughter went missing, Tess Knight has used her public profile to draw attention to the plight of missing people and their families. She acknowledged years ago the probability that Samantha was dead. "She will always remain a little girl in my imagination," Knight said.

Pay for pregnant ex-wife: Court

KARLSRUHE (Germany) — A German man whose ex-wife used his sperm to become pregnant against his will must pay for her upkeep, Germany's highest administrative court decided in a ruling issued yesterday. The ruling came in the case of a married couple who, unable to have children, decided to use artificial insemination. After three unsuccessful attempts to impregnate the wife by artificial means using his sperm, the man told his partner he wanted to separate from her for another woman, and that he wanted no further attempt to have children with her.

Despite this, the wife decided to try once again to become pregnant using her husband's sperm, which had been stored in deep-freeze, and this time she did become pregnant.

The couple meanwhile divorced and the man married again. The court decided that the man must pay for the upkeep of his ex-wife and her child because, it said, in becoming pregnant she had "not deliberately acted with an eye to the husband's assets".

The supreme court ruling came after a lower court decided that the woman had only a claim to a small amount of financial upkeep from her ex-husband because she had "deliberately put herself in a situation of need" by becoming pregnant.

That district court decision was upheld by a regional court, which said one could not blame the woman for holding to the original joint family-planning decision, as the man had "not shown conjugal fidelity" and had "unilaterally" backed out of their family plan.

But the federal administrative court rejected such "moralistic" considerations, holding that nowadays marriage partners could freely decide whether or not they wanted to have children.

Genetic disorders pinned to 2 genes

PARIS — One of the commonest genetic abnormalities may be pinned down to two genes, scientists reported yesterday. DiGeorge Syndrome (DGS), which affects about one in 4,000 live births, can cause facial deformities, such as cleft palate and a downward slant to the eyes, as well as malformed heart arteries and throat glands and mental retardation.

Researchers have long known that the cause of DGS lies in the deletion of a large region of the smallest human chromosome — Chromosome 22. In separate research, teams from the University of Chicago, New York's Columbia University and Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, located two genes in mice that, they believe, are critical in developing DGS. Mice specially bred to lack the genes, called Tbx1 and Crkl, developed almost all the characteristics of human DGS, they reported. Their work is published in upcoming issues of the British weekly *Nature*, the specialist monthly *Nature Genetics* and the biweekly *Cell*. Medical researchers are eager to locate the genetic source of a disease because it opens the way to devising diagnostic tools that, for instance, could advise carriers of the gene of the risk of transmitting the ailment to their offspring.

Another goal, but more ambitious, is to devise medicine to block the action of a suspect gene in order to prevent the disorder from developing in the first place.

Woman in adoption row held

LONDON — British police have arrested the woman at the centre of a transatlantic Internet adoption row on suspicion of theft, a spokesman said yesterday. Judith Kilshaw, 47, from Buckley in North Wales was questioned by police before being released on bail without being charged. "We can confirm that a 47-year-old woman from Buckley was arrested yesterday on suspicion of theft and questioned at Mold police station," a police spokesman said. "She has now been released on police bail. No charges have been brought against her." According to reports in the British media on Thursday, Kilshaw is alleged to have stolen £2,500 (\$3,600) worth of travellers cheques to fund her trip to the United States where she and husband Alan Kilshaw collected the twin girls they had bought over the Internet.

The ensuing battle between the British couple, an American couple who also claimed to have adopted the babies and their biological mother over custody of the twins exploded in the international media last month. British social workers took the babies into custody on January 18 and a court has ruled that they must remain in the care of local authorities while it considers the case.

Redundant stomach removed

MOSCOW — In an operation unprecedented in Russia, Siberian doctors removed a redundant stomach in surgery performed on a three-month-old baby, the Interfax news agency reported. When the two-month-old Aina Adonina, born in southern Siberian region of Altai, had trouble getting food down, doctors had first suspected a tumour, said Professor Vladimir Kozhevnikov of the Altai University, who performed the surgery.

However, they soon discovered a second stomach, which adjoined the main one and shut off the oesophagus after secreted fluids accumulated within and caused it to swell. The little girl's main stomach was not affected by the surgery, which was performed in the Siberian city of Barnaul. The infant is in good condition, Kozhevnikov said.

Search for soul, Britons told

LONDON — British society needs to "rediscover its soul", the head of the country's Roman Catholics said after he was created a cardinal, the *Daily Telegraph* reported yesterday.

The Most Reverend Cormack Murphy-O'Connor, created a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in Rome on Wednesday, said: "Society has lost its sense of community and its understanding of right and wrong. It is searching for its soul." He added in an interview with the paper that he believed people's preoccupation with their rights rather than responsibilities was destroying British society. "My mission is to teach and to preach what the Church believes to be true and to speak out on issues such as marriage, the family and the dignity of human life," he said.

8-year jail, caning for teacher

SINGAPORE — A thirty-five-year-old teacher was sentenced to eight years' jail and 24 strokes of the cane after he admitted molesting pupils from an unnamed Singapore school, the *Straits Times* reported yesterday.

On separate occasions, Terence Thaver lured his four female victims, all aged 10 years old, to the school library, taxis and classroom where he would molest them. He committed 23 sex offences for almost two years between January 1999 and September last year until he was apprehended. — *AFP, Reuters*

New study says asteroids wiped out life twice

WASHINGTON — Asteroids crashing into the Earth have virtually wiped out life not once but at least twice, scientists reported yesterday.

An asteroid or comet roughly the same size as the one that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago did even worse damage 250 million years ago, experts found in a report to be published in today's issue of the journal *Science*.

The evidence comes from space gases trapped in little carbon spheres called Buckyballs in ancient layers of sediment. They show the Permian extinction event, during which most species on the planet disappeared, started with a cosmic collision.

"The impact... releases an amount of energy that is basically about 1 million times the largest earthquake recorded dur-

ing the last century," Robert Poreda, associate professor of earth and environmental sciences at the University of Rochester in New York, who worked on the study, said in a statement.

The comet or asteroid would have to have been 6.5 to 13km across. The jolt roused volcanoes, which buried huge areas in lava and sent up ash to join the dust from the explosion to plunge the world into centuries of unnatural dark and cold.

Trilobites — strange, cockroach-like creatures that once ruled the planet — died out completely, all 15,000 species of them. Ninety per cent of all marine creatures and 70 per cent of land vertebrates went extinct.

"If the species cannot adjust, they perish. It's a survival-of-the-fittest sort of

thing," said Luann Becker, assistant professor of Earth and Space Sciences at the University of Washington, who also worked on the paper.

"To knock out 90 per cent of organisms, you've got to attack them on more than one front." The asteroid which wiped out the trilobites was just about the size of an asteroid that left a giant crater on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula 65 million years ago and wiped out the dinosaurs. Unlike with the Yucatan impact, the researchers, who included teams from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and New York University, do not yet know where the giant space object smacked down.

What they did find was a layer of little carbon molecules called buckminsterfullerenes, or Buckyballs. Inside these

soccerball-shaped spheres were helium and argon gases. The spheres, gathered at sites in Japan, China and Hungary, lay at the sedimentary layer put down 250 million years ago, between the Permian and Triassic periods.

"These things form in carbon stars. That's what's exciting about finding fullerenes as a tracer," Becker said.

The gases are isotopes, meaning they have a certain atomic structure that suggests they came from space, the researchers reported.

They fit in with other evidence found from layers dating back to the extinction. For instance, some of the most extensive volcanic activity ever, in what is now Siberia, laid down enough lava to cover the entire planet with three metres of rock over a one-million year period.

"It was the proverbial blast from the double-barrelled shotgun," Poreda said. "We're not sure of all the environmental consequences, but with both the impact and with the volcanic activity, we do know that Earth was not a happy place. It may be that the combined effects of impact and volcanism are necessary to cause such a tremendous extinction."

But life did come back, giving rise to the rich collection of animals that thrived during the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. Dinosaurs evolved as did mammals. "These two extinctions are like bookends for the age of the dinosaurs," Poreda says. "The P/T (Permian/Triassic) boundary helped to usher in the age of the dinosaurs, and the K/T (Cretaceous/Tertiary) boundary snuffed it out." — *Reuters*

Mori voices regrets over reports US submarine had detected sunk trawler

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori expressed regret yesterday over reports the US submarine which struck and sank a Japanese trawler had detected the vessel more than an hour before the accident.

A US National Transportation Safety Board investigator said late on Tuesday (US time) that the *USS Greenville* had detected the Japanese boat about 70 minutes before the fatal collision, but the crewman plotting sonar readings was distracted by the presence of civilian guests in the control room.

"Such a thing is extremely regrettable," Mori told reporters yesterday.

"At this point, it is only natural to ask the US government to carry out a more thorough investigation, in addition to asking them to release the findings soon."

The 6,080 tonne nuclear-powered attack submarine was demonstrating an emergency surfacing drill for 16 civilian guests when it hit the underside of the 499 tonne *Ehime Maru* fishery training vessel, sinking it off Hawaii on February 9.

Nine Japanese including four teenagers are missing presumed dead.

Chief cabinet secretary Yasuo Fukuda said: "This would mean a serious error had taken place. We regard it as a very significant issue." — *AFP*

Ex-Sharif military aide sacked

ISLAMABAD — The Pakistani military said yesterday it had dismissed an army brigadier who was serving as military secretary to ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif at the time of the October 1999 army coup that toppled him.

"Brigadier Javed Iqbal Malik was tried by a military court for offences prejudicial/detrimental to military law and order," a military statement quoted by the official APP news agency said.

"He has been sentenced to be dismissed from service," it said without giving details of the charges.

Pakistani newspapers reported that during the October 12, 1999 coup Malik dismissed a small group of soldiers who arrived at the state television centre in Islamabad to try to stop the broadcast of Sharif's decision to sack army chief General Pervez Musharraf and replace him with Lieutenant-General Ziauddin Butt. — *Reuters*

Britain sets 7 days to contain farm disease

LONDON — Britain set itself a seven-day target yesterday to contain a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak that has led to a world ban on exports of UK livestock and animal products and plunged the meat industry into a new crisis.

The Agriculture Ministry said yesterday it had put a five-mile animal exclusion zone around another abattoir after officials found a sick bullock.

A spokeswoman said the measures were precautionary and officials had yet to find out what was wrong with the bullock.

"An abattoir at Guildford (southern England) has been put under restrictions," she said.

"We found a sick young bullock. We can't rule foot-and-mouth disease out. It's simply a precaution."

"The next seven days will be critical in determining whether or not the export ban on live animals, meat and dairy produce from Britain will be lifted," the National Farmers' Union (NFU) said in a statement.

"The signs so far are optimistic that we are keeping on top of the problem. We are hoping for the best but fearing the worst," NFU President Ben Gill said.

He said there had been no

new cases of foot-and-mouth disease and the animals hit by the disease at an abattoir in Essex on Tuesday had been destroyed.

But news of the outbreak led the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Ireland and other countries to announce crackdowns on British livestock and animal imports.

And Gill said it was too early to say whether Britain could soon remove a self-imposed export ban and whether it would avoid a repeat of the outbreak in 1967 when more than 440,000 animals were slaughtered after over 2,300 cases were discovered.

"If the situation remains stable, the hope is that we will be able to lift the blanket ban from Britain in a week and start lifting restrictions on affected areas. This will be critical if a wholesale disruption of the entire livestock industry is to be avoided," Gill said.

The National Pig Association told ramblers to reschedule their countryside walks. Officials say the disease knows no boundaries as it can be spread through the air or transmitted through urine, milk, semen or saliva.

"Can we stress the importance of staying away from live-

stock farms for the time being," a spokesman said.

"If a passer-by were to talk over a fence to an infected sow, lamb or an inquisitive heifer, the virus would reach their nose, where it would remain for up to two days... If they were to come into close contact with an animal, the disease would spread."

Characterised by the development of blisters in the mouths and on the feet of cloven hoofed animals, foot-and-mouth can be fatal to animals. Officials say it poses little risk to humans.

The disease has been seen in Europe over the past decade, and in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and parts of South America.

Officials said they were chasing all possible leads for the source of the outbreak, including the "surprisingly large" number of pet pig owners in the affected region.

"It was really quite a shock to a number of people that there were quite so many pet pig keepers in the area," the spokesman said.

But a spokeswoman for the UK Agriculture Ministry said it was more likely that the key factor was illegal imports.

"It is more likely to be some form of imported product. We are confident it was illegally

imported," she said.

Officials have extended a movement restriction zone around the abattoir near Brentwood, in southeast England, where the disease was found in 28 pigs on Tuesday to 16km in a bid to ensure the disease is contained.

Farms in Northern Ireland, the southern English county of Buckinghamshire and the Isle of Wight, off England's southern coast, have also been put under movement restrictions.

One farmer said the outbreak could destroy businesses.

"We are hoping that the ministry is going to be able to sort it out and knock it on the head very quickly. If the ban that's been put on Essex is lifted in a week that's fine, but if not, we'll all have severe difficulties," Bernard Partridge said from his Essex farm in the middle of the affected area.

Britain exported 160,414 tonnes of pork to the European Union, worth almost 111 million pounds, from December 1999 to November 2000, while industry officials say the ban will cost the UK meat industry eight million pounds a week.

Economists said the world import ban could cost the farming industry millions of pounds, but would be only a blip on the nation's economy. — *Reuters*

Lopez wows Aussie fans in Akubra hat

SYDNEY — Pop diva Jennifer Lopez donned a traditional Aussie Akubra hat and some barely-there pants yesterday when she wowed Australian fans in an appearance by Sydney Harbour.

The 30-year-old actress and singer signed autographs for hundreds of fans as she promoted her latest album *J. Lo* which has already topped the charts in the United States.

Her promotional tour here began on Wednesday with a press conference at the home of a Sydney socialite couple, during which Lopez refused to comment on her recent split from rap star Sean "Puffy" Combs.

Combs is on trial for an alleged 1999 night-club shooting in which Lopez was said to have been present.

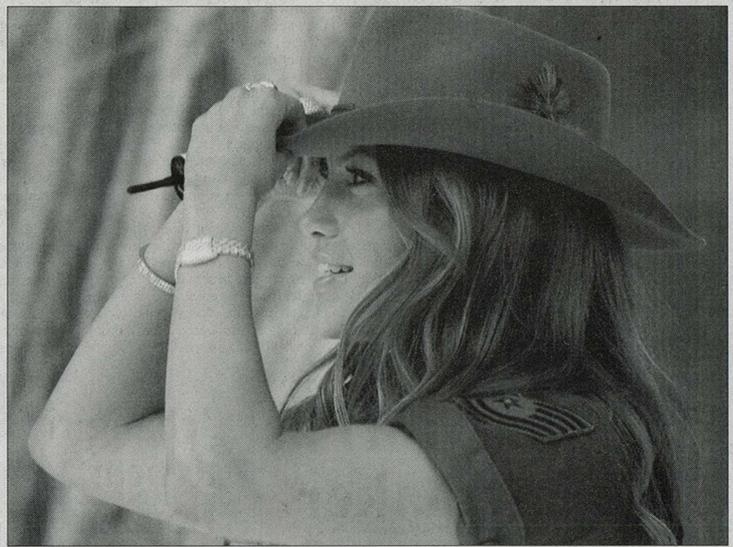
Both the prosecution and the defence have said they intend to call her as a witness.

The new man in the 30-year-old's is rumoured to be dancer Chri Judd. At a press conference on Wednesday, she revealed some of her most intimate secrets.

"I have to admit I'm one of those people who has to find a balance still," she told reporters.

"I haven't quite finessed that yet. My life is really mostly about work right now and hopefully one day... I haven't got it all figured out but I'm trying."

Despite the fame, Lopez



SMART STUFF: Jennifer Lopez trying on a traditional Australian bushman's hat as she arrives on stage in Sydney yesterday. — *Reuters*

said she was a normal person.

"On my day off I like to get up late, I like to shop, I like to go to a restaurant, eat outside, go to a movie, normal things."

And she also revealed that she has a philanthropic streak.

"I think about this a lot. I am that point where I want to

create my own thing. My own kinda non-profit organisation and I know it will have to do with kids, and I know it will have to do with education," Lopez said.

"We are working on that now." She would also love to work with New Zealand-born

actor and Oscar nominee Russell Crowe, who is also due to arrive in Sydney today for the premiere of his new movie *Proof of Life*.

"I think he is an amazing actor. I would love to work with him one day," Lopez said. — *AFP*

2 dead in Spanish bomb attack

SAN SEBASTIAN (Spain) — Two people were killed and three seriously injured, one of them a local socialist councillor, in a car bomb attack in Spain's Basque region yesterday.

Police blamed the attack on the rebel separatist group ETA. A hospital statement said that two of the injured were in critical condition, while the presumed target of the attack — Councillor Ignacio Dubreyll Churrucua — was said to be in serious condition. A fourth person — Dubreyll Churrucua's bodyguard — was less seriously injured.

According to Basque regional police, a team of ETA activists triggered the bomb by remote control as Dubreyll Churrucua was driving by.

The moderate nationalist head of the Basque regional government, Juan Jose Ibarrexe, called for a united mass demonstration to be held on Friday to protest against the bomb attack.

"It is essential that we all stand together for peace and freedom and against the blind violence of ETA," the head of the regional assembly said, insisting that all political parties should be represented at the mass rally. In a harshly worded statement directed at Euskal Herritarok (EH) considered as the political wing of ETA — Jose Ibarrexe condemned yesterday's killings and said the party should do the

same. If EH did not support ETA's path of "killing people, killing police officers, killing cooks, killing local councillor's, killing workers as it die today" it should clearly say so, he said.

The two dead men were Angel Santos Larranaga and Josu Leones Azkona, employees of the electrical materials firm Elektra, according to a spokesman for the Nuestra Senora de Aranzazu hospital.

They died of their injuries shortly after the device rocked the northern coastal town of San Sebastian, the biggest city in the Spanish Basque region. The blast went off on the outskirts of the town, opposite Martutene station and near the prison, shortly after 8:00am.

The councillor was pulling out of the station, on his way to work as a teacher at a training institute, when the bomb exploded.

Police estimated that the device contained 5kg to 6kg of explosives.

ETA has frequently used car bombs to target government officials in its 32-year-old battle for an independent Basque homeland in the region, which straddles Spain's border with France.

The organisation was also blamed for a car bomb attack last month, also in San Sebastian, that killed a Spanish Navy cook. — *AFP*

Russia to sell 50 MiG fighter planes to India

MOSCOW — Russian is about to sign a contract with India for the sale of 50 MiG 29K fighter jets in 2001, the deputy head of the MiG aircraft maker said yesterday. Andrei Karasev, who did not say exactly when the deal would be signed, described the MiG 29K as a very sophisticated aircraft which costs around \$30 million apiece, Itar-Tass news agency reported.

The fighter jets are to be used aboard the refurbished Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Gorskov, which is due to be sold to the Indian Navy in a two-billion-dollar deal, he added. Earlier this month India signed a deal to buy 310 T-90 battle tanks from Russia, which is estimated to be worth up to \$800 million. — *AFP*

Carnival on fever pitch to see Berry the Clown

COLOGNE (Germany) — German carnival-goers tempted to forget their marriage vows during celebrations which hit fever pitch yesterday should keep a lookout for "Berry" the bespectacled clown.

For Berry is in reality Cologne private detective Lothar Wenzel, on the lookout for husbands and wives taking advantage of the fancy-dress extravaganza to indulge in what Germans call a "sideways jump" — a Seitensprung.

His glasses contain a mini-camera which has proved the undoing of many a carnival reveller, and business has taken off so much that he will have a dozen undercover agents on the streets of the Rhineland carnival capital this year.

"Demand is so great during carnival that I have to turn away some requests," Wenzel, 56, told the local *Express* newspaper.

In around 40 per cent of cases, Wenzel's team manages to come up with videotaped or photographic evidence confirming his clients' worst fears. "Usually it ends in divorce," the private eye added.

The four-month carnival season, celebrated in Germany's predominantly Catholic west and south, climaxed on Thursday with Weiberfastnacht — women's fasting night — when women storm town halls and seize the keys to the city.

Men wearing ties to work also run the risk of having them cut off by female colleagues in a ritual interpreted by some as a symbolic castration. — *Reuters*

INDIA

Business interests scuttling Sankhya Vahini: Arunachalam

ATLANTA (Georgia) — V. S. Arunachalam, former principal scientific adviser to the Indian government, has alleged that continuing attempts to scuttle the \$250 million Sankhya Vahini project is a conspiracy by leading vested business interests in India.

But Arunachalam vowed to press on with the project — a collaboration between the Carnegie Mellon University and the Indian government on networking educational institutions — because he had the complete backing of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and other key government members.

Arunachalam and Raj Reddy, also of Carnegie Mellon University, prepared the first draft of their proposal for a national high-speed inter-university data network, to be called Sankhya Vahini (data carriers), for India in 1998.

Though the information technology task force of the Indian govern-

ment approved the proposal in principle and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed, the project has since run into controversy on procedural and national security grounds.

Arunachalam alleged at a meet here that some vested interests had asked, "How much would it take for you to just go back. Don't do this project. We will do it our style. The country doesn't need bandwidth. We got a lot of indigenous people, why are you coming?"

Arunachalam, who is currently distinguished service professor of engineering and public policy, materials science and engineering at Carnegie Mellon, was speaking at the Indian Professional Network (IPN) of Georgia, comprising mainly high tech entrepreneurs and information technology (IT) specialists.

"Essentially, it is two, three companies having all the monopolies and who are wanting to do this,"

Arunachalam said, adding that one company, which he refused to name, "that has laid a few hundred kilometers of fibre, their main job is to ensure that no other person comes in here, and this is true of communication, this is true of electric power."

Arunachalam said there was absolutely no credibility to the fears these vested interests have fuelled. Arunachalam said he and Raj Reddy, who heads up the university's robotics institute and has been a pioneer of artificial intelligence, had mooted the project in 1997 solely on the urging of Singh who was on the information technology task force and implored them to help India to set up its communications infrastructure "without sitting in America."

He said Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu had also been part of the campaign to solicit the expertise and the resources of Carnegie Mellon.

After a discussion with Singh,

"because I had previous experience of writing Sanskrit names like Agni, Prithvi and so on and so forth, I told him I'll give a nice Sanskrit name this time too, Sankhya Vahini," Arunachalam said.

He emphasised that Singh had been told "we do not want anything but will use India's fibre and make it fast and put it in," and that the government of India would have the majority stake with 51 per cent and Carnegie Mellon would form a company for 49 per cent.

Arunachalam, who is president of company IUNet, Inc., a subsidiary of Carnegie Mellon University, said, "I also insisted that Indian universities should be involved — IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) of Bombay, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, IIT Madras."

"We said we will bring not only the technology, we will bring cash, (and) we will raise the equity of \$250 million," he added. But he said as

soon as the cabinet approved it, "and I must say the prime minister understood it — all hell broke loose."

Arunachalam said he and Reddy were accused of being front-men for the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) "and that Carnegie Mellon, because one former CIA worker was an adjunct professor or something — is a den of CIA agents."

Arunachalam said these vested interests were not reassured even when he and Reddy had argued that "it is going to be an Indian company and Indian engineers would be designing the network with us." He lamented that today, when India should be having 40 gigabits, "I am still waiting for the public interest litigation to be over."

"But I have not given up and we will go ahead and fight to see that the country gets the bandwidth and I still feel confident that we will pull it through. We have invested two full years of our lives on this project," he

said. Arunachalam claimed that the fight has already cost Carnegie Mellon \$1.5 million and the irony of it was that "we fought against going to another country that wanted this kind of network."

He was full of praise for the prime minister, who he acknowledged, "defended me beautifully. It's not ordinary. I mean he came out very strongly in (my) defence."

Arunachalam, who has also won a slew of civilian awards in India, including the Padma Vibhushan, the Padma Bhushan and the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Engineering Sciences, acknowledged that if something like this could happen to a person like him who worked for the government for over 30 years and has so much clout and influence in New Delhi, he accused of being a CIA agent, "imagine an innocent Indian from the United States wanting to invest." — *India Abroad News Service*

6 burnt alive in Orissa village

BHUBANESWAR — A major fire in a village in Orissa's Bhubaneswar district, about 96km from state capital Bhubaneswar, left six people dead and destroyed at least 15 houses, it was reported here yesterday.

The bodies of three persons, including a child, have been recovered from the burnt down houses in the Sabaranga Toranapada Sasan village. They have yet not been identified, the *Samaya*, a local newspaper, reported. Three more people are suspected to have died.

Fifteen houses made of straw were destroyed one after another when flames from a kitchen spread to the cluster on Wednesday afternoon, the paper said. The fire brigade rushed to the village and brought the fire under control around 9pm on Wednesday.

More than a dozen cows, goats and other domestic animals have also died. Local legislator Biren Palai and senior police officials of the districts are camping in the village, according to newspaper reports.

In the first week of this year five children — three boys and two girls — were burnt alive in a thatched house in Baunsdiha village in the tribal populated Mayurbhanj district of Orissa.

Kerala farm sector suffers Rs66b loss

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — Kerala's agriculture sector has suffered a loss of Rs66.45 billion in the current fiscal due to federal government's new exim and liberalisation policies, state Agriculture Minister Krishnan Kaniyampambal told the assembly yesterday.

Replying to a calling attention motion on the need to solve the crisis faced by the state's agriculture sector, he said the loss was mainly due to the fall in the prices of cash crops following the removal of quantitative restrictions on several agriculture products.

With further liberalisation of imports and removing of restrictions on import of another 715 agriculture products from April 1, the situation in the sector would worsen.

It was not possible for the state alone to save the sector or minimise hardship faced by farmers, he said adding an agitation was required to pressure the federal government to change its policies.

Even within the parameters of WTO agreement, the federal government could help the cash crops sector by increasing the import duty by 10 per cent on tea, coffee and 150 per cent in the case of value-added products, he said, adding, federal government was not "moving in this direction."

Kerala was badly affected as nearly 80 per cent of its total agriculture sector was cash crops, he said.

Mild tremors in Kerala

KOZHIKODE — Mild tremors were experienced in several parts of Kothamangalam, Angamaly, Perumbavoor and Kalady in Emakulam district on Wednesday.

The tremors were felt at 11.35am local time. Residents ran out of their houses following the tremors which were similar to the one experienced in these areas in December last.

Panic spread in the area as the vibrations felt were followed by a loud sound. People participating in a meeting in a church at Malayattoor ran out after hearing the echoing sound. No casualties were reported. The Kalady police said there were no reports of damage to houses in the area. The tremor lasted only a few minutes.

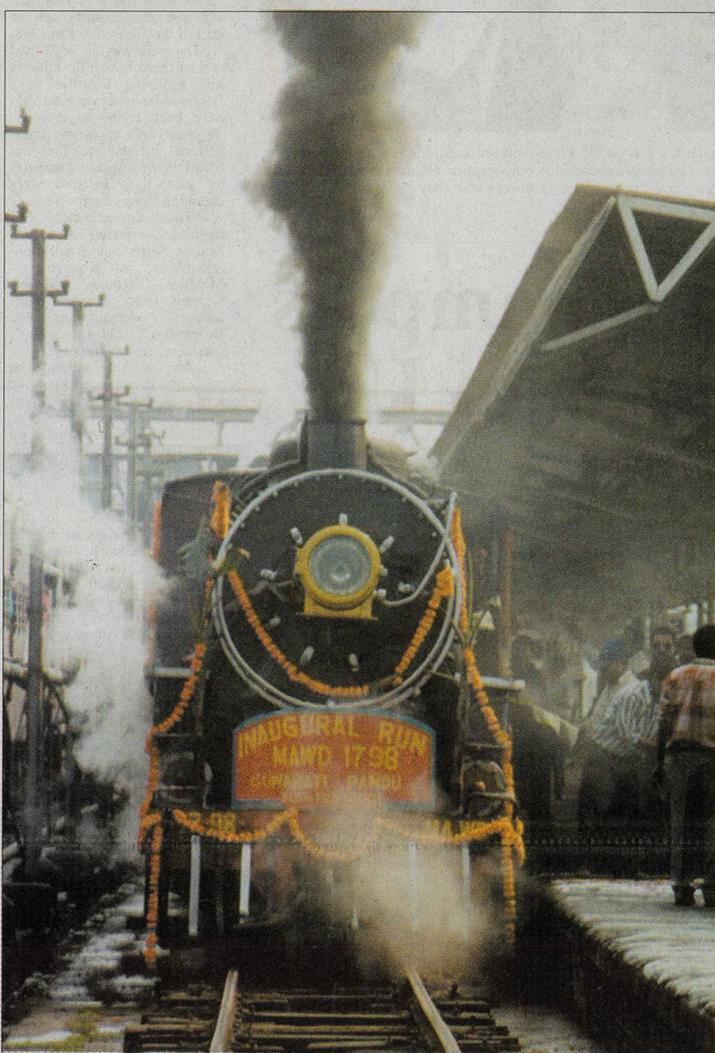
Some houses near Koovapady, Kodanad and Okkal were slightly damaged following the tremor.

Other places which experienced the tremor include Kottamam, Manjapra, Ellithodu and Mulankuzhi in Emakulam district.

KSRTC runs up Rs860m loss

KOZHIKODE — The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation has run up a loss of Rs860 million last year.

This was revealed at a meeting of the directors' board of the KSRTC held in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. The board expressed concern over the delay in receipt of several lakhs of rupees by way of charges payable for buses deployed for various government duties.



OLD GLORY: India's North Eastern Railways has revived the Guwahati Pandu, a US steam locomotive, to be used in pioneering rail tourism in Guwahati, the capital city of the northeastern state of Assam. This locomotive first ran in 1944, and was then shipped to India from the US in 1948. The train ran the last passenger service in 1993. — *Reuters*

Mammootty, Samyuktha win Asianet Lux Film Awards

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — Superstar Mammootty has bagged the best actor award in Kerala's most prestigious and popular Asianet Lux Malayalam Film Awards for his role in the film *Aaryamangalude Veedu*.

At the same time, *Narasimham*, starring the other Malayalam superstar, Mohanlal, clinched the best film award and got noted filmmaker Shaji Kailas the best director award, private television channel Asianet announced here yesterday. Asianet Film Awards are selected through a Gallop poll in which top five films are short-listed and a five-member jury takes the final decision. This year — the third year of the award — the panel of selectors was headed by veteran filmmaker Kumar Sahni and included director Sree Kumaran Thampi, Mallika Sukumaran, P. Valsala and Shobhana Parmeswaran Nair.

The Asianet lifetime award



MAMMOTTY: Best actor

for achievement in Malayalam films has been given to music director K. Raghavan. Samyuktha Varma has been awarded the best actress award for her roles in *Mazha* and *Madhura Nombarakattu*. Incidentally, she has also been selected as the best actress by the Kerala Film Critics for the same roles.

Young and upcoming actor Biju Menon and veteran charac-



K.P.A.C. LALITHA: Best supporting actress

ter artiste K.P.A.C. Lalitha have been selected as the best supporting actor and actress, respectively. Vocalists K.J. Yesudas and Chithra have bagged the awards for the best male and female singers, respectively.

Asianet officials said that the awards would be presented at a function to be held at the Galfar Auditorium in Kochi on March 1. — *India Abroad News Service*

Quarter of Indians live on less than \$10 a month

NEW DELHI — A quarter of India's billion-strong population lives below the official poverty line, although poverty has decreased over the past decade, the government said yesterday.

In a statement the government said poverty was determined on a cut-off figure of Rs454 (\$9.75) per head per month for people living in urban areas. People earning more than this were judged to be above the poverty level.

For rural areas, the cut-off was Rs327.56 per head per month.

Over the past few years the percentage of poor people has shrunk but 260 million people, or 26 per cent of the population, still live under the poverty line, it said in a statement. That compared to some 36 per cent of the population in 1993-94.

The spread of poverty is much higher in rural India where 193 million people are officially categorised as poor compared to 67 million urban poor.

In the eastern states of Orissa and Bihar almost half the population lives under the poverty line. In Orissa 47.15 per cent are among the poorest and 42.60 make do with just as little in neighbouring Bihar, according to the government statement.

In contrast, only 3.48 per cent of the population in the disputed northern state of Jammu and Kashmir were among the very poor, it said.

The country's capital city has 1.15 million people living below the poverty line, comprising 8.23 per cent of its population.

Though the drop in poverty figures appears impressive, analysts were unsure whether the basis for calculating poverty was correct. — *Reuters*

Chandrika arrives in bid to revive Saarc

NEW DELHI — Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga arrived in New Delhi yesterday to open talks with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in a bid to revive the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

The Sri Lankan president, accompanied by Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and other senior officials, was received at Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport by Social Justice Minister Maneka Gandhi.

"I have come to Delhi to get India's support to revive the Saarc summit and further our long-standing bonds of friendship," Chandrika told reporters at the airport.

Chandrika's two-day visit comes in the wake of a trip by Kadirgamar to Pakistan last week where revival of the seven-member Saarc was discussed. — *AFP*

Gujarat govt in dock over quake relief

AHMEDABAD — The credibility of the Gujarat government headed by Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel appears to have taken a serious knock with reports pouring in about mismanagement of funds and in the supply of relief material in the earthquake-hit areas of the state, especially in Kutch and Saurashtra.

About 90-odd national and international relief agencies, which had rushed manpower and material to the areas hit by the earthquake on January 26, have now either opted to channel the distribution of the material through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or undertake the task themselves, keeping the state administration at bay.

Employees of the state government too have expressed strong reservations about donating money to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, suspecting corruption and bias in the handling of the funds. A circular issued by the state finance department to all employees to contribute at least 10 per cent of their salary to the fund notwithstanding, the "Gujarat Rajya Karamchari Mahamandal (Gujarat State Employees Association)," representing 750,000 state government and semi-government employees, have said they are ready to contribute provided the funds are regulated by an independent authority.

"We will prefer to contribute to NGOs, but not to the government, if funds are to be utilised by unscrupulous and corrupt staff of the revenue department," said association general secretary Upendra Chauhan. "In the past, the government had collected millions of rupees in the name of helping the Kargil victims but the amount is now being misused."

A government spokesman, commenting on reports that foreign and Indian donors are shy away from contributing funds to the Gujarat government, said, "It is a canard unleashed by opponents of the government. We maintain complete transparency in utilising relief funds. We are encouraging NGOs to participate in rehabilitation work because it is a gigantic task."

To prove its credentials to donors, the state government has created a separate account for earthquake-related contributions to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund with the State Bank of India. The state government has announced plans to raise between Rs4.5 and Rs5 billion

3 tremors recorded

AHMEDABAD — Three tremors, including one measuring 4.6 on the Richter scale, were felt in several parts of Gujarat yesterday morning.

The 4.6 magnitude tremor at 0743am was followed by another shock measuring 3.4 on the Richter scale at 0919am. The shocks were preceded by a 3.0 low intensity tremor, recorded in the wee hours, the Meteorological Department sources here said.

The epicentre of the tremors continued to be in the vicinity of Bachau taluka in the quake-ravaged Kutch district, they said. There was no report of any damage or casualty in the fresh tremors. The state which experienced two moderate intensity tremors of 5.1 magnitude on Monday, recorded 10 mild shocks during the day on Wednesday. — *PTI*

by deducting 10 per cent from the salaries of its employees. Highly suspicious of the state government's managerial skills and its impartiality in distributing the earthquake-related funds, many foreign countries and international relief agencies have started distributing funds through recognised NGOs.

The Ahmedabad-based Self-Employed Women's Association (Sewa) alone has received \$1.5 million worth of assistance from around the world. Similarly, Janpath, a network of 200 NGOs, has received Rs30 million. Setu, another Ahmedabad-based NGO, has been given \$6,000 by small donors. Rima Nanavaty, a senior Sewa official, confirmed on Wednesday that her organisation had received about Rs3 million worth of aid in cash and kind from various international agencies. — *India Abroad News Service*

Maharashtra set for rebuilding Bhachau

BOMBAY — Flushed with relief funds of more than Rs600 million, the Maharashtra government will begin reconstruction of the Bhachau sub-district in the Bhuj region of Gujarat, the worst affected in the January 26 earthquake that ravaged the state.

Bhuj lies at a distance of only 20km from the epicentre of the quake that killed about 30,000 people and destroyed property worth billions of rupees. The Maharashtra government had earlier decided to adopt Bhachau and rebuild it after the quake. The Maharashtra government, which mobilised around Rs70 million in the first fortnight following the quake, will have more than Rs600 million after all state government employees donate a day's salary for the quake affected. The funds have been deposited with the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

According to a senior revenue department official at the state administrative headquarters in

Bombay, the reconstruction of Bhachau will begin on Monday. The Maharashtra government adopted Bhachau, where all the buildings were flattened in the temblor that measured 6.9 in the Richter scale. The Maharashtra government expects the entire sub-district to be rebuilt in one year.

Under the first phase of the reconstruction beginning on Monday, two villages will be reconstructed. The Maharashtra government estimates that a total of 3,500 houses need to be built in the area. Volunteers from the affected villages and non-government organisations are being roped in to help in the reconstruction.

Shortly after the state government adopted Bhachau, top officials of the state government including ministers, legislators and senior bureaucrats had rushed there to assess the damage. Earlier this week, an all-party meeting was called by Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh to discuss the issue. — *India Abroad News Service*

Kerala's growth defies conventional logic : Study

From Our Correspondent

KOZHIKODE — Kerala's economy in the post-liberalisation era in India has been displaying a curious tendency to defy the conventional logic which holds that growth buoyancy will depend on how well the industries perform. The post-reforms period is witnessing a revival of economic growth in Kerala after a long phase of stagnation. However, this buoyancy is in spite of the sluggish performance of the industries. It is happening on account of a steady growth in the service sector.

This interesting finding comes in a paper titled *Industrial Growth in Kerala: Trends and Explanations*

authored by Dr K.K. Subrahmanian and Dr E. Abdul Azeem of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS). They have selected for their study the performance of Kerala's economy during 1981-82 to 1990-91, representing the pre-reforms phase and 1991-92 to 1997-98, representing the post-reforms phase.

The analysis has been carried out by them in a comparative framework, with the growth of the state economy being evaluated against the performance of the neighbouring Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and also India as a whole.

During the pre-reforms period covered by the study, the annual growth rate of net domestic product

(NDP) of Kerala had been 4.83 per cent against a more impressive Karnataka growth rate of 5.39 per cent, Tamil Nadu rate of 5.35 per cent and an all-India rate of 5.36 per cent. During the post-reforms period, the state's NDP had been growing at a faster rate than Karnataka's and also the nation's as a whole.

This period witnessed 6.05 per cent annual growth of NDP in Kerala, compared to Karnataka's 5.46 per cent and the country's 5.64 per cent. Tamil Nadu's performance, with a 6.26 per cent NDP growth rate annually, has been better than Kerala's.

The rate of growth in absolute value of state NDP has a limitation in giving the real picture of the econom-

ic progress of region, since it is not adjusted for the size of the population. A clearer picture of the growth behaviour can be obtained from how the per capita income has performed.

When this criteria is taken into consideration, Kerala's economic growth can be seen to be more impressive than either of the two neighbouring states of Kerala and also India as a whole, Dr Subrahmanian and Dr Azeem analyse. During the pre-reforms period, the annual rate of growth of the per capita NDP of Kerala had been 3.39 per cent against 3.51 of Karnataka, 4.37 of Tamil Nadu and 3.23 on the national level. The study published here says that after the economic reforms of 1991, it

has climbed to a spectacular 5.10 per cent in the case of Kerala against 4.02 of Karnataka, 4.90 of Tamil Nadu and 3.80 on the national level.

Tracing the sectoral contribution to the total NDP in Kerala, the study says that during the pre-reforms phase, agriculture and allied activities has accounted for 31.87 per cent of the overall growth in Kerala, with industries accounting for 17.43 per cent and the service sector, 50.70 per cent. The sectoral contribution after the reforms came down to 29.27 per cent and 11.68 per cent for agriculture and industries respectively, while it went up to 59.05 per cent for the service sector.

The study says that the service

sector in Kerala has been growing at an annual rate of 7.91 per cent during the post-reforms phase, which is considerably higher than the 6.47 per cent growth at the national level.

Before the reforms, the growth rate in this sector was 4.35 per cent in Kerala against 6.38 per cent at the national level. The post-reforms growth in service sector of Kerala is higher than that of Karnataka (5.79 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (7.60 per cent).

The researchers say that, given the general character of Kerala, a shift in policy to give a higher priority to the service sector of the economy can bring better dividends in the post reforms environment.

OPINION

TIMES OF OMAN

ESTABLISHED: 1975

Hillary under cloud

By Leon Bruneau

NEWLY-ELECTED US Senator Hillary Clinton was under a cloud yesterday following revelations that her brother Hugh Rodham benefited financially from last-minute pardons issued by her husband, former president Bill Clinton.

Rodham, a Florida lawyer, collected around \$400,000 for championing the causes of businessman Glenn Braswell, convicted of perjury and mail fraud, and Carlos Vignali, jailed for drug trafficking.

Rodham returned the money on Wednesday at the express demand of the former first couple, according to his lawyer, Nancy Luques.

Though the Clintons insist they knew nothing of the payments, questions were raised yesterday about the extent to which Rodham may have influenced the president's decision the pardon of Braswell and the commutation of Vignali's prison term.

A sharply critical editorial in the *New York Times* predicted the saga would damage the ambitious new senator.

"The latest revelation can only hurt her standing and complicate her efforts to break free of the lax ethical standards of her husband's White House," it said.

The latest scandal "adds to the disturbing impression that Mr Clinton's actions may have been influenced by friendships, politics and financial contributions."

Professor Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution in Washington, a think-tank, said her fledgling political career may suffer, but more through public perceptions than in any concrete way.

"Nothing that has happened is good for her future," he said. "But it is not something for which she is going to face any legal charges, nor is she going to lose any rights or privileges as a US senator. So it is strictly a question of public opinion, and public opinion is fickle."

He described the fallout from the scandal as "distracting to her, in terms of what she hopes to do in the Senate."

The pardon of Braswell was among the more controversial of 140 pardons issued by Clinton on January 20, his last day in the White House.

Braswell was sentenced to three years in prison in 1983 for perjury and mail fraud in connection with his mail order health products company. The pardon was handed down as Braswell was under criminal investigation for alleged tax evasion and money-laundering relating to offshore corporations and bank accounts.

Vignali walked out of prison on January 20 after completing six years of a 15-year sentence for cocaine peddling. His father Horacio Vignali is a rich Democratic contributor in Los Angeles.

Former president Clinton issued a statement on Wednesday denying knowledge of the payments and saying that he and Hillary Clinton had ordered Rodham to return the payments.

In a separate statement, Hillary Clinton said she had no contact with her brother concerning the affair.

"Hugh did not speak with me about these applications," she said in a statement.

Clinton's spate of pardons issued on the day he ended his eight years in the White House have sparked a criminal investigation and two Congressional probes.

They are focusing on his pardon of Marc Rich, a fugitive financier whose ex-wife, Denise Rich, contributed more than \$1.3 million to party coffers and \$450,000 for Clinton's presidential library in Arkansas.

Clinton's controversial pardon of his half brother Roger Clinton, 44, convicted in 1985 of possessing one gram of cocaine, has also been challenged. Now members of a Congressional panel plan to probe the Braswell pardon.

Show of support or publicity

FOR leaders of the two key international organisations having a reputation for imposing policies on developing countries, it was significant that World Bank President James Wolfensohn and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Horst Köhler chose to begin their current Africa tour by asserting that they had come to listen. The World Bank has said the trip is a demonstration of support for the continent, which is mired in abject poverty and faces serious health threats. But sceptics are firm in their view that the visit is intended as a publicity stunt for organisations whose policies are often blamed for cutbacks in social programmes for the poor. To be fair, Africa has been gaining increasing attention from the two organisations in recent years. Unlike Asia and Latin America, which have seen substantial international investment flows, Africa has been largely ignored by global investors. Whatever foreign investment the continent has been able to attract is primarily focused on a handful of countries. The World Bank and the IMF have become the primary instruments in providing loans and technical support on economic reforms for African countries. Moreover, the World Bank-IMF debt relief initiative has paid special attention to the continent. The key challenge, however, remains the designing of reform policies that would generate economic growth. There is growing concern in the international development community that Africa is not managing to sustain enough growth to prevent an increase in the number of people living below the poverty line.

Barely two years ago, the optimism of an 'African renaissance' pervaded the air. Through a prudent mixture of development assistance, foreign investment and enhanced trade privileges, the theory went, Africa could make up for decades of lost opportunities. But that optimism has evaporated with the continent's return to turmoil. Foreign aid and direct investment to the region has slumped. Growth in sub-Saharan Africa has gone down significantly after 1998, with average per capita GDP falling by almost one per cent in 1998-99. The World Bank and IMF have long been attributing this dismal performance to regional and civil wars and poor governance in the continent. The two organisations believe their emphasis on reducing corruption and ensuring greater fiscal responsibility would help the region's poor over the long term. African governments can embark on meaningful 'structural adjustment' and 'macro-economic stabilisation' — to borrow the bank's and fund's own terminology — only in the midst of sustained support from the international community. A critical component of that support must be a system that shields the weakest sections of society from the pains accompanying the reform process. — *Khaleej Times*

Rupee's downslide

AFTER a short respite of a few weeks, the rupee has started dipping again, touching the all-time low on Tuesday. It fell to 60.05 to a dollar in inter-bank market, sustaining an overnight loss of 40 paise. Dealers in the kerb market, where the overnight fall was of 50 paise, gained a clear margin of over Rs3 to a dollar. The adverse factors that gave impetus to the fall were the very low level of net cash foreign exchange reserves which now stand at half a billion dollars, a widening trade gap, a sharp increase in demand for the greenback on account of Haj, higher import requirement, heavy payments by the corporate sector and the delay in repatriation of export proceeds to collect gains from the falling value of the rupee. In addition, partial repayment by the State Bank in respect of swap funds and other obligations made the bank buy dollars from the free market. The State Bank is said to have purchased \$750 million from the kerb during the first six months of the current fiscal year and the practice continues. Overall, the rupee has lost 16 per cent of its value since the military-led regime assumed power 14 months ago.

In the given circumstances, how does the government intend to protect the value of the rupee? The IMF has advised the State Bank to stop financing of oil import and let the market take care of it. This may not make any significant difference. It may only relieve the pressure on reserves but the pressure on the rupee will remain all the same. The finance minister wants to hasten the privatisation of gas companies and the PTCL so that he may retire high interest rate-bearing commercial loans. Under the present circumstances, any haste in disinvesting may prove unhelpful in that it may not get Pakistan a fair price for its assets. The real remedy lies in asking for a longer-term rescheduling of foreign loans, aggressive efforts to increase exports and streamline the system of remittances through the banking channels.

The United States and the European Union are said to have offered to lift the quota limitation on textiles ahead of schedule offering an opportunity to increase exports. In return, the two trading partners have asked for the lowering of our maximum tariff from 35 per cent to 25 per cent. Pakistan is committed to this reduction but it is not clear whether the textile industry is fully poised to engage in open competition in the two markets and whether other industries would be able to withstand competition from foreign exporters in the domestic market under a lowered tariff regime. Pakistan needs to work hard in these crucial areas. — *Dawn*



COMPENSATION: Munich lawyer Michael Witt, left, and his colleague, US lawyer Ed Fagan, presenting a number for a telephone hotline for farmers during a news conference in Munich yesterday. Witt and Fagan are preparing compensation claims for farmers whose businesses are affected by the BSE crisis. The claims are directed against several European governments who they claim did not react in time against the crisis. — Reuters

Political vacuum hampers Japan in faceoff with US

By Linda Sieg

A STRING of incidents involving US forces in Japan and the sinking of a Japanese ship by a US submarine are straining two-way ties just when a political vacuum has left Tokyo least able to cope.

Experts argue that the alliance, for decades the bedrock of Japan's defence and diplomacy, isn't unravelling. But mishandling the potential crisis could feed latent anti-American sentiment, undermine popular support for the US military presence in Japan and give ammunition to right-wing politicians hoping to broaden their base.

Ties between the two allies, already strained after the chief of US forces on the Japanese island of Okinawa called his hosts "nuts and wimps" in an e-mail, were further bedevilled by the tragic sinking of a Japanese ship carrying students by the submarine *USS Greeneville*.

The February 9 accident left nine missing, presumed dead. "It was an accident but it's become a political problem and thrust into the hands of the politicians," said Keith Henry, a research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Japan office.

"But the fact is that Japan doesn't have a prime minister capable of taking a strong and credible stance in dealing with the United States," he added.

Embattled Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, one of Japan's most unpopular premiers ever, is under intense pressure from within his ruling coalition to quit in order to improve the three-way ruling bloc's prospects in a tough Upper House election in July.

It was Mori's failure to give up his golf game when he learned that the trawler *Ehime Maru* had been sunk by the submarine that sparked a groundswell of criticism and prompted members of his own coalition to call for his head.

That was in contrast to the early reaction by Washington.

President George W. Bush's new administration — already targeting tighter ties with Tokyo — was quick to apologise.

"The US side took a very serious, sincere attitude. This was seriously appreciated by the Japanese people," said former diplomat Satoshi Morimoto.

"But I'm ashamed of the Japanese side."

Japan's leaders have since taken a sterner stance, complaining about Washington's failure

to inform them promptly that civilians were on board the submarine, urging a thorough probe and pressing Washington to salvage the trawler.

Mori yesterday deplored a report that the civilians distracted the submarine crew member responsible for tracking possible contact with other ships, but added that Japan should not "seek a solution in haste".

Critics were unimpressed. "He's saying it's 'deplorable' but it isn't strong enough. It still looks as if they (the Japanese government) are playing around," said Muneyuki Shindo, political science professor at Tokyo's Rikkyo University.

Rising in tandem with the unfolding submarine saga are developments on Okinawa, the southern Japanese island which is host to the bulk of the US military presence in Japan.

Ever-present Okinawan resentment of what islanders see as their unfair share of the burden for the US-Japan defence alliance has been rekindled by the e-mail episode and other incidents, such as the arrest of a US Marine accused of arson.

Yesterday, Okinawa Governor Keiichi Inamine — not usually an outspoken critic of the US bases — said for the first time that he would seek a

reduction in the number of US troops stationed in Okinawa.

Okinawa is home to some 25,000 US military personnel, about half the total in Japan.

Emotions fanned by the submarine accident could transform into a broader antipathy to American troops in general — an outcome Japan's government is loath to see, experts said.

"The government wants to minimise the impact," Morimoto said.

But with its own credibility in tatters, analysts question whether current leaders could contain the fallout if, for example, the public proves unhappy with a navy court of inquiry's decision whether to discipline three *Greenville* officers.

A government misstep could give right-wing politicians such as outspoken populist Shintaro Ishihara an opening to boost his support — something even anti-US base activists worry about.

"Anti-US forces and anti-US sentiment are different. We don't want the recent incidents to lead to anti-US sentiment and to result in nationalism and right-wing moves," said one activist among a small group demonstrating in Tokyo yesterday to demand that the US forces go home.

Ethnic violence looms over Macedonia border

By Anatoly Verbin

THIS dusty village high in the mountains bordering Yugoslavia's volatile Presevo valley is the unlikely focus of rekindled fears that ethnic violence will spill across the Balkans.

Gunfire rings out through the night, setting on edge the nerves of villagers who wonder if they will soon be swept up in the conflict close by between Serb police and ethnic Albanian fighters in Presevo, bordering Kosovo and Macedonia.

Concern that Macedonia's delicate ethnic balance, two-

thirds Slav and a third Albanian, will be upset by near-by violence is nothing new. For nearly a decade Western diplomats have sought to prevent conflict in Yugoslavia destabilising tiny Macedonia.

But hopes that the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic from the Yugoslav presidency would bring calm have been dashed as new ethnic fires have been lit and Balkan separatist movements recharged.

"We're simply in a bad place on the map," said former Macedonian interior minister, Pavle Trajanov, a nationalist who voices the Slav majority

fear that Kosovo's independence-seeking Albanians will join forces with local Macedonian Albanians.

Western concern was roused last month when Macedonia blamed former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters for a grenade attack on a police station that killed a Macedonian policeman and talk emerged of a "Liberation Army of Albanians in Macedonia".

Nato officials pledged quickly to prevent Albanian extremists from converting their violent drive to rid the Presevo area of Serbs into a pan-Albanian freedom movement.

Tension has eased, however, with Macedonian officials noting that two police injured in the grenade attack were ethnic Albanians. They now say the incident was likely criminal.

For decades, ethnic Albanians in former Yugoslavia lived as one oppressed community, and though the collapse of the federation cut them apart into different states, family and business links are still very close. So far violence has not spread across the thinly-guarded border that separates the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia from its unstable former patron.

READERS' FORUM

Use eco-friendly bags

OMAN is a beautiful country and the civic authorities are also doing their best to keep it clean. Sadly, when the world is realising the profligacy of plastic carry bags' menace and when it is being banned and people urged to carry their own eco-friendly bags in some parts of the world, we in Oman are totally oblivious of the menace we create by using the plastic bags. It has become an unmanageable habit on the part of the shopkeepers too. They can't help but give the shopper a carry bag, even if he were to be buying a pin or a chocolate. Like pointed out rightly by Manayil C. Shaheer, (*Readers' Forum*, February 21) to some extent the menace can be curbed by the manufacturers, but to a greater extent the menace can be checked if we can learn to carry our own eco-friendly bags (cloth/jute) and also learn to dispose of these inevitable bags/bottles in the right way, instead of scattering these bottles and bags and making the streets look dirty. Oman is a beautiful and clean place, let us learn to cooperate with the civic authorities and keep it so.

V. T. Rajan
Ruwi

A practical solution

I WISH to continue on with Mr Shaheer's letter on the 'plastic menace' and genuine concern towards conservation of the environment. Here is a practical solution: The municipality should intervene and impose a rule that soft drinks should be sold only in bottles that are re-cycled (and not in cans or plastic bottles or paper bottles). When the buyer returns the empty bottle to the shop he should then get back his 50 baiza, he paid in excess at the time of purchase. This rule is followed in many countries (Denmark, for instance). This is proba-

bly a tough decision for the local authorities, as the soft drink manufacturers here in Oman would then have to redesign their manufacturing process to a large extent. Having said this, environmental protection cannot be implemented without tough decisions. If the above is implemented, we would then see that not a single bottle would be broken and thrown on the roads. The added advantage is, you can take off your shoes and walk on the beach without fear.

R. Murali
Ruwi

Hypocritical to the core

THE report about Kerala Chief Minister Nayanar's daughter contesting the assembly election made interesting reading. When Indira Gandhi stood for election, the communists condemned it as dynastic rule. When EMS's son contested the election, it was termed as party's desire! When Karunakaran's son Murali fought and won the election it was again dynastic rule. Jyoti Basu's son moving in Lexus car is OK but Congress leader buying a Maruti is capitalistic. What hypocrisy!

P. Babu
Nizwa

Reference letters

IT'S flattering to see that my letters in the *Readers' Forum* are not only thoroughly read but cuttings are saved by some readers in order to refer back from time to time. Thanks a million, Kotker. Keep it up.

M.A. Dar
Muscat

Serbs seek their missing relatives

By Aleksandar Mitic

FOR almost three years Zivka Kostic, a Serb woman from the south-western Kosovo village of Retimlje, has been looking for 14 members of her family, kidnapped in front of her by armed Albanian rebels from the former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in June 1998.

During the KLA attack on the Serb-populated village near Orahovac on June 17 1998, Kostic said she had witnessed the murder of her husband Andjelko, killed on the doorstep of their house, and kidnapping of 16 people, 14 of them members of her family, by Albanian separatist fighters.

Ever since, she has learnt nothing of the fate of her kin, like the families of more than 1,300 Serbs and non-Albanians who had gone missing since the start of the Kosovo war in 1998.

The relatives have joined ranks in their search for missing kin, grouping together in a Belgrade-based association, and have been trying to mobilise Yugoslav authorities and international officials to find out their fate, by inspecting suspected sites they insisted were detention camps for the Serbs.

"These are genocidal kidnappings directed not just against Serbs but at all non-Albanians in Kosovo — Muslims, Roma gypsies, Goranis (Slav Muslim highlanders), Macedonians and Bulgarians," said the group's president, Ranko Djinoovic.

Most of those missing, he said, had disappeared after the arrival of Nato-led peacekeepers in Kosovo (Kfor) in June 1999.

Ethnic Albanians make up more than 90 per cent of the population of the southern Yugoslav province, which has been run by the United Nations since Nato intervened to stop Belgrade's mass persecution of Albanian civilians in 1999.

However, since June 1999, more than 200,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians have fled Kosovo fearing reprisals and violence by the Albanian majority in the province, international aid officials said.

An estimated 110,000 remaining Serbs in Kosovo live under tight Nato guard, mostly in isolated enclaves surrounded

by ethnic Albanians. Incidents have multiplied in recent weeks, topped by Friday's blast on a bus carrying Serbs, in which 10 people were killed and 43 injured.

On February 9, the association launched a campaign to collect signatures for a petition demanding release of their relatives.

The petition — under the name "Lives or bones" — calls for the Yugoslav authorities and the UN administration Kosovo to do their utmost to find the missing, or, if they are dead, to return their remains to their relatives.

"The missing have not taken part in the conflicts, they are innocent civilians," said Verica Tomanovic, whose husband Andrija, a former manager of the hospital in the Kosovo capital Pristina, was abducted on June 24, 1999.

She insisted that her husband, a doctor in Pristina for 36 years, "saved lives of thousands of people, including KLA members during the war."

"Andrija did not want to leave the hospital" after Belgrade troops pulled out from Kosovo, "since there were hundreds of sick whom he did not want to abandon," Verica Tomanovic said.

However, she was informed that her husband might be kept in a working camp for Serb detainees in northern Albania.

Kfor and international organisations have tried to verify the existence of such camps, but without any success.

"These are moving camps, both in Albania and in Kosovo. As soon as Kfor is informed of their existence, they are dismantled," Tomanovic said.

"The only thing I want to see my husband again alive, or to have his body to bury him with dignity," she demanded.

Meanwhile, many Kosovo Albanians are still looking for their relatives who went missing or have been detained in Serbia proper.

They demand release of some 700 Albanians, sentenced to long jail terms during the rule of former strongman Slobodan Milosevic for "terrorist actions" committed during the 1998-99 Kosovo war.

Zimbabwe faces hard times ahead

By Stella Mapenzauswa

ZIMBABWE'S economy could shrink 10 per cent in 2001 unless the government revises its controversial land reform programme which is undermining the vital agriculture sector, analysts said yesterday.

"The prospects for the economy while the government's policies on land remain in place are very dismal," said leading private economic analyst John Robertson.

"This year we could easily have a 10 per cent collapse in the economy," Robertson said. He dismissed official estimates of a 2.8 per cent decline after a 4.2 per cent fall in 2000.

President Robert Mugabe's government has reaffirmed its drive to seize over 3,000 white-owned farms for black resettlement by the middle of this year with no compensation, further isolating Zimbabwe from vital donor aid.

Foreign currency is in critically short supply, which has hampered fuel imports. Unemployment is close to 60 per cent as companies succumb to the country's worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1980.

Agriculture directly accounts for about 20 per cent of gross domestic product and indirectly about 50 per cent in a country where the majority of industries are agro-based.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which led Western donors in suspending aid over a year ago, is sending a team to Zimbabwe next month to discuss possible resumption of support. But analysts say Mugabe is unlikely to abandon his land programme before presidential elections due early next year.

Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party narrowly won last year's parliamentary election. "I don't see the government backtracking on land because they have to satisfy certain constituencies to win the presidential election," said James Jowa, senior economist at the Zimbabwe National Congress of Trade Unions.

The land seizure programme has the support of veterans of Zimbabwe's 1980s war of independence. The violent campaign against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change is widely credited with helping Zanu-PF win last year's poll.

Robertson said this year's farm seizures would effectively destroy 3,000 businesses employing 250,000 people.

"The programme has also put at risk something like a third of the total tobacco crop and will very likely damage the prospects of the rest of the agricultural sector," he said.

"At this rate, we are nowhere near the bottom of this economic collapse, the bottom is still a long way down."

Tobacco contributes about a third of Zimbabwe's foreign currency, but industry officials say output this year could be down 24 per cent at 180 million kg partly due to disturbances on white farms by the war veterans.

In an editorial yesterday, the private-owned weekly *Financial Gazette* said the future hinged on how successfully Mugabe sells his land programme when he and other African leaders meet IMF and World Bank officials in Tanzania this week.

"Should he successfully sell his controversial fast-track land reforms...then Mugabe might just clinch the vital donor support that could save his career and Zimbabwe's tottering economy," it said.

From Our Archives

February 1986

Summer Youth Camp in July

MUSCAT — The High Committee for Summer Youth Camps has announced that the 11th Summer Youth Camp will be held at Izki in Dakhliya region from July 5 to 17.

The site of the camp was selected by the committee headed by Ali Mohammed Said Al Kindi and approved by Minister of Education and Youth Affairs Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Manthari after a survey of the area.

Ali Mohammed Said Al Kindi, chairman of the high committee, told the *Times* that the time of the camp has been advanced to July from August to enable the Omani students in the United States to participate. The camp will be the scene of wide ranging activities by Omani students studying overseas. About 100 Omani students abroad will take part in the camp.

FEATURES

In Chicago, Bard is out of box

By Michael Conlon

THE Bard always sells and plays the thing — but a new box sure helps.

That is certainly true in Chicago, where a new home for Shakespeare has turned into one of the brightest spots in a thriving live theatre feast across the city.

What is now the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre mounted its first performance on the roof of a tavern in 1986. For 12 subsequent seasons it operated in a converted dance hall with folding chairs bought from a local hardware store. There was, says executive director Criss Henderson, a devotion to quality on the stage, not to the surroundings, and a loyal following.

After moving into a new \$24 million theatre in October, 1999, the group's subscriptions shot from 7,000 to 17,000 along with a leap in group sales and single tickets.

"There were tens of thousands of other people in groups and single tickets who came to us our first season. In year two we renewed 83 per cent of those subscriptions and added another 6,000," he said. "So we now have 22,000 subscribers and a very healthy group sales business. For any production, only about 15 per cent of the entire capacity is available for single ticket buyers. It's been an incredible success in year two."

Tickets for a travelling *Hamlet* from legendary Shakespearean director Peter Brook and starring Adrian Lester sold out "pretty much the minute it went on sale" nearly a year ago, Henderson said — even though the performances will not take place until May and June of this year.

What he and theatre founder Barbara Gaines wound up with is a seven-storey, courtyard-style theatre modelled after The



SHAKESPEARE: Evergreen

Swan at Stratford-upon-Avon, with 525 forest-green seats on three levels, wrapped inside walls of brown brick and framed by gleaming honey-blond ash galleries.

Its 9-metre thrust stage brings players within touching distance — or in the current production of *King Lear* blood-splatteringly close — to the audience. A proscenium stage another 30 feet deep behind the thrust allows for what Henderson calls a full palette of flies and scrimms to add depth to a story. And another 30 feet is available through an overhead door. The new space also has every up-to-date bit of theatre wizardry such as equipment for rainstorms that dump real water.

All of this would be enough for any theatre, but what nearly rivals it is the location: in the middle of Navy Pier, a First World War-era wharf extending for several blocks into Lake Michigan with Hollywood-scripted views of the city's skyline. The pier's restaurants, museum, shops, ice rink, convention space and giant Ferris wheel, all added in recent years, have made it the most-visited tourist attraction in the US Midwest, according to the city of Chicago.

Architects and designers placed the theatre next to an existing seven-storey parking

garage and wrapped the exterior in glass and steel. The resulting lobby and corridors surrounding the interior theatre walls provide an extra buffer of sound-proofing from the horns of tour boats moored nearby and the fireworks that regularly pound the night sky at the venue.

Once past the glass exterior, visitors are drawn to the theatre by an exterior wall of warm, brown Ohio sandstone, and enter the play space itself through airlock-style double doors with noise-deadening space in-between. There are 320 seats on the first floor, more than 100 on the second and some 50 movable chairs in a single row behind the third-level gallery railing.

A pub off the lobby where actors can mingle with patrons is open before and after performances. The theatre is the result of a 100-year lease signed by the company with the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, a public agency that runs the pier and other properties. The agency put in an initial \$18 million and the company raised \$14 million but had complete control of the design, Henderson says.

"We had always said this theatre was a gift we wanted to give to the city of Chicago. In the last decade, Mayor (Richard) Daley is making this city a world-class city in ways that I don't think anyone could have imagined, especially culturally," Henderson said.

"We went through a long journey and talked to a lot of people... and there was never a consensus. I think that had we gone back to the spirit of Shakespeare we would have realised that this (location) is as close as you could ever get anywhere to (his) sort of mix of humanity... the idea that at the centre of this most democratic space in Chicago there really is this convergence of Chicagoans

and visitors from around the world, and to put Shakespeare at the centre of it shows a great vision of the mayor."

The not-for-profit company relies on contributions and grants for about half of its revenue. Henderson estimates it costs about \$750,000 to mount a Shakespeare production: "He didn't write any two-person plays for me to slip into a season to try to save some money."

The company also offered this season *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, the latter in cooperation with the Stratford Festival of Canada.

Henderson says the theatre will be lighted for 47 weeks this year, including a summer pop musical, a daily abridged version of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and a version of *Hamlet* from the improv-comedy group Second City.

In addition, 60,000 students visit the theatre during the regular season each year for a programme of Shakespeare aimed at them. The building is also open for tours.

Henderson says he and others in the company were inspired in their project by the Swan, a "magical" theatre space, and the new theatre may be able to return the favour to the old one in Shakespeare's hometown.

The same theatre consultant who helped the Chicago company in their project is now working with the Royal Shakespeare Company in its rebuilding of the Swan.

"So people from over there are coming over here to take a look at what we've done," Henderson said.

"It will be a thrill to watch them take some of our solutions... back to his hometown. To think that a theatre in Chicago has in any way influenced the intimate courtyard-style theatre in Shakespeare's home town is very impressive."



DEFENDERS' DAY: Military cadets showing their dancing skills to Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, left, during his visit to a military lyceum in the small town of Boyarka on the outskirts of Kiev yesterday. Ukraine celebrates the Day of Motherland's Defenders today. — Reuters

Universities struggle for honour roll spot

By Missy Ryan

VERONICA Pupato's love for numbers spurred her to enrol after high school in accounting courses in Argentina's most prestigious public university in Buenos Aires.

Pupato, 27, dreamed of becoming an accountant, but when she took a part-time job at a local firm she discovered the regulations she memorised for her university classes were a far cry from what real-life accounting required and her degree appeared less and less useful in Argentina's tight job market.

"There are 800,000 engineers wandering around here driving taxis," said the disheartened mother of two. "There is a desperation or resignation because people aren't sure they are going to be able to work in what they're studying — or feed their families doing what they studied," she added.

Pupato, like thousands of fellow Argentines, abandoned her university courses after a few years and resigned herself to making her way without a higher degree in a country with jobless rates close to 15 per cent. She now teaches English at her home.

Argentina's public university system has stood out in Latin America since the 19th century as a regional model for low-cost, high-quality higher education. President Domingo Fausto Sarmiento, hailed as the father of Argentine public education, pushed open universities from the 1860s as the way to establish civilised society in the budding South American nation.

With the region's highest rates of university enrollment — around 36 per cent of the university-age population at last count in 1994, the United Nations says — Argentine academics were long recognised as competitive with peers from Europe and North America. The prestigious University of Buenos Aires boasts Latin America's only two Nobel Prize-winners in science.

But time and persisting economic decline have eroded what was once one of the country's proudest accomplishments. Today students seeking a degree in state universities face crowded classes, outdated courses and little personal attention from formidable academic politiburos.

The walls of deteriorating facilities are

spackled with peeling paint and graffiti while professors are a rare commodity in smoke-filled, unheated classrooms. And fewer and fewer students are leaving those classrooms with a degree in hand.

A recent report from the public Universidad Nacional del Sur said 80 per cent of public university students drop out before graduation, a figure confirmed by education officials.

According to a study from the private Foundation for Latin American Economic Investigations (FIEL), total government spending on education in 2000 was 0.95 per cent of GDP, less than countries with per capita incomes much lower than Argentina's. Spending per student also lags.

In 1995, there were 21.7 times as many students in public universities as there were graduates, while the ratio was as low as 4-to-1 in some European nations such as England and 6-to-1 in neighbouring Brazil, FIEL said.

"Higher education in Argentina was for many years a competitive tool for the country against the rest of Latin America," Education Minister Hugo Juri said in an interview. "But after several crises linked to the military government that sparked specialists to flee the country, the quality of this education declined," he said.

Analysts wonder whether the ailing public university system can satisfy the needs of the country of 36 million people.

"The public education system wasn't able to keep up with what it was at the beginning of the 20th century without a doubt... but we shouldn't abandon it. We need to move forward with necessary reforms," Juri said.

Education experts agree reform is needed, but exactly how to restore the prestige of public education is a puzzle in a cash-strapped country emerging from more than 30 months of economic stagnation and plagued with political crises.

Some analysts say the key to revitalising universities is remodelling the outdated degree system. Courses of study such as political science or economics last six or seven years and can drag on much longer if students work or have academic problems.

An intermediate degree, like the bache-

lor's degree in US and British universities, would allow students who founder mid-stream to walk away with some sort of title, they say. "There is a lot of inefficiency here and we invest important resources in education and apparently we're not getting the results we should," said Maria Echart of FIEL, which proposes a boost in academic quality through greater privatisation of state universities, a step that would mirror neighbouring Chile's growing emphasis on private higher education.

Echart says instituting fees would allow universities to provide better services and make for a more selective student body. Scholarships for needy students would cover living expenses as well as schooling fees.

But university reform is a touchy subject in Argentina, where the highly politicised institutions represent an important voting force, usually for the left.

"If we are aiming at a large number of well-educated students in Argentina... we need to look for solutions that don't leave out qualified individuals," Juri said.

International experts say while Argentina's universities still are solid in some areas, they are at risk of falling behind their regional peers. "The situation in Argentina isn't bad but the tendency is alarming," said Juan Carlos Tedesco, director of the Latin American office of the United Nations International Institute for Educational Planning.

"If the country can't rapidly get back on track, Argentina could lose its place in a short period of time, and for a country like this one the loss of cultural and intellectual capital would be a tragedy," he said. "Symptoms already show the situation is serious — such as the quality in some academic fields. People are worried."

As for Pupato, she says she might like to give her studies another shot, but only for her own enrichment. As with many other aspiring students here, juggling work, study and family would be a challenge.

"If someone feels that what they are doing is going to be useful, they are going to struggle to finish it," she said. "But a degree doesn't assure you of anything."

Mardi Gras carnival peaks

By Peter Shard

A TIME of wild excesses, lavish costumes and disguises, the annual carnival season reaches its heady climax on Tuesday with the Mardi Gras celebrations.

From Rio to Venice and from New Orleans to Cologne, manic street processions will be the order of the day and a general spirit of reckless abandon will fill the air as revellers mark the end of winter and herald the start of the Christian season of Lent, with a "feast before the fast". The derivation of "carnival" is unclear but the most likely explanation is that it comes from the medieval Latin "carnem levare" or "carnelvarium", the removal of meat, persisting today in the modern Italian "carnevale".

Every culture may have its own name for the day — Mardi Gras, fat on Tuesday, Shrove on Tuesday, fetter Dienstag — but the rules, or rather the absence of them, seldom vary.

Shrove on Tuesday gets its name from the old English "shrive" for hearing confession, while Mardi gras, or fat on Tuesday, comes from the tradition of using up flour, fat and eggs

— usually to make pancakes — before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent, as they are food-stuffs which are not permitted during the fasting leading up to Easter. Eggs and flour are also regularly thrown at others at carnival time.

Ironically, it is in Germany, now predominantly a Protestant country, that the old Roman Catholic festival of excess is most widely preserved.

But only in Cologne, site of the country's biggest celebrations, is it called Karneval. In Mainz, where many believe the tradition originated, it is known as Fastnacht, in Swabia it is Fasnet, Fasnacht in Franconia and Fasching in Bavaria and Austria. Although its origins are lost in the mists of time, it is widely accepted that the spirit of carnival grew out of an ancient Egyptian festival to honour the deity Osiris. The Greek "Bacchanalia" in honour of Bacchus, and the Roman festival of "Saturnalia" were in similar vein. By the Middle Ages, carnival had become a universal Roman Catholic feast. Already in Germany in the early 13th century, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival mentioned the rites and rituals of Fasching and the Karneval was known to be established in Cologne by the year 1234.

Traditionally, it was a feast which lasted six days but the high point was always on the Tuesday before Lent. It was a time when the orders of daily life were subverted and it was common for the keys of the city to be handed over to fools or women; allowed to rule for a day. Noisy costume parades, masked balls and irreverent plays were all staged and the generally riotous and excessive behaviour still common today was already prevalent.

In its heyday, every major city in Europe had a carnival, but it was in Rome where the most lavish and popular parades took place, encouraged in the mid-1400s by Pope Paul II, even though subsequently the Church tried to curtail carnival time, particularly in Italy. The Venice carnival, still one of the most spectacular, was notorious for its debauchery and the rulers of the Serenissima Republic regularly had to pass laws to curb the excesses. The first reference to masks is in a document dating from 2 May 1268, when it was recorded that it was forbidden for masqueraders to practise the "game of the eggs".

French cinema festival offers Thailand alternative to Hollywood

By Nicolas Revise

THE fourth festival of French cinema opens next week in Thailand, a country awash with big Hollywood productions and whose once-vigorous film industry is now struggling to survive.

"Globalisation can be risky for the local cultures and cinema can be destroyed."

"In France, culture is taken seriously. It is not only business but it is something useful for the whole society," said Guy de la Chevalerie, cultural counsellor of the French embassy in Bangkok.

The embassy and the Alliance Française cultural association are together organising this year's French film festival from March 2-11.

Seventeen feature films, most of them hits in France, will be shown at one of the newest multiplexes in Bangkok.

This will be a discovery of *The Widow of Saint-Pierre*, directed by Patrice Leconte, which had one of the biggest budgets ever for a French film.

They will also have the chance to see *East-West* by Régis Wargnier, which stars Catherine Deneuve, an Oscar-nominee last year, *Maybe* by Cédric Klapisch, as well as *Astérix and Obélix against César* by Claude Zidi and starring Gérard Philipe.

"It aims to show a range of French productions, to represent all genres and all the interests of the film-makers," said Lannig Stervinou, who selected the 17 films.

Only controversial movies with strong erotic content, such as *Baise Moi* which outraged some Parisian critics last spring, were not considered since they risked being cut by the prudish Thai censors.

Despite the successful launches in Bangkok of European or Asian film festivals over the past years, Thai movie houses are flooded every year with a hundred or so American productions, many of them from the dregs of Hollywood.

Last year, only one French film, *Taxi*, was shown in Thai theatres. Only 55,000 people paid to see it, dissuading the distributor from showing *Taxi 2*.

The organisers of the French festival are hoping that Thai distributors will let themselves be convinced by French films, some of which have been warmly received by local critics looking for an alternative to Hollywood.

"French cinema has a lot to offer and could be a source of inspiration for Thai artists," said influential critic Prada Yoon.

Especially at a time when the Thai movie industry, which flourished during the 1960s and 70s with more than 100 films a year, is in trouble.

In 1999, the country produced only seven feature films.

Internet gambling leaves Hong Kong out of pocket

By Chee-May Chow

HONG Kong's Jockey Club is facing a nagging problem — punters in the gambling-mad territory are increasingly placing their bets with offshore Internet sites, costing the club and the government billions in revenue.

Growing competition from offshore bookies has made Hong Kong's only legitimate betting agent so nervous it is pressing the government to take action.

But authorities admit the odds are against them being able to stop the unofficial betting because most of the online bookmakers are based overseas. They have no jurisdiction over them, even if they are clearly targeting punters in Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong is a big piece of meat for these operators," Kim Mak, executive director of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, said.

"Many of them are very blatant. They advertise heavily and some of them have even set up so-called service centres in Hong Kong but in fact, they take bets," Mak said.

The Jockey Club estimates it is losing HK\$50 billion (\$6.4 billion) a year to high-tech and illegal bookmakers, but it is not alone.

The trend is also hitting government coffers just as the

territory is emerging from its worst recession in decades.

Betting duties are a key source of income for the government — the Jockey Club provides about 11 per cent of its tax revenues.

The Jockey Club sounded the alarm bell when Lunar New Year races in January brought in eight per cent less than last year.

This, the club chief warned, could cost Hong Kong dearly. One would think even the most avid gambler could satisfy their appetite for betting in Hong Kong.

Hordes of punters file twice a week to two racecourses, one in Shatin and the other in the aptly named Happy Valley, hoping to strike it rich. Local radio and television stations carry races live.

Another two nights a week, the club's popular lottery produces instant millionaires.

Together, the games raked in more than HK\$83.6 billion for the club in the year to the end of last June.

But club officials said this reflected only a fraction of what it should have received.

The Hong Kong government says 500 Internet gambling sites are collecting bets from punters in the territory.

A handful of offshore sites, including one of Britain's largest bookmakers William Hill, have come up with



RACING SESSION: Punters watching horses on the track as the event is being broadcast on a huge screen behind them during an evening horse racing session at Hong Kong's Happy Valley race track yesterday. — Reuters

Chinese-language services specially tailored to appeal to Hong Kong betters. William Hill is not shy to

admit it is accepting bets from Hong Kong. "We are not based in Hong Kong and we operate an entire-

ly legal business," Graham Sharpe, a spokesman for William Hill in London, said. The Hong Kong govern-

ment and the Jockey Club are discussing how to update existing betting laws, which do not cover online betting or offshore

BUSINESS

Sugar tilts balance of trade in favour of India

LAHORE — The balance of Pak-India bilateral trade this year has clearly remained in favour of India, helped by its sugar exports to the western neighbour.

Analysts say sugar is a key determinant of Pak-India trade balance. Balance of two-way trade remains in the favour of the country which exports sugar.

For example, Pakistan exported sugar to India during 1997-98 and 1998-99 and during this period balance of trade remained in Pakistan's favour.

Pakistan's exports to India dropped by \$122.85 million during 1999-2000, resulting in trade deficit of \$73.43 million.

During last fiscal year, Pakistan's exports to India amounted to \$51.43 million, whereas during 1998-99, the country exported \$174.28 million worth of various items to India. Imports from India stood at \$126.84 million last year.

A key factor of sharp drop in exports to India during the last financial year was an immense decline in the export of sugar as Pakistan witnessed 0.5 million tonnes shortfall in this commodity export last year. In 1999-2000, the country earned only \$2.70 million by exporting sugar to India.

During the last fiscal year, fresh fruits, nuts and rice were the main sectors that had attracted a reasonable foreign exchange from the eastern neighbour.

Fresh fruits/nuts fetched \$19 million, rice \$11.50 million, raw cotton \$3.27 million and vegetables export fetched \$2.5 million from India.

However, the exports of all the other items to the said destination remained below the mark of \$3 million in 1999-2000. — *Internews*

ABN Amro profits surge but 6,700 jobs to be shed

AMSTERDAM — The Dutch bank ABN Amro increased net profits by 20.5 per cent last year but said yesterday that it would shed 6,700 jobs over three years in restructuring, signalling that the expected costs of this had pushed it into overall loss last year.

Net profits amounted to 3,097 billion euros (\$2.78 billion) from 2,570 billion euros in 1999, representing an increase of 20.5 per cent, but excluding a provision of 599 million euros for the costs of restructuring.

After inclusion of this provision net profits fell by 2.8 per cent to 2,498 billion euros.

The board said that it was fully confident that results this year would be in line with forecasts. The price of shares in the bank fell by 1.9 per cent to 25.15 euros in initial trading.

The number of people employed would be reduced from about 29,000 to about 23,000 over three years and the business servicing consumer and commercial clients would be reorganised to improve service. — *AFP*

Korea Telecom profits up 163pc

SEOUL — South Korea's telephone service giant Korea Telecom Corp. said yesterday its net profit surged 163.5 per cent to \$808 million last year.

The state-run giant said net profit reached 1.01 trillion won (\$808 million) in 2000 on sales of 10.3 trillion won, up 7.6 per cent from the previous year.

Its sales included 4.24 trillion won from domestic telephone services and 681.9 billion won in international calls and overseas business.

Korea Telecom Freetel Co., a sister company, posted a net profit of 116 billion won, up 97 per cent from a year earlier. Its sales rose 23 per cent to 2.78 trillion won. Freetel attributed the rise in earnings to brisk sales of subsidiary brands and wireless Internet services. It had 5.28 million subscribers at the end of 2000, up from 4.27 million a year earlier. — *AFP*

Prudential profits rise

LONDON — British insurance giant Prudential said yesterday that record sales in 2000 helped drive operating profit up eight per cent to £840 million (\$1.2 billion).

Insurance and investment sales topped £13.9 billion, up 13 per cent from 1999 levels, Prudential said.

"The markets in which we operate around the world are experiencing tremendous change, bringing with it both enormous opportunities and challenges," said chief executive Jonathan Bloomer. — *AFP*

S. African firm, India's Tatas in IT partnership

JOHANNESBURG — Three South African Indian leaders in different fields have formed a new company and entered into a partnership with India's Tata business group to promote empowerment and facilitate information networks in South Africa.

Jay Naidoo, a former minister of telecommunications, post and broadcasting, and Jayendra Naidoo, a former executive director of the National Economic Development and Labour Council, have formed the Jay & Jayendra Group (J & J), which in partnership with the Tatas, has launched Consilience Technologies, a total information and communications technology (ICT) solutions provider.

The company has appointed Hasmukh Gajjar, president of the Black Business Council, as its chief executive officer (CEO).

Gajjar is a pioneer in the ICT industry in South Africa and also serves on a number of bodies pertaining to these areas.

"Our goal is to become one of the top five ICT companies in South Africa through organic growth and appropriate acquisitions," Consilience Technologies chairman Jay Naidoo said. "We have the resources and experience to do this. We intend coalescing smaller companies into a larger entity that achieves a critical mass in promoting empowerment and facilitating greater communication networks in South Africa," he added.

"This partnership is a landmark in cooperation between two societies that have enormous complementary strengths and potential for mutual benefit," said Nirmal Jain, Tata Infotech's managing director.

"As a leading systems integrator from India, Tata Infotech and Tata Africa Holdings were looking for a partner with serious social and business commitments towards Southern Africa. We are extremely pleased to have forged a relationship that resulted in the formation of Consilience Technologies," he added.

"In creating a company with a new South African identity, we are determined to establish ourselves as a broad-based world class solutions-provider rather than as product suppliers," says Naidoo.

"Consilience Technologies understands the transformation needs and challenges of the public and private sectors. In combining global and local expertise, we will focus on new growth areas relating to e-business," he added.

"This joint venture supports the national

drive and concomitant processes to establish information and communications technology as a priority growth and development sector," Naidoo said. "At the same time, it reflects the government's strategy of promoting partnerships between South Africa and other major developing countries such as India and Brazil."

"The immediate aim of Consilience Technologies is to establish a solid foundation in South Africa and promote Africa-centric growth in such vertical markets and industry segments as financial services, transportation, telecommunications, healthcare, e-business, and government and public sector agencies," Naidoo said.

He added that Tata's strength in solid customer relationship management particularly in the field of metropolitan government; railways

and international banking would help in this regard.

"Our relationship with Tata Infotech will help in growing local skills through leveraging Tata Infotech's back office and seeding key skills into Consilience Technologies," Naidoo said. One of India's largest conglomerates, the Tata group has an annual turnover of \$9 billion. One of the ICT companies within the group, Tata Infotech Limited (TIL) has been appointed a preferred supplier to Consilience Technologies.

As an integral part of Tatas, TIL has a deeply entrenched culture of quality and customer satisfaction. A global player, which has offshore earnings of between 60 and 70 per cent, TIL, specialises in establishing long-term relationships with its clients. — *IANS*



IT'S A DAMP SQUIB: A Turkish woman putting her money in her bag as her colleague watches dollar rates during trading at a foreign exchange bureau in central Istanbul early yesterday. — *Reuters*

Turkey floats lira in battle to curb crisis

ANKARA — Turkey said yesterday it was abandoning its controlled currency regime, centerpiece of an \$11 billion IMF-backed reform programme, and floating the lira in a dramatic bid to curb a financial crisis racking the country.

The move, after 12 hours of emergency talks, looks set to cripple the three-year programme, launched amid high hopes in January 2000, and dealt a heavy blow to Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit. Rapid depreciation may bring some social hardship. Analysts in Asia's main financial centres predicted the lira would see a 30-40 per cent depreciation.

The International Monetary Fund voiced support for Turkey's decision and said it hoped to start talks this week on changes needed to the reform programme in the light of the new exchange regime.

"The IMF supports the decision of the Turkish authorities to float the lira," IMF managing director Horst Koehler said. "Looking forward, we welcome the Turkish government's goals of continuing to reduce infla-

tion, and ensuring sustainable growth."

IMF officials had been in contact by telephone throughout the evening with Ecevit and senior economic officials, including Gazi Ercel, a chief architect of the programme.

International ratings agencies, which assess debt risk and influence foreign investment, made clear their alarm about a crisis that has sent interest rates soaring to 4,000 per cent.

Tremors have been felt throughout emerging markets. "The currency is going to be allowed to float in accordance with the economic circumstances that have arisen recently," a statement issued after the Ankara meeting said.

Economy Minister Recep Onal told reporters as he left Ecevit's offices that the float would begin when markets opened in the morning. Ercel and Ecevit, whose public outburst against the country's president on Monday triggered the crisis, left the meeting without commenting.

The currency market will be watched with great anxiety yes-

terday for early indications of just how quickly and how far the lira will fall. The least bearish forecast from Asian analysts questioned by Reuters was for a 25 per cent fall.

However economists said they expected interest rates to plummet from their staggeringly high levels to below 100 per cent as soon as the market opens. Koehler said Turkey was still committed to the existing economic programme and ongoing fiscal adjustment. A strict monetary policy should help to stabilise the exchange rate and ensure, possibly after an initial increase, that the inflation rate continued to decline.

A row between Turkey's prime minister and president earlier this week terrified Turkish banks, many of them weakened from the country's financial crisis late last year.

Panicked investors drained over \$7 billion from central bank reserves on Monday, leading the central bank to cut off the taps to them in a bid to wrest those dollars back, sending key lending rates over 4,000 per cent on Wednesday. — *Reuters*

Oil prices on upswing after US stock drain

LONDON — Oil prices firmed yesterday after a hefty drop in US crude stocks reignited concerns about the impact of energy costs on the economic health of the world's biggest petroleum importer. Benchmark Brent blend rose 30 cents during morning trading in London to \$26.67 a barrel while US light crude gained 34 cents to \$28.87.

US crude remains some \$3 below a peak in January when, according to a Wednesday report from the US Labour Department, energy bills were the main factor behind a surge in US inflation. Weekly data from the American Petroleum Institute (API) released late on Wednesday showed US crude stocks down 12 million barrels to 278.7 million in the week to February 16. That put the nation's crude inventories at their lowest level in 25 years and nearly six million barrels below this time last year. Dealers, though, said they were treating the data with a pinch of salt.

"The market's up a little but a lot of our customers are wary about these (API) numbers," said a New York-based trader.

"There's talk that fog off the

Gulf coast delayed shipments so the stock situation perhaps isn't as bad as it might look at first sight," Nigel Saperia of oil trading firm Glencore said he was "very sceptical" of the stock figure. Price gains also were tempered by data from the API for distillates, including heating oil, that showed stocks up 2.5 million barrels, for a 12.5 million barrel year-on-year surplus. Gasoline stocks rose 1.6 million barrels and now are 8.9 million barrels higher than a year ago.

Dealers said they were waiting for weekly US Department of Energy (DoE) figures, due for release at 1400GMT, for confirmation of the API numbers. The data will serve as a reminder to the industry that oil stocks in the West remain tight despite last year's series of Opec production increases.

Opec reduced supply again in January because it was concerned that stocks were building too quickly. Dealers said the latest data probably reflected the initial impact of the new cartel outbacks that came into effect at the beginning of February.

The US inventory crunch will put the spotlight back on talk in Opec that the group's

mid-March conference might need to agree another round of output cuts — of as much as a million barrels daily.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has shrugged aside criticism its export policy, aimed at keeping oil prices near current levels, is partly to blame for the downturn in US economic growth.

Wednesday's US Labour Department report said energy costs pushed US inflation up 0.6 per cent in January and raised some doubt about whether the Federal Reserve can risk cutting interest rates again in March.

Japanese trade data for January, also released on Wednesday, showed a 20 per cent surge in oil import costs that helped push the country into a trade deficit for the first time in four years.

Opec has said it will defend crude prices in the range \$22-\$28 for a basket of cartel crudes that on Wednesday was valued at \$24.61. The basket is valued about \$4 below US light crude. Some in the group are worried that a seasonal downturn in demand during the second quarter could see prices slump if more cuts are not implemented in March. — *Reuters*

Two Swedish banks merge

STOCKHOLM — Swedish banks SEB and Föreningsparbanken announced yesterday they are to merge to form SEB Swedbank, which will be number one in Sweden's banking sector with 35,000 employees and an annual turnover of 55 billion kronor (\$5.6 billion).

The new bank will be the second-largest in the Nordic region, behind the Finnish-Swedish giant Nordea, formerly known as MeritaNordbanken.

SEB Swedbank will have a market value of 150 billion kronor, total assets of 2,000 billion kronor and 11 million customers in Europe.

SEB shareholders will hold 51.5 per cent of the new bank and Föreningsparbanken 48.5 per cent. The merger is expected to create cost savings of 2.5 to three billion kronor, which the banks expect to take full effect during 2005. There will be no layoffs but around 2,000 employees are expected to leave over a three-year period through "natural retirement".

The merger comes amid a wave of consolidations in the European banking sector. "The financial sector in Europe is undergoing extensive changes as a result of globalisation, continued deregulation and new technology. This has led to changed customer behaviour and increased competition," the banks said in a statement. — *AFP*

Pakistan's telecom sector grows

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's telecom sector recorded a net growth rate of 6.7 per cent in year 1999-2000, officials say.

According to a study by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), total sales of telecom industry were Rs71.683 billion by June 2000.

Telecom industry included Pak Telecom, cellular, payphone, telecom equipment production, and ISPs.

Listed companies' sales revenues remained dominant, accounting for about 87.75 per cent of total telecom industry revenues, followed by mobile (5.65 per cent), equipment production (4.66 per cent), payphones (1.1 per cent) and ISPs (0.67 per cent) during 1999-2000.

Capitalisation of the sector grew by Rs16.837 billion to Rs174.549 billion from Rs157.712 billion last year. The capitalisation of telecom sector listed in stock exchange increased from Rs133.296 billion to Rs144.154 billion during

1999-2000 showing an increase of 8.146 per cent.

According to PTA, the listed companies include Pak Telecom, TeleCard, Pak DataCom and WorldCall.

Approximately as 98.63 per cent of the total capitalisation during 1999-2000 is represented by Pak Telecom, while 1.17 per cent for TeleCard, Pak DataCom and WorldCall among the listed companies.

As a whole, Pak Telecom capitalisation dominates about 81 per cent of the total industry followed by cellular mobile 9 per cent, ISPs 5 per cent, CTI and TIP 3 per cent and Payphones 2 per cent during 1999-2000.

The cellular mobile companies currently operating in Pakistan are PakTel, Instaphone, Mobilink and new arrival Ufone. This sector also revealed an upward moving trend in the overall investment during 1999-2000.

As a whole, the cellular sector of the telecom industry had

indicated a net growth of Rs2,427 million (22.36 per cent) during 1999-2000. Capitalisation for the 1998-99 was Rs14,059 billion vs Rs11,323 billion during 1999-2000.

In addition to these three companies, the commercial operations of Ufone as a new player in the cellular mobile sector would have a significant impact on telecom industry. The investment statistics concerning Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and hence the annual growth rate of their portfolio implied the most exciting outcome since last three years.

The investment portfolio of these ISPs for financial year 1999-2000 was Rs7,968 billion as against Rs7,103 billion in 1998-99.

The companies TIP (Telephone Industries of Pakistan) and CTI (Carrier Telephone Industry) are involved in the manufacturing of various telecom equipment and instruments. — *Internews*

Bridgestone suffers fall in profit by 80 per cent

TOKYO — Reeling from a massive tyre recall after dozens of fatal accidents in the United States, the world's largest tyre-maker Bridgestone Corp. yesterday announced an 80 per cent drop in net profit last year.

Bridgestone said its net profit plunged to 17.7 billion yen (\$155 million) compared to 88.7 billion yen in 1999.

Revenue in 2000 fell 3.8 per cent to 2.01 trillion yen and pre-tax profit slumped to 124.8 billion yen compared to 200.8 billion yen a year earlier. "Our pre-tax profit declined due to the increased cost of the raw materials and the cost of the inventory adjustment for the Bridgestone/Firestone product and the strong yen," Bridgestone president, Yoichiro Kaizaki told a press conference.

Bridgestone's US subsidiary Bridgestone/Firestone Inc. posted a \$510 million net loss — its first since 1992 — as a result of the tyre recall, said Kaizaki.

However, the group's net profit was better than the 13 billion yen the company forecast in December after booking a \$750 million special loss related to the

tyre recall.

Bridgestone has set aside \$450 million to cover the costs of the lawsuits over accidents linked to its tyres but Kaizaki declined to respond to questions about possible or pending legal action.

Firestone was forced to recall 6.5 million tyres which were linked by US safety investigators to at least 148 fatalities and hundreds of injuries. Most of the accidents were linked with tyres used on Ford Explorer sports utility vehicles.

Firestone used to supply all of the tyres for Explorers but this has since fallen to 30 per cent. "We took a hammering after the recall incident, but we are glad to see that 30 per cent of (Explorer) drivers still choose our tyres," Kaizaki said, comparing the figure to Firestone's 20 per cent share of the overall US market.

"We are planning to restore the brand image of Firestone and we hope to see the company return to the black by the latter half of 2002," Kaizaki said.

Firestone plans to participate in motor racing in the United

States to regain public confidence, Kaizaki said.

"Through steady participation in motor sports activities in the United States, we hope to rebuild the brand," he said. Looking ahead, Bridgestone forecast net profits of 48 billion yen for this year with pre-tax profits of 100 billion yen on sales of 1.95 trillion yen.

The company said it expected the earnings situation would remain difficult due to slowing economies in the US and Europe, as well as an only moderate recovery in Japan.

Fiercer competition in overseas markets and a possible rise in material prices will also pressure the company's earnings, it said.

However, tyre demand in Japan is expected to hold-up, with the volume of sales increasing slightly. In North America, tyre sales are expected to decline due to weakening demand for new cars and trucks as well as the Firestone recall. In Europe, Bridgestone expects volumes to rise as the company plans to expand its sales channels. — *AFP*



OPENING ACCOUNT: Chinese residents opening accounts at a Shenzhen brokerage to trade hard currency B shares yesterday. Earlier, China announced the opening of its hard currency B share markets to local investors. The trading in hard currency B shares will begin on Monday. — *Reuters*

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SPORTS

Record beckons Schumacher in 10th Formula One season

LONDON — Michael Schumacher could enjoy a record-breaking season in 2001 if he can keep the McLaren men behind him and lead Ferrari into a new era of Formula One supremacy.

Domination is also a theme away from the racetrack, with uncertainty over the control of commercial rights hanging over Formula One before the first chequered flag is waved in Australia on March 4.

Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone was this week even quoted as saying he had been asked by leading carmakers to look into the possibility of establishing an alternative series should German media groups take control.

The financial twists and turns, in a pre-season period always clouded by bluff and counter-bluff among the teams, have already made gripping reading.

"What Bernie has to deal with I wouldn't choose for myself. Personally, I'm quite sat-

isfied with my responsibilities," declared Schumacher recently.

Compared with lack of transparency elsewhere, the 32-year-old German's aim is clear. He starts his 10th season in Formula One needing eight more wins — one fewer than he managed from 17 races in 2000 in becoming Ferrari's first champion for 21 years — to beat Alain Prost's record of 51.

Another title would equal the Frenchman's four, with only the late Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio ahead on five.

But Schumacher claims to be less interested in that.

"You cannot say that my goal is a certain amount of titles," he said at the launch of the new F2001 which technical director Ross Brawn has described as Ferrari's best car yet.

"I would simply like to win as many races as possible."

Schumacher says he is hungry as ever and there can be no doubt that the 2001 champi-

onship will be as tough as ever, probably more hotly contested and open to surprises than it has been for some time.

There has already been controversy and acrimony.

Prost and Jaguar, the teams who disappointed their fans most last season, are already at daggers drawn over the latter's signing of Spanish test driver Pedro de la Rosa after he had already tried out the new Ferrari-engined Prost.

The French team have threatened both Jaguar and De La Rosa with legal action.

Further controversy can be expected with the immediate renewal of "tyre wars" and the return of hitherto banned electronic "driver aids" from the fifth race in Barcelona at the end of April.

"I think we are going to have some very contentious post-race scrutineering," said McLaren boss Ron Dennis, voicing fears about illegal tyre wear and the possibility of

teams cheating with electronics in the early races. His drivers can expect to be front runners again in a sport that has seen just four races won by teams other than Ferrari or McLaren since the end of 1997.

Finland's Mika Hakkinen, whose son Hugo was born in December, says he is refreshed and looking forward to being a hunter again after having his run of two successive titles ended by Schumacher.

Briton David Coulthard is more determined than ever to break out from under Hakkinen's shadow at McLaren.

The top two teams may not be able to dominate to the extent they did last season, when they won everything.

"We'll be fighting with McLaren for the title but with the advent of Michelin tyres there'll be room, in some circumstances, for other teams," says Schumacher, whose Brazilian teammate Rubens Barrichello was the only first-time winner of 2000.

One team on the rise should be former champions Williams, a distant third last year, who have Colombian newcomer Juan Pablo Montoya and an all-new BMW engine.

Montoya, a Cart champion who won the Indy 500 last year, is a class act who will be particularly closely watched at the season-opener in Melbourne.

In 1996, Canadian Jacques Villeneuve made his Formula One debut in a Williams in Australia as a Cart champion who had just won the Indy 500. He took pole and almost won the race, finishing second. Next year he was the champion.

Montoya's team mate Ralf Schumacher is also ready to win a Grand Prix in his fifth season. Villeneuve's chances of a first podium since 1998, when the Canadian was still at Williams, are also looking better since his BAR team finished a strong fifth overall last season.

He will be partnered by Frenchman

Olivier Panis, McLaren's test driver last season, who is one of seven drivers who were not on the grid at the start of 2000.

Briton Jenson Button, now 21 and on loan to Benetton after a strong debut at Williams, seems like a seasoned driver compared with some of the youngsters who will be making their Grand Prix debuts in Melbourne.

Spaniard Fernando Alonso, in a Minardi, is just 19 while Finland's Kimi Raikkonen is 21 but the Sauber driver has just 23 single-seater races under his belt.

Only three teams have unchanged line-ups — Ferrari, McLaren and Jordan — while Honda and Ferrari are providing engines to five of the 11 teams and watching with interest. Jordan will be sharing the Hondas with BAR — a situation which has fired up both teams.

"This is our chance. If we blow it this time you can blame us," said Eddie Jordan at the launch of his EJ11. — Reuters



SOUND START: Scotland's Colin Montgomerie hitting out of a bunker on the 8th hole during the first day of the Singapore Masters golf tournament yesterday. Montgomerie, who is playing against some 140 players in the US\$850,000 competition, carded a five-under par 67, three strokes off the leader. — Reuters

Real Madrid, Leeds reach quarterfinals

PARIS — Real Madrid and Leeds became the first two pieces of the jigsaw in the European Champions League quarterfinals after earning their passage following Wednesday night's action.

Defending champions Madrid earned a 2-2 draw at Italy's Lazio, enough to see them mathematically through to the last eight with two Group D second round matches still to be played.

Leeds, well out of the English Premiership title race, thrashed Anderlecht 4-1 in Belgium, meaning they booked their quarterfinal ticket from the same pool.

Of course the success of Madrid and Leeds meant both Anderlecht and Lazio were unceremoniously dumped out of the competition.

Bayern Munich's 3-0 victory at Spartak Moscow, played earlier because of the time difference between Moscow and central Europe, meant the Germans were virtually assured of going through from Group C.

Bayern, who were just seconds from certain qualification when Lyon's Edmilson

equalised Arsenal's first half goal for a 1-1 draw, will no doubt qualify after their final two matches.

Italian title holders Lazio made most of the early running against the outfit voted Fifa's team of the century and twice took the lead only for the Spanish giants to twice restore parity.

Santiago Solari equalised Pavel Nedved's fourth-minute opener only for Argentinian striker Hernan Crespo to put Lazio back in front eight minutes into the second period.

But Real's prolific striker Raul came up with a second equaliser 17 minutes from time to seal Lazio's fate and confirm the eight-times winners are serious about a ninth continental crown.

Meanwhile Leeds struck three times in a devastating first-half performance. Alan Smith ended his recent goal drought by grabbing two goals, sandwiching a Mark Viduka effort, before Ian Harte crowned their win with an 81st minute penalty. Giant Czech striker Jan Koller added a 75th-minute consolation but it was too little

too late.

The Belgian champions had won 21 successive home matches at the Constant Vanden Stock stadium, as well as their last nine in Europe, but that record was destroyed as they were eliminated from Europe's prestige competition.

Leeds manager David O'Leary paid tribute to his players, who have failed to shine in the English Premiership this season.

"All credit to the players because they earned this result. I'm delighted. A lot of things have been said and we all wanted to go out and do something about it. The best way is to do just that and prove some people wrong, and I think we did that tonight," he said.

Bayern midfielder Mehmet Scholl scored twice, once from a penalty, with Paulo Sergio adding a third late on against Spartak Moscow to extend their lead in the pool.

Spartak's third consecutive defeat after an opening 4-1 victory over Arsenal left Spartak bottom of the group with three points and they look set to go no further in this season's cam-

paign.

After the opening quarter-hour Bayern got more into the match while Spartak, out of match practice following the three-month winter break in the domestic league, simply made too many mistakes.

Scholl gave Bayern a 1-0 lead on 17 minutes after Brazilian teammate Giovane Elber fed him from the right following a mistake by Spartak in defence.

After the break, under the watchful gaze of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Spartak continued to push forward on the uneven, muddy turf of Luzhniki stadium.

Scholl netted Bayern's second with a precise penalty kick into the top left hand corner in the 75th minute after Spartak defender Dmitry Ananko fouled Salihamidzic in the area.

Late substitute Paulo Sergio netted the third with a header from a Stefan Effenberg free kick from the right with three minutes left.

The victory must have been all the more pleasing for Bayern officials who on Tuesday said the match should never have

been played in such low temperatures and snowy conditions.

Arsenal looked as if they had ground out a typical 1-0 win but they ultimately paid the price for some missed chances and defending too deep, a 90th minute corner headed in by the unmarked Brazilian Edmilson.

Arsenal had taken the lead in the 33rd minute.

French midfielder Robert Pires exploited space down the left-hand side and set off on a 30-yard run.

He passed to Dennis Bergkamp and the Dutchman firmly brushed aside Edmilson before curling a right-foot shot past the left hand of diving Lyon goalkeeper Gregory Coupet.

Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger said: "We lost too many balls in the second half and we didn't create enough chances. This result is a blow but we are still second in the group and if we finish level on points with Lyon we will go through."

Arsenal have the better record against Lyon, the tie-breaker for teams on the same points total, having beaten them 1-0 in France. — AFP

Harvey leads Victoria to 5-wicket win

SYDNEY — All-rounder Ian Harvey took four wickets for four runs to guide Victoria to a five-wicket win over South Australia in the Australian domestic championship yesterday.

Harvey cleaned up the South Australian tail in a devastating 9.2-over spell to win the Adelaide Oval match in Victoria's favour.

South Australia began the fourth and final day in the commanding position of 157-3 in their second innings, leading by 161 with their first innings century-maker Greg Blewett unbeaten on 80.

But when Harvey dismissed Blewett for 95, the home side suddenly collapsed to be all out for 186, losing their last seven wickets for 22 runs. That left Victoria chasing 191 to win with a little over two sessions to play.

They suffered an early setback when they slumped to 29-2 but reached their target in the 65th over for the loss of five wickets with Michael Klinger finishing not out 66.

— Reuters

Lewis throws first punch in Tyson talks

LONDON — Lennox Lewis has delivered the first sucker punch in negotiations over his possible fight against American heavyweight rival Mike Tyson.

The Briton issued a statement on Wednesday agreeing in principle to the fight, which could be the richest in history.

But Lewis attached a list of conditions the American camp could never agree to, the Daily Telegraph reported yesterday.

"Mike...made an offer to fight as early as June this year, leaving me to choose the date and location," said Lewis, who holds the World Boxing Council and International Boxing Federation titles.

"I am delighted to accept the offer and I have instructed my lawyers to send Mike a draft contract for the deal."

"I intend to fight Hasim Rahman on April 21 in Carnival City in South Africa, and I am prepared to meet Mike soon after his birthday on June 30, although my preferred date is July 21."

There lies the hitch for Lewis also outlined details of the contractual arrangements he is seeking.

"Mike wants us to share purses on a 50-50 basis," Lewis said.

"I am prepared to do that provided the live pay-per-view for the fight is on my (television) network HBO and that Mike compensates his network, Showtime, out of his 50 per cent of the purse."

— Reuters

Smooth sailing for Capriati and Seles

OKLAHOMA CITY — Australian Open champion Jennifer Capriati beat Maria Vento of Venezuela, 6-2, 6-1 in the second round of the IGA Indoor Championships on Wednesday.

Top-seed Monica Seles also won convincingly, beating fellow-American Jenny Hopkins of the United States 7-6 (7-1), 6-3.

American Alexandra Stevenson used her big serve to beat Jana Kandarr of Germany, 6-3, 7-6 (9-7) and 17-year-old Aniko Kapros of Hungary, a qualifier with a No. 336 ranking, upset Jana Nejedly of Canada, 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7-5).

Capriati needed just 37 minutes to overpower Vento, ranked No. 106. Vento got her only service break of the night in the first set to tie things at 2-2. Capriati then took over, getting two service breaks and limiting Vento to one point the final three games of the set.

Capriati had three more service breaks in the 18-minute second set.

"My confidence and conditioning are really good right now," Capriati said. "I was anxious to see how I'd play in my first match back. Everything has come together in my game."

Seles struggled some vs. Hopkins in the first set and had to go to a tie-breaker. She was more in command the second set with seven aces.

"It is always tough when you're playing your first match

in a tournament," Seles said. "I missed a lot of shots at first, but I got a lot more confidence as the match went on."

Seles is the defending IGA champion.

Stevenson had 13 aces in beating Kandarr, ranked No. 80. "I am happy with the way I've been playing," Stevenson said. "I am serving well. Everything this year is building toward Wimbledon, to play on the grass."

Stevenson reached the quarterfinals here in 1999 as a qualifier before losing to eventual champion Venus Williams. That momentum built until she reached the semis at Wimbledon as a qualifier.

She came back to Oklahoma City last year and lost a first-round match that lasted less than an hour. That mirrored her 2000 season, when she had a 12-26 record.

"It was a difficult last year," she said. "I was not going anywhere with the people I had around me. My mother was the only one who was really helping me. Everything was kind of confusing. That's all behind me. There is no more chaos."

Kapros is a perfect 18-0 this year after beating Nejedly, ranked No. 77.

"I have no pressure on me," Kapros said. "I am the youngest (17) and have the highest ranking (No. 336) in the tournament. I was very happy to win and make it into the quarterfinals."

— Reuters

Missing Tiger back on prowl at Nissan Open

PACIFIC PALISADES (California) — Tiger Woods has been missing from the record-setting scores posted in the past few weeks on the US PGA Tour. But the world's top player is back on the prowl here at the Nissan Open.

Play opens here on Thursday at the \$3.4 million event with Woods in the middle of his longest win drought in two years, eight events, while others have replaced him in the record-setting set.

Joe Durant set PGA Tour scoring marks for 72 and 90 holes last weekend on his way to victory at the Bob Hope Classic. And a month ago, Woods' good friend Mark Calcavecchia established the tour scoring record for a 72-hole event at the Phoenix Open.

Meanwhile, Woods has placed no worse than 13th but no better than fourth in four events and is winless on the tour since the Canadian Open in September.

"It's not four years, it's just four tournaments," Woods said. "Everyone goes through stretches like that."

This week, Woods returns to his Southern Californian roots and the Riviera Country Club, where he lost in a playoff to Billy Mayfair in 1998. Among the rivals to Woods are defending champion Kirk Triplett plus Phil Mickelson and Davis Love, who have established themselves as the best players on the tour this season.

Mickelson sat out the Bob Hope Classic after defeating Love and Frank Lickliter in a playoff at the Buick Invitational. A week earlier, he shared for third at the Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

Love snapped a 63-event title drought at Pebble Beach before losing the playoff. He has three top-10 finishes this season and leads the money list with \$1,146,600. David Duval withdrew on Wednesday due to fatigue. Former Player of the Year Mark O'Meara also withdrew, citing a rib injury. The field includes the Spanish trio of Sergio Garcia, Miguel Angel Jimenez and Jose Maria Olazabal, who normally play on the European Tour but have totalled more than \$260,000 on the PGA Tour this year. — AFP

West Indies to name captain next week

ST JOHN'S — West Indies will name their captain for the series against South Africa early next week.

West Indies Cricket Board executive secretary Andrew Sealy said the squad for the first Test against South Africa should be named by next Wednesday after the captain had been appointed.

Jimmy Adams led the side which was beaten 5-0 by Australia in West Indies' last series.

"The selectors are going to get together early next week and make representations to the WICB in terms of their recommendation for captaincy for the series," Sealy told Cna news agency on Wednesday.

"Thereafter, the board will be round-robin on the issue and then a determination made," Sealy said. Adams averaged 18.87 runs in Australia. The first of five Tests against the South Africans is in Guyana from March 9-13. — Reuters

Ducks blank Sharks 1-0

ANAHEIM — Jean-Sebastien Giguere made 24 saves for his first career shutout and defence-man Oleg Veredovsky provided the offence, leading the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim to a 1-0 blanking of the San Jose Sharks.

Giguere, who supplanted Guy Hebert as the Ducks' No. 1 goaltender, stopped 12 shots over the first two periods before equalling that total in the third for his fourth win of the season.

Anaheim has won consecutive games for the first time since a three-game streak from December 13-17.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, rookie Shane Willis recorded his first NHL hat-trick as the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Atlanta Thrashers 6-3.

Sandis Ozolinsh collected a goal and three assists and Jeff O'Neil added his 30th goal and an assist as Carolina improved to 8-0-0 all-time against Atlanta. Willis is second among rookies with 34 points. Arturs Irbe stopped 28 shots for the Hurricanes to pick up his 25th win. In Chicago, Sergei Fedorov scored his 29th and 30th goals and set up another as the Detroit Red Wings extended their season-high unbeaten streak to nine games with a 7-3 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks.

The Red Wings erupted for four goals over the final 20 minutes to improve to 7-0-2 in February. Fedorov's second goal of the night snapped a 3-3 tie 59 seconds into the final period. Steve Duchesne and Pat Verbeek also scored for Detroit.

Eric Dacy tallied twice for the Blackhawks, who have lost five of their last seven games.

— Reuters

Lakers use full force to beat Spurs

SAN ANTONIO — Shaquille O'Neal finished with 22 points and 10 rebounds and was one of seven Los Angeles Lakers in double figures as the defending NBA champions used a well-balanced attack to beat the San Antonio Spurs 101-99 on Wednesday.

Plagued by foul trouble late in the third quarter, O'Neal watched from the bench as Rick Fox, Horace Grant, Isaiah Rider, Robert Horry, Brian Shaw and Mike Penberthy took turns carrying the load.

Fox scored 17 points, Rider added 16 and Horry 13 with three big 3-pointers. Grant had 12, Shaw 11 and Penberthy 10 as Los Angeles used its full arsenal to hand San Antonio just its fifth loss in 26 home games.

In Cleveland, two days after posting their first overtime win in close to two years, the Los Angeles Clippers completed their first back-to-back road wins since April 1999 with a 100-94 triumph over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Lamar Odom scored 23 points and rookie Quentin Richardson had 12 of his 19 in the fourth quarter as both keyed important runs in the final period. Clarence Weatherspoon scored 18 points for the Cavs, who have lost 11 of 12.

Rookie Darius Miles had his seventh double-double with 16 points and 10 rebounds and Jeff Melnis added 12 points on 5-of-7 shooting for the Clippers.

In Auburn Hills, Michigan, Jerry Stackhouse scored 32 points as the Detroit Pistons built a huge lead and held off a late rally for a 90-85 victory over the New York Knicks.

The Pistons built a 23-point lead only to see New York stage a furious comeback that fell just short.

"We shot 36 per cent and



ON TARGET: Houston Rockets' guard Steve Francis (3) changes hands on the ball as he jumps around Minnesota Timberwolves' guard Terrell Brandon (7) for a basket during the first half at the Target Centre in Minneapolis. — Reuters

won the game," Detroit coach George Irvine said. "I thought our defence was really good. We got tentative offensively and we started missing shots and let them back in the game. When you beat New York, you've

done a good job."

In Miami, Cliff Robinson scored 25 points and the Phoenix Suns beat the Miami Heat 100-85.

Rodney Rogers scored 22 points and Shawn Marion added

18 for the Suns, who never trailed after the first six minutes.

Brian Grant scored 21 points for Miami, which is going in the opposite direction. The Heat have lost three in a row for the first time since a four-game slide from November 22-28.

In Minneapolis, Maurice Taylor scored 21 points and grabbed eight rebounds as the Houston Rockets sent the Minnesota Timberwolves to their fifth straight defeat with an 89-83 victory.

The Rockets used a 17-5 run to close the first half to help snap a six-game losing streak to the Timberwolves.

Walt Williams scored eight points and Mookie Norris had five in the decisive spur as Houston took a 49-38 lead into the locker room. Hakeem Olajuwon continued his strong play with 13 points and 13 rebounds for Houston, which has won seven of its last eight. Williams and Steve Francis each added 12.

In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Vince Carter bailed out New Jersey by missing a foul shot with 3.3 seconds left and the Nets held on for a 113-111 victory over the Toronto Raptors after nearly squandering a 13-point lead in the final eight minutes.

Stephon Marbury scored 35 points for the Nets, and Carter had 39 for Toronto.

In Philadelphia, Allen Iverson scored 36 points and the Philadelphia 76ers used a strong defensive effort in the fourth quarter as they beat the Vancouver Grizzlies 107-91.

Iverson made just 11-of-29 shots. But he also made 13-of-17 free throws and collected four steals as he was too quick to contain. Former Grizzlie George Lynch added 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Sixers.

— Reuters

Woodruff upsets Sampras in Memphis

MEMPHIS — Top-seed Pete Sampras, playing for the first time since losing in the fourth round of last month's Australian Open, was upset by unseeded Chris Woodruff in the Kroger St Jude tournament on Wednesday.

Sampras, winner of 13 Grand Slam tournaments, lost 7-6 (7-4), 6-2 to Woodruff, a Tennessee native who had not beaten Sampras in three previous attempts.

After dropping a first-set tiebreaker, Sampras went down easily. He was broken at love to open the second set, beaten by a trio of Woodruff return winners. Woodruff broke him again in the seventh game.

"It's got to be right up there with some of my biggest wins," Woodruff said. "I don't know if I ever thought I had it on. I have a lot of respect for Pete. I can appreciate what he's done in tennis. I just made some stance adjustments on my return and I got on a roll."

Sampras' loss prevented a third-round pairing between Goran Ivanisevic and Sampras in a rematch of two previous Wimbledon finals.

Sampras, playing in Memphis for the first time since winning the event in 1996, said he felt matched fit despite playing only one event this year and thought he started strong. But he let a questionable call on what he thought was an ace affect him late in the first set and Woodruff broke back to tie the match at 5-all.

"I give Chris a lot of credit," Sampras said. "He returned my serves well. At this point, it's a tough loss for me. I got a tough call at 5-4 and 15-love and it led to a tough service game and then kind of kind of got on my serve."

Sampras said Woodruff played a great second set and got into a zone.

"He really caught me off guard in the first game of the second set," Sampras said.

Top seeds advancing on Wednesday included No. 3 Tommy Haas and No. 6 Michael Chang.

In another second-round upset, Canadian doubles specialist Sebastian Lareau, whose crowning moment last year was winning the doubles gold medal at the Sydney Olympics, made a singles statement.

Lareau, ranked 117th in singles at the end of last year, upset No. 4 seed Nicolas Lapentti of Ecuador, 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-2) in a second-round match at the \$800,000 ATP tour event.

Lareau, 27, overcame a sluggish start and served well over the final two sets to force the tiebreak. In the tiebreak, Lareau got up a mini-break to go up 2-0 on a forehand volley winner and added another mini-break to go ahead 5-2 when a Lapentti forehand sailed long. He won the match by smashing a deep overhead that Lapentti could not return.

"It was a great win," Lareau said. "The beginning of the year has been rough. I came in here with not much confidence. I was the last guy (to gain direct entry into the main draw). I really thought I was going to have to play qualifying."

Lareau said he was concerned before

Namibia ban football broadcasts

WINDHOEK — Namibia have banned live television coverage of football internationals due to poor attendances, reports here said. The first match to be affected is the World Cup qualifier against Egypt at the Independence Stadium tomorrow with the home team seeking their first win in the five-nation mini-league. — AFP

TIMES SPORT

Friday, February 23, 2001

Simon Taylor recalled by Scotland

GLASGOW — Edinburgh Reivers forward Simon Taylor capped a memorable two days with a recall yesterday to the Scotland squad for the Six Nations clash against England at Twickenham on March 3. The 21-year-old broke his hand against Australia in November and has yet to feature in the tournament so far. — AFP

Pakistan beat New Zealand again

WELLINGTON — Pakistan went 2-1 up over New Zealand here yesterday with two to play in the One-day series, but were fined in the process for slow play.

They skittled New Zealand for 215 with ten balls remaining to win by 28 runs after topping their previous batting effort by more than 100 runs in scoring 243 for nine in their 50 overs.

However, their celebrations were dampened by the news they would be fined 25 per cent of their match fee for taking too long to bowl their allotted overs.

Pakistan off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq claimed man-of-the-match honours with a tidy three for 26 off nine overs.

"It's been a concern all the way through, top order batting and an inability to cope with a world class bowling attack," New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming said afterwards.

Pakistan captain Moin Khan was still smiling last night despite his side being fined for slow play.

Moin said the team, which contained three changes from the side that lost on Tuesday including the loss of Shoaib Akhtar through injury, provided a good combination.

"It was a good combined effort today," he said.

"Everybody did their bit today, but I was particularly pleased Yousuf Youhana got among the runs. He helped provide a good last 10 overs and he made a big difference."

Moin said he was concerned when New Zealand's Craig McMillan (64) and Lou Vincent (34) put on a fourth-wicket stand of 100.

"...I was a bit disturbed with the way they were playing. They



JUBILANT: Wasim Akram celebrates the dismissal of New Zealand's Nathan Astles.

were doing really well and we were getting a bit ragged at that stage, but once we got Vincent I thought we could win the game."

Moin said Akhtar, who limped off in Napier with a sore left thigh, is improving all the time and should be ready to take the field in Christchurch for the fourth match on Sunday.

The game looked one-sided early in the chase after New Zealand lost promoted opener Stephen Fleming, Roger Twose and Nathan Astle with just 18 runs on the scoreboard.

Fleming was trapped in front by Wasim Akram for one, Twose was again caught behind off Waqar Younis for the same score and Astle was trapped in front by Akram for 10.



HOWZATT?: Azhar Mahmood appeals for an lbw decision. — Reuters

But Craig McMillan and Lou Vincent confidently mixed deft placement with aggressive running to add 50 off 54 balls, which Pakistan assisted through some average fielding and some wayward bowling.

Vincent was given a life on the time and should be ready to take the field in Christchurch for the fourth match on Sunday.

Soon after posting the pair's 100 partnership off 127 balls in the 27th over, Vincent was given out by the third umpire, stumped for 34 by wicketkeeper Moin Khan off Saqlain.

McMillan soldiered on with help from Chris Harris, who made his 11th One-day 50 off 72 balls. He celebrated reaching the mark when he pulled Younis over square leg for six.

But on 64 from 83 balls, McMillan chipped Abdur Razaq to deep square leg. Worse came two balls later when Razaq struck again to remove Harris leg before wicket for 11.

When Vettori was bowled by Azhar Mahmood, New Zealand needed 77 runs off the last 10 overs with just three wickets left.

Only a late Adam Parore innings of 34 not out off 39 balls prolonged the outcome.

Pakistan coped ably without injured paceman Shoaib Akhtar, with replacement Azhar Mahmood taking one for 33 off 10 in his 100th match.

Earlier, Pakistan staged a big turnaround from their innings of 135 in Napier on Tuesday, thanks to a solid 57 from opener Saeed Anwar and 47 off 47 balls from Youhana.

Fleming won his second consecutive toss and again sent Pakistan in, but the visitors got

off to a solid start to be 123 for two after 30 overs.

Nineteen-year-old Imran Nazir, one of three changes to the side, made a flying start with 32 off 23 balls including a big six off Chris Martin over mid wicket.

He and Anwar put on 45 for the first wicket then another newcomer Salim Elahi helped Anwar add another 60 runs. Anwar, who was dropped on 22 by Astle, reached his 35th One-day 50 off 81 balls before being run out for 57 by some brilliant Vincent fielding.

When Razaq was out it was 172 for five in the 41st over, but Youhana and some late blows from the tailenders helped Pakistan add 80 off the last 10 overs and 51 off the last five.

Among the New Zealand bowlers Daryl Tuffey took three for 52 off 10, while James Franklin took three for 61 off eight and Chris Harris snapped up two for 31 off 10. — AFP

Out of sorts Pierce falls to qualifier

DUBAI — French Open champion Mary Pierce's poor run of form continued here yesterday as she crashed out of the Dubai Tennis Championships, losing 6-3, 6-1 in just 53 minutes to Australian qualifier Rachel McQuillan.

Still trying to find her form after a shoulder injury forced her to miss several months at the end of last year, the 26-year-old was outplayed by 111th ranked McQuillan that she lost eight consecutive games after recovering a break to level at 3-3 in the opening set, and it was not until she was down 5-0 that Pierce held a game point again on her serve in the second set.

"I feel a little bit tired I guess. I feel like I haven't stopped all year," she said.

"It's been a lot of travelling and a lot of playing, but no excuses really. Rachel played a great match. She didn't miss a lot of shots and she served really well. It was really hard to read," she added.

McQuillan showed superb racket control and followed up some excellent serving by often coming to the net to execute some fine volleys.

It was a surprising performance from a player who failed to win a single match on the WTA tour last year, and McQuillan was as shocked as anyone at her form this week. "I certainly surprised myself," said the 29-year-old Australian.

"If you had told me that I'd be here I'd have laughed. I would have thought it was a joke, a sick joke. I'm so happy and it's something I've worked hard for my whole career," she added. — AFP

Judge King closes inquiry after legal threat from Cronje

CAPE TOWN — South Africa's inquiry into cricket match-fixing was brought to a sudden end by the judge heading the commission yesterday because of the threat of legal action by disgraced former captain Hansie Cronje.

Cronje was the only South African player implicated in the match-fixing scandal which triggered the inquiry, Judge Edwin King said when announcing the closure decision.

"I have now formally approached the president (Thabo Mbeki) to close the commission at my request, subject to the compilation of my final report," King said.

"I have been informed by Shamila Batohi, who has led the evidence at the commission, that there is no evidence implicating any other member of the team, administrator or official. These persons must be regarded as having been cleared," King said in a statement. Batohi was the chief prosecutor at the King Commission.

Cronje had been offered immunity from prosecution if King was satisfied that he had revealed everything to the inquiry.

King said yesterday: "At the moment that is something I have to decide upon."

"It is something that is exercising my mind."

Asked when he would submit his final report, King said: "It is going to take a little time. I am going to invite the legal representatives of the various par-

ties to make written submissions. I expect Cronje's lawyers to do that, and they must be given time."

Cronje was sacked in April after Indian police accused him of being involved in match-fixing.

He was banned for life by the South African cricket board in October but is trying to have the ban overturned.

Cronje succeeded in having the resumption of the King Commission delayed several times. The Cape High Court ruled in December against an attempt by King to impose January 24 as the date for hearings to resume.

On February 5, lawyers representing Cronje said they might attempt a challenge to King following a ruling in the Constitutional Court whether a judge could be the head of a Special Investigative Unit.

The commission immediately cancelled a sitting set for February 19 and said it would seek clarity on the ruling before deciding whether the inquiry would resume.

King delivered an interim report to the government on December 12 in which he suggested tightening controls on players to remove the chance of match-fixing taking place.

Opener Herschelle Gibbs and bowler Henry Williams, who had admitted agreeing to throw matches but said they never went through with the deal, were banned from international competition until January. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan	N.Astle lbw b Akram10
Saeed Anwar run out (Vincent)57	R.Twose c Moin b Waqar1
Imran Nazir c Fleming b Tuffey32	C.McMillan c Youhana1
Saleem Elahi c & b Harris30	b Razaq64
Inzamam-ul-Haq c Twose b Harris12	L.Vincent st Moin b Saqlain34
Yousuf Youhana c Astle b Franklin47	C.Harris lbw b Razaq11
Abdur Razaq c Vincent b Franklin8	A.Parore not out34
Moin Khan c Astle b Tuffey15	D.Vettori b Mahmood7
Wasim Akram c Vettori b Franklin9	J.Franklin b Saqlain8
Azhar Mahmood b Tuffey17	D.Tuffey c Elahi b Saqlain3
Waqar Younis not out5	C.Martin b Akram1
Saqlain Mushtaq not out1	Extras (w-6 nb-2 lb-2)10
Extras (w-6 nb-2 lb-2)10	Total (for nine wickets, 50 overs)243
Total (for nine wickets, 50 overs)243	Fall of wickets: 1-45 2-105 3-132 4-152 5-172 6-202 7-216 8-229 9-242
Bowling: Tuffey 9-0-52-3 (w1), Martin 7-1-30-0 (w1, nb1), Franklin 8-0-61-3 (w1, nb1), Vettori 10-1-43-0 (w1), Harris 10-0-31-2 (w2), Astle 6-0-24-0.	Mahmood 10-0-33-1 (w2 nb1), Razaq 10-0-44-2 (nb4), Saqlain 9-1-26-3 (w1).
New Zealand	Result: Pakistan won by 28 runs.
S.Fleming lbw b Akram1	Man of the match: Saqlain
Mushtaq1	Mushtaq. — Reuters



DAY'S HEROES: Sri Lankan batsmen Marvan Atapattu, left, and Aravinda de Silva walk off at the end of the first day's play in the first Test against England at the Galle International Stadium. — Reuters

Atapattu, De Silva put Sri Lanka in command

GALLE — Marvan Atapattu played the perfect anchor role with an unbeaten 85 as Sri Lanka built the foundations of a match-winning total against England on the opening day of the first Test yesterday.

With Kumar Sangakkara (58) and Aravinda de Silva (56 not out) as his main allies, Atapattu guided Sri Lanka to 221 for two at the close.

Sri Lankan coach Dav Whatmore promised England more of the same.

"The big plus for us is that we only lost two wickets," he said.

"We should forge ahead tomorrow and build up a sizeable total. We have eight wickets in the dressing room and two batsmen with their eye in."

Whatmore, however, said he had been impressed with England's ability to keep the run-rate down and their refusal to buckle in the hot and humid conditions.

"We were made to work hard," he said. "I have seen sides come here and lose it completely. The line goes, the length goes. England team did very well."

After his side won the toss on a slow, dusty pitch expected to turn significantly as the match progresses, Atapattu put on 92 for the second wicket with Sangakkara and added 111 in an unbroken third wicket stand with De Silva.

Atapattu, showing great concentration and resolve, has faced 286 balls and hit eight fours while Sangakkara stroked his runs off 125 deliveries and the veteran De Silva emerged from a quiet start to hit six fours and one six in 120 balls.

England's bowlers perse-

vered but were rewarded only with a wicket in each of the first two sessions, Darren Gough removing Sanath Jayasuriya for 14 and off-spinner Robert Croft dismissing Sangakkara, both to catches by Craig White.

The touring team had two other chances, both involving De Silva, which did not go their way.

He edged a ball from Gough that went hard and fast to second slip where Graham Thorpe was unable to cling on to it. De Silva was 20 at that moment, and on 47 he narrowly survived a run out at the non striker's end after the third umpire had looked at a slow motion television replay.

Atapattu survived a confident appeal on 13 for a catch by Graeme Hick close in off a delivery from left-arm spinner Ashley Giles that appeared to go off bat and pad, but otherwise had few problems.

England coach Duncan Fletcher too, praised his team for their discipline but warned them to keep their nerve.

Fletcher said Nasser Hussain's men had done well to restrict the home side to 221 for two despite sweltering conditions and little luck.

"Our bowlers had to keep their discipline and they did a good job," he said. "We always knew it was going to be hard. It was probably one of the hottest, most humid days we have played in and it's a flat wicket not offering much to the bowlers."

Fletcher added that a couple of half-chances had gone begging, adding: "We mustn't lose our nerve, we must be patient. It will be vital to get a couple of wickets early tomorrow."

He added that England had won in Pakistan late last year despite the home side ending the first day of the deciding third Test in Karachi on 292 for three.

England should be aware Atapattu is a man with an appetite for big scores. He has played five three-figure innings in Tests and three of them have been double hundreds.

Sri Lanka progressed effectively after suffering an early blow when Gough dispatched captain Jayasuriya for 14 in his new ball burst.

Jayasuriya made a characteristically forthright start by stroking three fours. Two of his boundaries were square cuts but when he tried another back foot forcing shot he edged to second gully where White dived to his right to hold the catch.

Sangakkara, timing the ball well and using his feet to the spinners, reached his half-century in 90 balls but then had his threatening innings cut short.

— Reuters

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka	Marvan Atapattu not out85
Sanath Jayasuriya c White14	b Gough14
Kumar Sangakkara c White58	b Croft58
Aravinda Da Silva not out56	Extras (lb-1 nb-7)8
Total (for two wickets)221	Fall of wickets: 1-18 2-110
To bat: Mahela Jayawardene, Ramesh Arnold, Tuwan Dilshan, Chaminda Vaas, Dilhara Fernando, Muttiah Muralitharan, Kumar Dharmasena.	Bowling: Gough 15-3-59-1 (nb3), Caddick 16-10-13-0 (nb2), White 16-4-45-0 (nb2), Giles 23-4-54-0, Croft 16-5-41-1, Hick 4-0-8-0.
— Reuters	

Australia, India continue to trade verbal volleys

McGrath accuses Sachin of ducking pre-series duel

BOMBAY — Australian bowler Glenn McGrath yesterday raised the stakes for the upcoming series against India, saying Sachin Tendulkar feigned injury to avoid an early confrontation with him.

India's champion batsman withdrew from the Bombay team that began a three-day match against the Australians here yesterday after straining a calf muscle at the Indian team's training camp.

But McGrath refused to buy that line, saying the Indians wanted to shield their premier batsman ahead of the first Test starting at the Wankhede stadium here on February 27.

"He claims he is injured, but I don't think that is the case. I guess he does not want us to get a look at him before the Tests," the versatile fast bowler said.

Tendulkar declined to comment on McGrath's outburst, saying the Australians were welcome to believe what they wanted.

"I am very disappointed at not playing this game," he said. "But I can't go against the wishes of national coach John Wright who was worried about my condition. It's not a serious injury. I am fit and looking forward to the series."

Australian captain Steve Waugh considers the Indian tour the ultimate test for his world-beating side, which hopes to add to the record of



MCGRATH: Battle-hardened

15 successive Test wins by bagging Australia's first series on Indian soil in 31 years.

McGrath, who missed Australia's 2-1 defeat in India three years ago because of injury, used a syndicated column to strike a psychological blow at the Indians.

"Coming straight from the bouncy pitches in Australia, it will take time to get used to the low and slow pitches here," he wrote.

"Hopefully, if I bowl as well as I aspire to, we will need too many overs to bowl the Indian team out."

McGrath said even though Tendulkar was the best batsman in the world — "on par with Steve Waugh" — his gameplan for the series was to target the Indian captain

Saurav Ganguly. "Ganguly is uncomfortable against short-pitched bowling and I am sure he remembers that," McGrath said.

"I don't mind a batsman knowing that I am targeting him. Often he ends up thinking about me. It's always good to have a go at a captain because that often upsets the rest of the team."

The Indian captain laughed away McGrath's comments, saying it was another instance of Australia's ploy to verbal assault.

"Look, he's a good bowler and Australia are a good team," Ganguly said.

"But we are not easy to beat at home and certainly will not be giving it to them on a platter. As far as my supposed weakness against short bowling is concerned, let the series start and we will talk after that."

Tendulkar confirmed he will join the Indian squad of 14 at nets at the Wankhede stadium from today, five days ahead of the first Test.

"This Indian team is better prepared than many in the past," Tendulkar said. "We don't talk about it much but I know all of us are raring to go."

"If we play our best cricket, we will win. But we can't afford to be complacent against a team like Australia." — AFP

Srinath ready to sort Aussies out

NEW DELHI — Indian fast bowler Jagavallab Srinath yesterday he was prepared for the challenge of leading the attack against Australia in the home Test series.

The 31-year-old, who will spearhead a largely inexperienced set of bowlers, also said he was not bothered by Indian pitches which are traditionally slow and offer low bounce hinting he was ready to take the opposition head-on. "I have to focus on how to bowl to each individual batsman. We have done some homework on it at the camp," Srinath said by phone from the southern city of Bangalore.

"It's a good responsibility. (Anil) Kumble is not there, but the other five bowlers together have to do it, do what is best to win the match," he said.

Leg-spinner Kumble, a proven match-winner at home, has been ruled out of the series following shoulder surgery last month.

Srinath, who will play his 50th Test when the series begins in Bombay on February 27, has taken 183 Test wickets at an average of 29.84. But he has managed only 28 in 10 matches against Australia at an expensive 42.60 runs per wicket.

Srinath's best Test performance has come in India, eight for 86 against Pakistan in Calcutta two years ago.

Leg-spinner Narendra Hirwani, with 66 wickets from 17 Tests, is the next



SRINATH: Accepting challenge

most experienced among the six specialist bowlers chosen for the first Test. Srinath said bowling on Indian pitches, which have traditionally not been regarded as helpful to pacemen, had its advantages.

"It is a learning process," Srinath said. "Like Australia, West Indies or South Africa, Indian wickets also have a few advantages for fast bowlers."

He said the lack of bounce in Indian pitches by itself could be a weapon. "Even lack of bounce can sometimes be disconcerting (for batsmen)," he said.

Asked whether he always altered his bowling approach in India, he said: "It is not adjustments, it is being innovative." — Reuters

Bombay punish Australia

BOMBAY — Fast bowler Glenn McGrath made an impressive start on the Indian tour yesterday, bagging 3-46 before Australia let Ranji Trophy champions Bombay off the hook in the three-day match here. The hosts, electing to take first strike, recovered from 57-4 before lunch to post a creditable 328 for nine by stumps on the first day at the Brabourne stadium here.

To add to the tourists' woes, Mark Waugh received five stitches on his left hand when he split the webbing while fielding in his first match on the tour.

Team officials, however, said the injury was not serious and Waugh will be able to bat in the match.

McGrath, who missed his team's previous tour three years ago, made light of a slow wicket to grab two wickets before lunch in his first outing on the current

trip. McGrath had former Indian opener Wasim Jaffer caught at second slip by Mark Waugh for 16 and then removed another Test batsman Vinod Kambli for no score to make early dents in Bombay's batting.

Home captain Sameer Dighe made up for the absence of star batsman Sachin Tendulkar, to rescue Bombay with a sparkling knock of 84.

Tendulkar was asked by the Indian team management to skip the game to rest a strained calf muscle.

Dighe added 117 for the sixth wicket with Sairaj Bahutule (51) and 63 for the eighth with Ramesh Power as the Australians sweated in the heat to make an impression the unresponsive wicket.

Dighe and Bahutule batted through most of the afternoon session before part-timer Ricky Ponting set Bombay back with

two wickets in successive overs after tea. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Bombay first innings	V.Mane b Hayden19
W.Jaffer c M.Waugh b McGrath16	J.Paranjpe c Fleming b Waugh27
A.Muzumdar lbw b Miller1	V.Kambli c Ponting b McGrath0
S.Dighe c Gilchrist b Fleming84	S.Bahutule lbw b Ponting51
R.Powar not out2	R.Powar not out2
P.Mhambrey c Fleming b McGrath65	N.Kulkarni not out14
Extras (b-5 lb-16 nb-9)30	Total328
Fall of wickets: 1-27 2-52 3-57 4-57 5-82 6-199 7-202 8-265 9-269	Bowling: Glenn McGrath 19-6-46-3 (nb-3), Damien Fleming 19-4-56-1 (nb-3), Colin Miller 21-6-64-1 (nb-1), Matthew Hayden 7-0-37-1, Shane Warne 19-4-81-1 (nb-1), Mark Waugh 3-0-13-0, Ricky Ponting 6-0-10-2 (nb-1).
— Reuters	

Bowlers weary, Warne unlucky, says Buchanan

BOMBAY — Australia coach John Buchanan said his bowlers were weary and star leg-spinner Shane Warne was unlucky after they received some rough treatment on the opening day of their three-day game against Bombay (Bombay) yesterday.

"Overall, he (Warne) is probably disappointed with his own bowling," said Buchanan. "But he bowled well at certain times and then had some misfortune with edges going to the boundary."

Australia's bowlers got off to a good start before fading against aggressive batting by tail-enders on the first day of their second warm-up game against Bombay.

Warne came in for harsh treatment, hit for 81 off 19 overs for one wicket, as Bombay recovered from five for 82 at one stage to run up 328 for nine at the close.

"The guys are still a bit tired and jaded, but I am not making excuses," Buchanan added. The batsmen played quite well," said Buchanan. "It would have been nice to