

**INDIA** Page 10  
**Raveena weds like a princess**



**PAKISTAN** Page 6  
**Benazir throws up unexpected revelations**



**PHILIPPINES** Page 7  
**Gloria ready for debate with Poe**



**SPORTS** Page 15  
**Sehwag is engaged**

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**Cables of greetings**

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to His Majesty Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, sultan of Brunei Darussalam, on his country's National Day, wishing him good health and happiness and the people of Brunei further progress and prosperity.

• HIS Majesty the Sultan has also sent a similar cable to Bharrat Jagdeo, president of the Republic of Guyana, on his country's Independence Day.

His Majesty wished the president good health and happiness and the Guyanese people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

**AGCC delegates' visit to China postponed**

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — The visit of a joint delegation from the AGCC states to the People's Republic of China, which was scheduled for February 24 and 25, has been postponed in the wake of the outbreak of bird flu in the Asian region. The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry received a message from the Secretariat General of the Gulf Chamber Association informing it of the postponement of the visit.

The new dates are April 6 and 7. It is the second time that the visit has been postponed. The first delay was caused last year owing to the spread of Sars.

**Prayer Timings**

Dhuhr	12.25
Asr	03.44
Maghrib	06.11
Isha	07.36
Tomorrow	
Fajr	05.13

**Weather**

MUSCAT	
Maximum	31°C
Minimum	19°C
Humidity	30-80pc
Sunset	6.06pm
Sunrise (tomorrow)	6.34am
SALALAH	
Maximum	29°C
Minimum	18°C
Humidity	30-70pc
Sunset	6.28pm
Sunrise (tomorrow)	6.46am

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**Hearing on wall today**

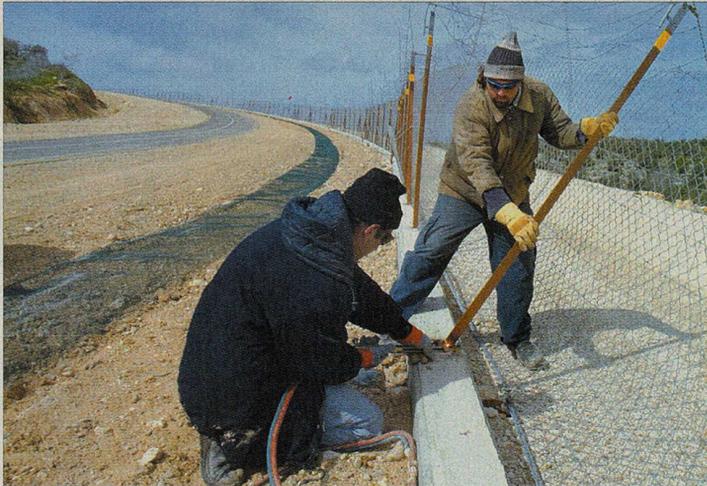
Rights body says barrier is a serious violation • 8 killed in bus attack

JERUSALEM — A martyrdom attacker killed eight passengers on a packed Jerusalem bus yesterday, police said, a day ahead of a World Court hearing on the barrier Israel says it is building in the West Bank precisely to prevent such attacks.

International pressure group Human Rights Watch yesterday slammed Israel's West Bank barrier as a "serious violation" of the Jewish state's obligations under the Geneva Conventions and a blatant attempt to consolidate illegal Jewish settlement in the territories.

The second such blast in less than a month prompted Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz to call a security meeting to "decide on reprisals for the attack", a ministry spokesman said, as Israeli troops clamped a curfew on the bomber's village, near the southern West Bank town of Bethlehem, and arrested 11 of his relatives.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and other Israeli officials said the attack justified



**WRITING ON THE WALL?** Israeli construction workers dismantling a part of Israel's controversial barrier near the West Bank town of Baka Al Sharqiya. — AFP

the barrier, as Palestinian leaders headed by Yasser Arafat condemned it and charged it was timed to harm the Palestinian case at

the International Court of Justice. The bombing, claimed by the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of Arafat's Fatah movement,

occurred in the middle of the rush hour just metres from a filling station and not far from Jerusalem's landmark King David hotel.

An anonymous caller from the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said the attack was carried out by Mohammed Zuhul, 20, from the village of Hussan.

The group had claimed the previous Jerusalem bus bombing on January 29, also carried out by a man from the Bethlehem area, whose security was handed back by Israel to the Palestinians last July.

Shalom told army radio, "This attack shows that the construction of the security fence is indispensable. Where there is no fence, it's horrible. Where the fence has been built, results are clear cut."

"That is why we will go on building this fence because it saves lives," he added.

A statement by the Palestinian leadership deemed "this attack extremely serious and its timing deliberately chosen ahead of the International Court of Justice's hearing and as an international campaign in support of Palestinian rights is taking place."

• Continued on Page 5

**VIEWPOINT**

By Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali

**Desired channel appears and promised channel missing**

FOR more than a decade, the Arabs, from the ocean to the Gulf, have been waiting with eagerness and patience for the promised Arabic television channel with the Western audience in mind. The channel was to portray the true image of the Arabs, focusing on their rich traditions, noble values and great traits of love, compassion and tolerance. That was to correct the wrong impressions created by the Zionist media that have, through systematic disinformation and distortion, maligned the image of the Arabs in the West and the US by linking them with violence, terrorism and all that is bad.

This lofty vision has raised the expectation of the Arab people who hoped and prayed that the promised channel would materialise soon. And they have been waiting all these years for the fulfilment of this beautiful dream right from word go that was pronounced a decade ago.

The project had the support and goodwill of each and every Arab. The Arab immigrants all over the globe, who have been subjected to racial discrimination and abuse as a result of the evil work done by the Zionist media to create a repulsive picture in the minds of people in the West, welcomed the project wholeheartedly and waited with eagerness.

• Continued on Page 4

**On the edge of doomsday?**

Secret Pentagon report says climate change a greater threat than terrorism and warns planet earth faces anarchy as warfare would define human life

LONDON — A secret report prepared by the Pentagon warns that climate change may lead to global catastrophe costing millions of lives and is a far greater threat than terrorism, *The Observer* said yesterday.

The report was ordered by an influential US Pentagon adviser but was covered up by "US defence chiefs" for four months, until it was "obtained" by the British weekly.

The leak promises to draw angry attention to US environmental and military policies, following Washington's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and President George W. Bush's scepticism about global warning — a stance that has stunned scientists worldwide.

• Continued on Page 4

**What it could lead to**

- Britain will have winters similar to those in current-day Siberia as European temperatures drop off radically by 2020.
- By 2007 violent storms will make large parts of the Netherlands uninhabitable and lead to a breach in the aqueduct system in California that supplies all water to densely populated southern California.
- Europe and the United States become "virtual fortresses" trying to keep out millions of migrants whose homelands have been wiped out by rising sea levels or made unfarmable by drought.
- "Catastrophic" shortages of potable water and energy will lead to widespread war by 2020.

**Rosetta may bare the origins of life**

PARIS — It is January 2014. Hundreds of millions of miles from home, hurtling into the chill, black depths of the Solar System at more than 100,000kmph, a spacecraft awakes from hibernation.

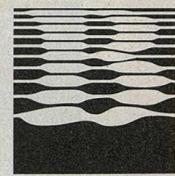
Nearly a decade after it was launched, Rosetta is at last nearing her goal: a comet, whose dark, icy head holds secrets as to how the planets were formed — and, just maybe, how life itself was started on Earth.

Rosetta's marathon, due to be launched by the European Space Agency (ESA) from Kourou, French Guiana, on February 26, is one of the most ambitious space projects since Apollo to chase a comet as it streaks around the Sun, and then land a miniature lab to explore its surface.

"This mission is like something out of science fiction," admits Marcello Coradini, head of Solar System Programmes at ESA.

The unmanned craft will use four planetary flybys like a slingshot to catapult it to the speed of the heavenly wanderer, and then perform a miracle in navigation to rendezvous in deep space with an object just 2.5 miles wide.

• Continued on Page 4



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OMAN

# Bollywood tribute to festival finale

By Rekha Baala

MUSCAT — It was a fitting finale to the month-long Muscat Festival. And as colourful fireworks lit the night sky from Qurum Park last Friday showering stars, the 5,200-strong audience at the City Amphitheatre were treated to scintillating performances by the best of Bollywood.

Bollywood Hungama presented by Muscat Festival and Naranjee Hirjee & Co. LLC and organised by Gazelle, an event-management company, was four hours of pure and wholesome entertainment — with plenty of surprises and real value for money.

By 6:30pm, the scheduled time for the start of the programme, most of the sections of the amphitheatre were packed with people.

The show was graced by many dignitaries which also included Abdullah bin Abbas bin Ahmed, president of the Muscat Municipality.

Thankfully, there was no long wait and the show started with a bang at 7pm. Singers Sunil Parida and Anupriya kicked off the show with *Har Ghadi Badal Rahi*. A few more songs like *Sharara Sharara* and it was time for Krishna Kumar or KK as he is fondly addressed to hit the stage. The singer with the most happening voice in Bollywood set the tone for the evening with a take-off on love and friendship, the sombre *Yaaron*, *Dosti Badi Hi Haseen Hai...* from his album *Pal*.

The man not only exudes charm but also has an enigmatic presence on stage. Whether it was *Humdum* from *Saathiya*, *Kuch Keh Raha Hai* from *Rehna Hai Tere Dil Mein* or the foot-tapping *Banda Yeh Bindaas Hai* from *Aks*, KK literally had the audience eating out of his hands. Equally brilliant was his rendition of Kishore Kumar's *Ek Ajnabi Haseena Se*.

KK left the stage for a break to make way for Lara Dutta, Bollywood's glamour



**STELLAR CAST:** Mahima Choudhary, Krishna Kumar and Lara Dutta during the show; below, Abdullah bin Abbas bin Ahmed, president of the Muscat Municipality, with a section of dignitaries watching the show. — Photos by K.J. George



queen, to make a grand entry on stage in shimmering orange and black. As expected, she sizzled with a dance medley, which included the current top of the charts, *Aisa Jadoo*, the 'item' number from *Khakee*. A versatile dancer, Lara literally set

hearts aflutter with a fantastic stage presence. The show had its lighter moments too. Prashant Rao, the host, is an excellent mimicry artiste. A few jokes, a bit of *sher-o-shayiri* and a couple of fine imitations brought roars of laughter from the

crowd. Anupriya and Sunil filled up during acts with renditions of popular songs. The show was also interspersed with the stars picking out lucky coupons for various prizes given away by the sponsors of the show. Give Mahima Choudhary a

stage and she will simply set it on fire. The other star of the show performed to beautifully choreographed songs like *Zara Tasveer Se Nikalke*, *Aksar Is Duniya Mein* and others. She smiled her way through different numbers and exuded warmth into the somewhat chilly atmosphere at the amphitheatre.

Ranjan Sahu, the mimicry artiste, hogged the limelight and a large share of show time, and rightly too. An acclaimed mimicry artiste, he had the audience in splits with a number of jokes. But it was his imitation of voices of various Bollywood artistes, which literally brought the house down with screams for more. He adeptly managed to imitate the voices of 20 artistes in one go, without even a small break to clear his throat, which was quite a feat in itself.

Lara entered the stage again in red and black and danced to *Shalala Baby* and other hits. And as Mahima swayed to the beats of *Chori Chori* and *Kaliyon Ka Chaman*, fireworks lit up the sky as if dancing to the tunes.

Anupriya and Sunil filled up the gap with more songs and shouts for KK rent the air for quite some time till the singer, well, galloped onto stage. Then, the stage was his all the way.

He had the audience crooning along with him with *Tere Ishq Ki Deewangee* and when he began *Koi Kahe Kehta Rahe*, the chart-buster from *Dil Chahta Hai*, he invited children from the audience to dance along with him. Soon, there were a number of children matching him step for step as he moved onto his latest hit and the finale of the show, *It's The Time To Disco* from *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. Gazelle certainly deserves appreciation for a job well done. The programme was well organised and without any hiccups at any point of time.

The reasonably priced tickets also ensured a huge turnout, which also contributed to the success of the programme. A perfect conclusion to Muscat Festival 2004.



**COURTESY CALL:** Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Hareb, minister responsible for defence affairs, yesterday at his office, received Mario Quagliotti, Italian ambassador to the Sultanate, who came to bid farewell at the end of his tour of duty. They discussed issues of common interest.



## Oman-Qatar joint panel to meet next month

MUSCAT — The Oman-Qatar joint committee will hold its ninth meeting next month.

Sheikh Suhail bin Mustahail Shimas, minister of housing and electricity and water, will head the Omani side and the Qatari side will be led by Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah, deputy prime minister and minister of energy and industry of Qatar.

According to an official source at the Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water, the committee will discuss a number of issues, including extension of the validity of tourist visas from three weeks to one month.

The committee will also explore the chances for setting up a joint Omani-Qatari shareholding company.

The two-day meeting will also discuss cooperation between the two countries in the field of telecommunications. — ONA

**COURSE COMPLETED:** The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), yesterday at the Air Technical College, organised a ceremony to mark the completion of a technical diploma course, under the auspices of Major-General Said bin Nasser bin Sulaiman Al Salmi, commander of the Royal Army of Oman. Salmi reviewed a guard of honour and conferred medals on the graduating cadets. Air Vice-Marshal Yahya bin Rasheed bin Rashid Al Juma'ah, commander of the RAFO, was present at the function.

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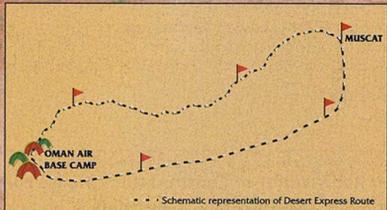
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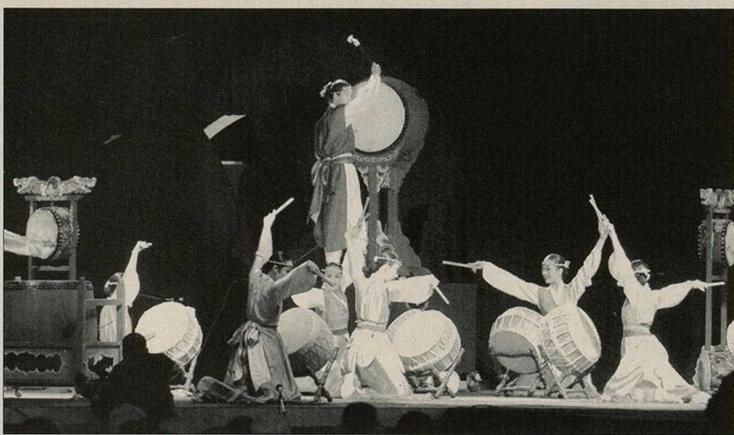
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**Flag off:** February 26, Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat  
**Award Ceremony:** March 3, Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat



# Korean folk performance leaves audience spellbound



**HARMONY:** Didim Dance troupe members presenting two folk dances. — Photos by Rodolfo Alfonso

By Sharifa Al Kindi

MUSCAT — The Korean folk dances, performed by the Didim Dance Company during the concluding days of Muscat Festival 2004 last weekend, kept the audience spellbound by their incredible rhythm and typical style of presentation.

Traditional dance, colourful costumes and the fascinating drumbeats whipped the audience at the festival theatre in Al Khuwair Festival Plaza with a unique ritual performance. Various themes and dances reflecting the 'soul and spirit' generated an emotional and powerful rhythm. The highly professional Didim Dance Company has received good response from the audience as they gave a great applause to each part of the dance.

Seung Il-kim, director of the company, said: "Korea has a music tradition of over 5,000 years. The music is mainly spiritual that contains our

souls and tradition. It is very calm and soothing."

The troupe comprises 25 young and energetic female and male artistes in their 20s and 30s.

"I wanted to introduce the company to a discerning Omani audience and to allow the people here to learn and know something about Korea. This was our first performance in the Sultanate and it gave us an opportunity to learn something about the rich culture and tradition of Oman and portray our culture and heritage to the spectators here," said Kim Eui-shick, ambassador of the Republic of Korea.

The various traditional instruments and drums were themselves artistic. Every single performance and drumbeat demanded a focus, creativity concentration and spiritual attention. Korea has its own distinct musical forms, especially with its large number of instruments and drums. Although the Korean people

have adopted a modern style of dance and music, the traditional Korean dance has still remained distinct and unique as it expresses the soul and the mind intensely. "Didim Dance Company has been known for its professional and high quality performance. They have presented high-profile shows during important ceremonies in more than 30 countries and that's why they are in heavy demand," Seung Il-kim added.

Each performance had its own themes. The 10 themes on which they present their shows are the Sound of Creation, Nature of Dawn, Goojeong-Nori, Moring of Lotus Flower, Hallyang-Dance, Soul of the Earth, Scarlet Soul, Gong-Hoo, Spirit Dance II and a Symphony of Drums.

Each theme had different scenes and the powerful drumming that offered a graceful style. In the Goojeong-Nori, one can notice the power of men on the drums, five masculine Korean young men in

pleasant costumes concentrate on beating the drums. The sound of drums, overtaking space itself, sufficiently pierces to raise the beat of one's heart. Fan dance was another creation in performance. Apart from the beauty and the colours of the Korean fans and costumes, it achieved a ritual and gentle ambience. It has gained a wide appeal throughout the world due to its decorative functions and the shifting geometrical designs created with fans.

The young performers have graced the majestic beauty of drum powers, it definitely needs a lot of energy that is combined with soul to make the performance a success. Similar to other Asian cultures, Korean traditional dances are influenced by three religions — Buddhism, Confucianism and Shamanism. The costumes worn during the performance covered the entire body because the dance appreciates beauty, gesture and uninter-

rupted movements.

In the Morning of Lotus Flower theme, the female performers were very gentle with their movements. What is so interesting in the Korean dances is that they are all linked together during the performance. Females, attired in purple and pink and wearing lily flowers, brighten the stage. "This dance is very graceful and colourful because it has a blend of flower and drum dance," said Seung Il-kim. Performance on the theme — Symphony of Drums — was the most astonishing in the performance. It is a combination of different rhythms of drumbeats and all the artistes converging on the stage projecting them as part of one soul. In it, the performer and drum are not separate and the movement and sound also become one. As dancers and drummers build to a crescendo, their passion at peak, the performance that began as a simple ritual ends in grand finale.

# 9 killed in road accidents

MUSCAT — An official source at the public relations department of the Royal Oman Police has said that 75 road accidents occurred in the Sultanate's various regions and governorates during February 14 to 20, causing the death of nine persons and injuring 61 others. Of them, 46 were collisions between vehicles, eight run-overs, 10 turnovers, and 11 collisions with stationary objects.

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## WEATHER

Clear to partly cloudy skies over the northern part of the Sultanate and mainly clear skies over the rest of the Sultanate with chance of late night/early morning isolated fog patches over the southeastern coastal areas.

**Winds:** Over the northern part of Oman winds will be northerly light to moderate during day becoming variable light at night. Over the rest of the Sultanate winds will be southeasterly to easterly light to moderate.

**Sea state:** Slight along the coastal waters of Oman with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Temp	Max	Min
Seeb	31	19
Khasab	28	21
Diba	28	18
Mad'ha	28	17
Buraimi	32	17
Ibri	34	18
Fahud	34	17
Sohar	26	16
Suwa'iq	29	18
Rustaq	32	18
Sumail	32	19
Nizwa	33	17
Saiq	21	10
Jabal Shams	12	06
Bahla	32	18
Adam	34	19
Mudhebi	32	17
Ibra	33	17
Sur	31	21
Masrah	30	21
Haima	32	14
Marmul	31	14
Thumrait	33	14
Salalah	29	18
Qairoon Hairiti	26	17
Mina Salalah	28	20
Al Halaniyat	28	18
Jabal Samhan	24	18
Jabal Samhan	25	18

**Temperatures recorded in other cities:** Muscat 26, Abu Dhabi 30, Dubai 28, Sharjah 30, Ras Al Khaimah 30, Doha 23, Manama 22, Riyadh 23, Makkah 31, Madinah 30, Jeddah 28, Kuwait 21, Sanaa 27, Aden 28, Mukalla 31, Baghdad 20, Beirut 07, Amman 05, Damascus 04, Cairo 16, Tehran 15, Karachi 32, Mumbai 32, Ankara 00, Geneva 08, Bruxelles 06, Frankfurt 04, Paris 03, London 06, New York 03, Tokyo 18, Rome 13, Amsterdam 06.

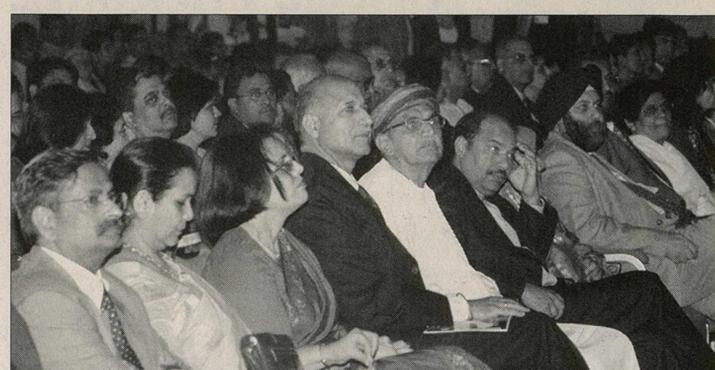
## OMAN RADIO

06:00	Opening, Royal Anthem, The Holy Quran, Preview of Morning Programmes, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty, Headline, Preview Update
06:15	Breakfast With
06:30	News Headlines, Weather
07:00	News Bulletin
07:15	Breakfast With
09:00	Headlines
09:05	Beauty and Fitness
11:00	News Highlights
11:05	Beauty and Fitness
12:00	News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Preview of Afternoon Programmes
12:05	Health is Wealth Show
01:00	News Headlines
01:03	Health is Wealth Show
02:30	News Bulletin
02:40	Oman Features
02:58	Weather Forecast and Pharmacies on Duty
03:00	Preview Evening Programme
03:02	Love Montage
04:00	The Selector
05:00	Moods
06:00	News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty
06:02	Kid's Club
06:30	News Bulletin
06:40	Weather Forecast and Pharmacies on Duty
06:45	Short Stories
07:00	Country Music
10:00	News Bulletin
10:15	Late Night Show
11:40	News Summary, Preview of Morning Programmes, Pharmacies on Duty
11:45	The Holy Quran
12:00	National Anthem, Close Down

## FM frequencies

Name of station	MHz
Ruwi Heights (main)	90.4
Salalah (main)	90.4
Thumrait (main)	91.3

# ISM celebrates 29th annual day



**ALL EARS:** A section of the dignitaries; below, the school choir rendering a song.



MUSCAT — Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji and P. Mohammed Ali were the guests of honour at the 29th Annual Day celebrations of the Indian School Muscat.

Manjeev Singh Puri, counsellor at the Indian Embassy, members of the board of directors of the Indian schools, vice-president Deepak Bradoo and other members of the ISM managing committee attended the function.

Gaurav Bradoo, head boy, welcomed the gathering and along with Kajal Aneesh, head girl, offered bouquets to the guests of honour.

Mohammed Ali gave away prizes for academic excellence to 108 students including those who were among the top 0.1 per cent of successful candidates in various subjects in the CBSE examinations. Mithun M. Bhat, recipient of Rajya Puraskar; Arpan Mandal, who represented ISM and the Gulf zone in the CBSE national swimming meet; Anisha Parambi, Sijo R. Mathew, Nikita Chengappa

and Aditya K. Kurien, four best athletes of the school who received tickets from Oman Air, were the other outstanding students who were honoured on the occasion.

Kanaksi Khimji presented mementos to members of the staff who have completed 10, 20 and 25 years of service. The retired members of the school managing committee were also honoured for their valuable service to the community through the school.

Acting Principal T.R. Mohana presented the whole gamut of achievement the school has made last year and thanked His Majesty the Sultan for nurturing Indian education in every possible way. He also expressed his gratitude to the Department of Private Education for their support and encouragement.

In the cultural programme that followed 120 students of Class III presented a song and dance that depicted the fascinating and changing faces of the earth in different seasons. The Assamese dance present-

ed by 10 girls from Classes VII and VIII portrayed the joy and happiness of the people of Assam.

The Odissi dance of classes 11 and 12 students captivated the audience with its most intricate facial expressions and hand gestures. 'Angels of Peace' presented by the students of the middle school was a fusion dance about the subtle nature of human relationships.

*Samudra Manthan*, a dance drama performed by 63 students of Class IV, portrayed the victory of good over evil. Students of Classes IX and XI enacted the seven stages of life from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in the form of a pantomime.

The rendition of music and songs by the school choir and the band, and the various fillers to the cultural programme made the evening really remarkable. Kajal Aneesh, the head girl, proposed a vote of thanks. Meghna Nooyi, Sankalp Labroo and Priyanka Nazareth compered the programme.

## EVENTS

- Free blood sugar, BP, BMI and genetic blood disorder checkups at Al Arahim Complex from 6:30pm to 9:30pm till February 25.
- Muscat Book Fair at the Oman International Exhibitions Centre from tomorrow to March 5.
- Workshop on telephone handling skills at NIS (Khimji Training Institute) tomorrow (Information on 9315198).
- 'Power Presentation', the 'Fire Up' system, a breakthrough in Public Speaking conducted by Tom McCarthy in association with ORDC tomorrow and on February 25, at Fairmont Hotel in Dubai. Information on Tel: 693501 (Devavrat Nambiar), fax: 693697, Mobile: 9058719.
- The Radiology Club of Oman will meet at the ROP Hospital on February 25, at 6pm (Information on 9432264 Dr Bhuyan).
- Soorya's Oman chapter will present *Pranamam*, dedicated to legend singer Mohammed Rafi, on February 26 at the Le Grande hall of Al Falaj Hotel.
- Lecture on Radiation protection by Benny John, radiographer, at Al Amal Medical Centre lecture hall on February 26 (Information on 685052/686298).
- Fourth annual day function of Al Hikma Educational Institute LLC on February 26 at the institute at 7pm.
- National Travel and Tourism will present Anupam Kher's play *Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai* on February 27, at the Oman Auditorium of Al Bustan Palace Hotel. Entry shall be by invitation.
- Inter-House Athletics Meet of the Sri Lankan School Muscat at the ROP Stadium in Wattayah at 1pm, on February 27.
- Telephone and Reception Skills course at Ideas Management Consultants on February 28 and 29 (Information on 787349, 791876 or 798881).
- Supervisory and Management Skills course at Ideas Management Consultants from March 1 to 3. (Information on 787349, 791876 or 798881).
- Lecture on 'Genetic blood disorder — sickle cell disease, Thalasemia and G6PD' by Dr Suresh Venugopal, head of pathology and microbiology at Al Nahda Hospital, on March 4, at 8am, at Al Amal Medical Centre ((Information on 685052/686298).
- ISC will hold 'Asil Butter cooking competition' at the ISC multipurpose hall at 5pm on March 4.

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LATE NEWS

# Iran says it bought nuke parts from dealers

TEHRAN — Iran acknowledged yesterday that it bought nuclear components on a shady black market amid mounting concern that the Islamic republic may still be concealing sensitive nuclear research.

Disclosures by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear programme, have in recent weeks lifted the lid on the global trade in nuclear technology that could be used to make atomic bombs.

Khan has admitted to leaking nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea. Unlike the other two countries, Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

"We have bought some things from some dealers but we don't know what the source was or what country they came from," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

"It happens that some of those (dealers) were from some subcontinent countries," Asefi added, stressing that Tehran had informed the UN's nuclear watchdog — the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — about the purchases.

Malaysian police said on Friday that Khan had sold Iran \$3 million in centrifuge parts to Iran in the mid-1990s.

Western diplomats in Vienna say Iran has given the IAEA the names of five

European middlemen and six Pakistani scientists who helped Tehran acquire nuclear technology.

Diplomats also say the IAEA has found parts usable in advanced "P2" centrifuges to produce enriched uranium in Iran.

Iran late last year admitted to an 18-year cover-up of sensitive nuclear research and signed up to snap inspections of its nuclear facilities.

But the discovery of P2 centrifuge parts has increased concern in Washington and the European Union that Iran may still be hiding aspects of its nuclear programme.

However, a senior Western diplomat in Tehran said yesterday he did not expect further major revelations about Iran. "I don't think there will be more nasty surprises on the nuclear file," he said.

He said Iran appeared to have taken a fundamental decision, endorsed by all factions in the ruling establishment, that developing nuclear weapons was not worth the trouble. However, he said Iran wanted to retain a capacity to enrich uranium to keep the know-how, while the West was united in seeking to persuade them to give up the programme completely.

"We are still haggling, thinking of prices," the envoy said. Asefi said Iran had told the IAEA about its P2 centrifuge project, which Tehran says is still at the research stage. — Reuters



**WAITING TO BE SEPARATED:** Twenty-two-month-old brothers Clarence, left, and Carl Aguirre from the Philippines, lying in a hospital bed before heading to the operating room at The Children's Hospital at Montefiore (CHAM) in New York. Doctors at CHAM told a Saturday news conference that they were "quite pleased" with the results of the third in a series of surgeries designed ultimately to separate the 22-month-old conjoined twins. The five-hour surgery, which took place on Friday at CHAM, focused on tying off one of two remaining major veins and a series of smaller veins that the twins shared at the back of their heads. — Reuters

## On the edge of doomsday?

● From Page 1

The Pentagon report, commissioned by Andrew Marshall, predicts that "abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies," *The Observer* reported. The report, quoted in the paper, concluded: "Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life.... Once again, warfare would define human life." Its authors — Peter Schwartz, a CIA consultant and former head of planning at Royal Dutch/Shell Group, and Doug Randall of Global Business Network based in California — said climate change should be considered "immediately" as a top political and military issue. It "should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a US national security concern", they were quoted as saying. Randall, one of the authors, called his findings "depressing stuff" and warned that it might even be too late to prevent future disasters. "We don't know exactly where we are in the process. It could start tomorrow and we would not know for another five years," he told the paper.

Experts familiar with the report told the newspaper that the threat to global stability "vastly eclipses that of terrorism".

Taking environmental pollution and climate change into

account in political and military strategy is a new, complicated and necessary challenge for leaders, Randall said. "It is a national security threat that is unique because there is no enemy to point your guns at and we have no control over the threat," he said. Coming from the Pentagon, normally a bastion of conservative politics, the report is expected to bring environmental issues to the fore in the US presidential race.

Last week the Union of Concerned Scientists, an influential and non-partisan group that includes 20 Nobel laureates, accused the Bush administration of having deliberately distorted scientific fact to serve its policy agenda and having "misled the public".

Its 38-page report, which it said took over a year to prepare and was not time to coincide with the campaign season, details how Washington "systematically" skewed government scientific studies, suppressed others, stacked panels with political and unqualified appointees and often refused to seek independent expertise on issues. Critics of the report quoted by the *New York Times* denied there was deliberate misrepresentation and called it politically motivated. The person behind the leaked Pentagon report, Andrew Marsall, cannot be accused of the same partisan politicking. — AFP

## Desired channel appears and promised channel missing

● From Page 1

The Arab information ministers and officials have held many meetings to study, discuss and review comprehensively the project and the plans.

On all levels there had been unanimity on the importance of the channel.

Many decisions were taken to speed up the preliminary steps for the launch of the promised channel as early as possible.

In spite of all that, the project remains stillborn; all the plans remained on paper.

And then came the bolt from the blue. On February 14, 2004, an Arabic channel made its way into Arab homes.

Al Hurra, funded by the United States of America, targets the Arab population and aims at improving America's image in the Arab world.

Through well-conceived programmes and use of highly sophisticated techniques, Al Hurra explains US ideas and tries to get the Arabs agree to its viewpoint.

Since September 11, 2001, the US has been convinced that there is an urgent need for an Arabic television channel directed to the Arab world to popularise American views and thinking among the Arabs and to improve its image.

The matter was of strategic importance to the US and, practical as they are, they did not waste any time.

Decisions were taken quickly, and their implementation was double-quick.

On the other hand, all that the Arabs were doing was just

talking about the significance of the promised channel and taking one decision after another.

The American channel has all it needs to reach out to its targets: latest techniques and highly qualified and trained staff. Its varied programmes are beamed with a purpose: to implement a well-thought-out plan.

We all know that the US spares no efforts or resources, material or moral, in fulfilling its strategic goals. Seldom does it waste time in taking the appropriate steps to implement its plans.

No doubt, collective, serious work produces results whereas mere talks and meetings do not.

The pity is that the Arabs do not lack resources to launch the channel.

The money is no problem — the western banks are saturated with Arab money. Nor is qualified, English-speaking media cadres who can work wonders on the promised Arab channel. We have plenty of them.

What we lack is the resolve and the need to be quick, practical and result-oriented.

When will the promised Arabic channel be launched? Will the launch of Al Hurra encourage the Arabs to accelerate the implementation of the significant project? Will we take a leaf out of the Americans' book: talk less, work more? Or, are we still going to talk about the channel's significance and issue decisions, to be kept in cold storage?

## Women bosses are most common in Russia: Poll

HONG KONG — Women are included in the senior management of nearly 90 per cent of Russian companies, the highest rate among major countries, a survey showed yesterday. Grant Thornton, a business advisory firm, polled 6,900 medium-sized businesses from 26 major countries and territories in September and October last year. The survey found women were included in the senior management of 89 per cent of Russian companies, followed by 85 per cent in the Philippines and 75 per cent in the United States. The Netherlands and Pakistan, each with 27 per cent, were at the bottom, while in Japan the figure was 29 per cent. However, even in Russia, women accounted for only 42 per cent of the total senior management posts. Japan came last in this category with eight per cent. "Analysing the results requires a certain amount of caution due to cultural differences," Grant Thornton said. "Women's rights issues, religious constraints and, crucially in the modern world, economic ones, such as childcare costs, are all key factors which can help determine the levels of representation by women in senior management," it said. The regions covered included the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

## Jilted Italian man spreads poison around lover's flat

ROME — A love-crazy Italian, incensed because his chosen would have nothing to do with him, tried to kill her by spreading anti-snail poison around her apartment, court officials said after his arrest on Saturday. The 30-year-old was detained as he left the woman's place in the northwestern city of Turin, where she lived with her boyfriend, carrying the poison, along with paint thinner and a stolen gun. "She blew me away, not so much by her beauty but by her intelligence," accountant Matteo Porzio said, who was the woman's colleague. "I tried to approach her, touch her, I tried to kiss her on the cheeks and she avoided me. She scorned me," he told a judge. He had snuck into the apartment and put the poison into yogurt, jam, salt and water. While there, he rifled through the drawers, took a look at family pictures and even put a small microphone in the couple's bedroom. They became suspicious when they found small blue stains in the food — along with traces of footprints — and called the police. Though his lawyers called him a quiet and courteous man well-respected by his colleagues, he already had a police record: he was to appear in court on March 1 for spying on a colleague in another company with a hidden camera.

## Man who threw babies out of window arrested

FRIBOURG (Switzerland) — Police yesterday arrested a man accused of throwing two infants, aged about 18 months, from a second-floor window of an apartment. Both children were injured, but there was no immediate word about their condition from the hospital to which they were taken. A police source said the 31-year-old man was arrested without attempting to resist when he went to his house at Marly, near Fribourg. Police gave no immediate reason for his action. — AFP, Reuters

## Rebels kill over 190 in Uganda

KAMPALA — Suspected rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have massacred civilians at a refugee camp in northern Uganda, sources said yesterday, with a local politician putting the death toll at 192. The attackers torched many of the homes in Barlonyo displaced people's camp near the town of Lira in the assault late on Saturday that lasted three hours, said local member of parliament Charles Angiro. He said after visiting the scene that 192 people were killed, adding that a soldier and five government militiamen known as "Amukas" also died. — AFP, Reuters

## Rosetta may bare the origins of life

● From Page 1

It will have to cope first with bitter cold and then rising temperatures as the comet sweeps around the Sun on its lonely trek. Its computers must survive long years of shutdown or agonising communication lags with Earth.

And after a decade-long voyage in arduous conditions, its scientific instruments, some of them never tested outside the laboratory, must work to perfection.

This arduous trip across the void and ESA's investment of a billion euros (\$1.25 billion) will ultimately depend on just a few seconds.

Those critical moments are when Rosetta edges to within just half a mile of Comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko — "C-G" to ESA scientists — and releases a miniature laboratory called Philae.

This unprecedented attempt to land on a comet is extremely delicate, for the comet has only the slenderest gravitational field.

Even at walking speed, Philae could land onto the surface and then bounce back off into space. It has just five seconds in which to fire a harpoon into the surface to anchor itself.

What exactly is C-G's surface is the whole point of this extraordinary gamble.

The prevailing notion is that comets are like "dirty snowballs" of frozen gases mixed with dust left over when the Solar System was born some 4.6 billion years ago — in short, a remnant of the same pieces that formed the Earth and other planets.

They are virtually virgin, for they are almost untouched by gravity and heat, the two biggest forces in the Solar System.

These clusters of debris and gases lurk on the fringes of the Solar System and then are given a gravitational kick by a passing star, sending them on an aeons-long orbit around the Sun, the theory goes.

As they near our star, they leave the frigid cold of deep

space. Some of the ice melts, shedding dust and pebbly debris. The wake is illuminated by the solar rays and can spread millions of miles, visible from the Earth as a breathtaking "tail".

But, scientists say, comets are far more than just leftover building rubble and the source for innumerable tales of ill or good omen.

Many planetologists bet they are rich in amazingly complex carbon molecules — and, if this turns out to be the case, little Philae and her mothership could rewrite science and much of religion.

The big theory behind this was initiated in 1981 by British astronomers Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe.

They suggest that the infant Earth was bombarded by comets, which seeded it with the fundamental chemicals to make DNA in the warm nutrient bath of the oceans.

The so-called panspermia theory was at first widely dismissed, and both it and its authors are still viciously attacked by Creationists.

Since then, however, the idea has been making cautious headway, picking up piecemeal (and still contested) support such as the apparent remains of microbial life in a Martian meteorite, and images of the astonishingly dark ice enveloping Halley's Comet, which last flew by Earth in 1986.

Little more than 10 years from now, the theory may be consigned to the dustbin — or become the next Book of Genesis.

"This mission has the potential to make spectacular discoveries about the origin of Earth and, perhaps, about the origin of life itself," says French astrophysicist Jean-Pierre Bibring.

Rosetta is named after the Rosetta Stone, the carving that provided the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics. Philae is so called after an Egyptian obelisk that itself provided essential clues for deciphering the Rosetta Stone. — AFP

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'Basant' becomes another big bash



**FESTIVE LOOK:** A section of the crowd in festive mood after Khayyam Akbar, fifth from right, officially declared the event open.

By Shahzad Raza

MUSCAT — Pakistan's famous Jashn-e-Baharan has been celebrated in its true spirit by the Pakistani community with a kite-flying extravaganza on Azaiba beach.

Basant, the kite-flying festival of Lahore, has become a permanent feature on Pakistan Social Club's cultural and entertainment calendar. The event, officially declared open by Khayyam Akbar, charge d'affaires at Pakistan Embassy, on Friday attracted thousands from various communities of the heterogeneous society of Oman who got a rare opportunity to enjoy a day out, replete with the vital ingredients of entertainment — fun, food and music.

Mian Mohammed Riaz, president of the Pakistan Social Club, ensured non-stop supply of mouth-watering biryani and drinks while Chaudhary Ilyas provided colourful cloth, kites and string to some of the kite-flying enthusiasts.

Pakistani music added an extra festive touch to the atmosphere, which was enjoyed to the hilt by all those who had come to party with their families.

Interestingly, many had come fully prepared for the battle in the skies and Habib Bank, led by its country manager Khalid Sher Khan, was among the most impressive with an array of colourful kites of various shades and sizes.

The sky over Azaiba beach was then literally covered with a rainbow of multi-coloured kites as the weather became friendly for this adventure sport. Shouts of *Bo Kata* (the screams of joy when the opponent's kite is



**ONE FOR THE CAMERA:** A section of Pakistani women in colourful attires; below, a view of the large crowd on Azaiba beach.



severed) resounded the place every few seconds as someone somewhere won a battle in the skies. Then as if the bigger celebration was mandatory, loud screams of joy, whistling and dancing followed to set the tone for a new contest.

It was a wonderful sight. Free from the monotonous routine of material life, for once, they all became one.

The chief guest Khayyam Akbar was amazed by the people's response. Buoyed by the spirit of celebration, he too joined in to experience the thrill of kite-flying. Other embassy officials, PSC directors and Pakistan School man-

agement also made their presence felt.

The constant shouts of *Bo Kata* continued to reverberate the surroundings as the Azaiba beach became a battlefield for the combatants who fought their war in the skies. An interesting contest among Muttrah, Wadi Kabir, Seeb and Muscat teams was the highlight of the day. Each side was trying to outdo the other as the celebration got louder and louder. It was heartening to see the manifestation of Lahore's festival of fun in its full glory in Muscat. Those who had experienced it back home, called it the biggest such celebration out

of Pakistan.

Mian Riaz thanked everyone for their participation and praised the efforts of the organising committee, particularly Chaudhary Ilyas, for holding the event of such a magnitude.

"We will continue to bring smiles to people's faces as well as promoting the lovely culture of Pakistan in Oman," he said. The committee, led by Chaudhary Ilyas, comprised Jameel Ahmed Rana and Zafar Jafri as members.

The PSC officials thanked the Ministry of Social Development and Muscat Municipality for their cooperation and encouragement.

Palestinians must do more for aid: US

JERUSALEM — To get more aid from the United States, Palestinians must show a greater commitment to improving security and bring to justice those behind the deaths of three Americans in Gaza, a US official said yesterday.

The United States has been critical of the Palestinians for failing to tackle fighter groups in line with pledges under a peace "roadmap" backed by Washington. Relations were further strained when three US diplomatic security guards were killed in a roadside bomb attack in the Gaza Strip in October.

The United States has since barred its officials from going there, hampering aid projects in Gaza. "For us to continue to be involved in projects, it's important to ensure the security of those who work on projects," US Undersecretary of Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs Alan Larson said in Jerusalem. — Reuters

Hearing on wall today

● From Page 1

In a subsequent meeting chaired by Arafat, the Palestinian national security council vowed "to go after those behind this serious attack and bring them to justice," the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

At The Hague, Nasser Al Qidwa, the permanent Palestinian representative to the UN, who will lead the Palestinians' prosecution against the barrier, said the attack would not hamper their arguments.

The ICJ begins debating today the legality of the barrier, which at points juts deep into Palestinian territory, cutting off entire villages from hospitals, schools and jobs.

Israel has submitted written statements to the ICJ, which is meeting at the behest of the UN General Assembly, but refuses to attend the hearing as it argues the court has no authority to rule on such matter.

Although the court's opinion will be non binding, Israel

may decide to review the barrier's planned route if the judges rule against it.

In an apparent conciliatory move, Israel began tearing down yesterday a five-mile section of the barrier that encloses the Palestinian town of Baka Al Sharkiya, cutting off some 5,000 Palestinians from their farmland.

But Shalom said there was no question of re-siting the barrier along the Green Line, which marks the 1949 armistice boundary between Israeli and Palestinian territories.

Meanwhile, the International pressure group Human Rights Watch said in a briefing paper released just hours before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) begins debating the legality of the vast enterprise that the barrier "entails serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law."

"Israel's separation barrier seriously impedes Palestinian access to essentials of civilian life, such as work, education

and medical care," said Joe Stork, acting head of the group's Middle East and North Africa division.

By confining more than 100,000 civilians inside enclaves, which are regulated by a highly-complex regime of permits, the barrier will "institutionalise a system in which all movement for large numbers of people is sharply curtailed," thereby endangering access to basic services, the group said.

Although Stork acknowledged Israel's "right and duty" to protect its citizens from harm, he insisted such a right should not be used in a harmful way.

"Israel has a right and duty to protect its civilians from attack but it must not use means that entail indiscriminate punishment of entire communities," Stork said. HRW also said the barrier's tortuous route, which often juts deep into Palestinian territory, was a clear attempt to include Jewish settlements "within" Israel. — AFP

Kuwait seeks clarification from Iraq over land claims

KUWAIT CITY — Kuwait expressed amazement and concern over new territorial claims from Iraq and demanded clarification from the interim Governing Council over statements attributed to its current president. "The State of Kuwait followed up the statement with concern and amazement. We are awaiting clarification from the interim Governing Council of brotherly Iraq about the truth of the statement and its aim," the state-run Kuna news agency quoted an official source as saying. It was Kuwait's first official reaction to the council's president, who said on Saturday that Baghdad could consider territorial claims over neighbouring Jordan and Kuwait in the future. "We need our Arab brothers around us. Now, we cannot discuss this matter with them at all, but in the future, we'll see," said Mohsen Abdul Hamid, in response to a question from a Baghdad consultative council member. — AFP

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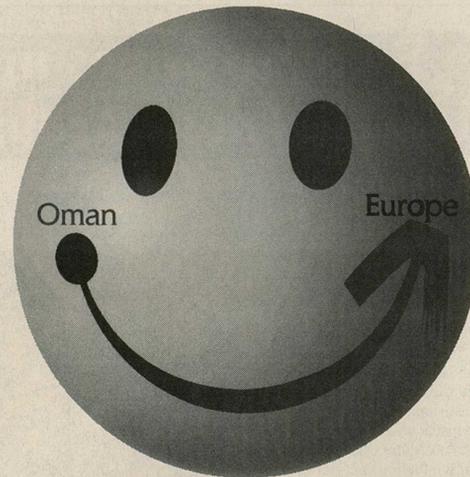
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We regret our inability to thank them individually.

Wife — Sussie & Daughters — Pinky & Dily and all the family members.



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May God Almighty rest her soul

in eternal peace and grant the Family Members the courage and fortitude to bear this irreparable loss.



Khimji Ramdas

PAKISTAN

**JUI-S parts ways with Islamist alliance**

**PESHAWAR** — The Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Samiul Haq (JUI-S) has called upon the National Assembly speaker not to count its three members in the parliament with the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) while electing the leader of the opposition. The three MNAs of JUI-S, including Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani, Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz and Maulana Gul Rehman, said that their party reserved the right to negotiate with any group inside the parliament including the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD). They said that the party, headed by Senator Maulana Samiul Haq, would soon request the National Assembly speaker to allot separate seat to its parliamentary leader in the Lower House. "The three MNAs of JUI-S are no more part of the alliance and Speaker Chaudhry Amir Hussain should reserve separate seat for their parliamentary leader in the National Assembly," they said. — *Internews*

**Benazir comes up with unexpected revelation regarding nuclear cover-up**

**LONDON** — The former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto accused the President Musharraf yesterday of covering up a vast scandal involving the leaking of nuclear secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea. Speaking in Britain where she lives in exile, Benazir said President Pervez Musharraf's decision to pardon the top scientist at the centre of the scandal — Abdul Qadeer Khan — only fuelled suspicion the president himself was involved. "It seemed to me to be a big cover-up," said Benazir, an arch-rival of Musharraf. "I know Qadeer Khan, and I find it very hard to believe that he could have exported nuclear technology on his own... One person could not do it because of the enormous security," she told BBC television. In a dramatic televised confession earlier this month, Khan, who was revered as the father of Pakistan's atomic bomb, said he acted independently in leaking secrets as head of Pakistan's nuclear programme from the 1970s. A day later, Musharraf pardoned the scientist, saying he remained a national hero despite passing secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea.



**MAKING HER POINT:** Benazir Bhutto

Musharraf has said neither the government nor the military were involved in leaking secrets and rebuffed calls for an independent inquiry into any military role in the leaks. But Western diplomats, local commentators and opposition parties say Khan could not have acted alone and say he is being used as a scapegoat for the army, which Musharraf heads. Benazir, leader of the opposition Pakistan People's Party, said she believed Musharraf himself was behind the scandal and called on him to resign. Asked why Khan had confessed, Benazir noted that he had only done so after his arrest. "We believe that he is covering up for Musharraf," she said. "And we think that if Musharraf has endangered our nuclear arsenal and endangered our country's reputation by involving himself in the export of nuclear technology, he has no business to remain in power." Benazir said Khan may even be killed by Pakistani authorities wishing "to silence him forever because he knows too much about the people who ordered him to export nuclear technology". — *Reuters*

**Osama cornered in north: Report**

**LONDON** — US and British special forces have cornered Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in a mountainous area in northwest Pakistan, near the Afghanistan border, the *Sunday Express* newspaper reported. Quoting "a US intelligence source," it said Osama and "up to 50 henchmen" were inside an area 16 kilometres wide and deep "north of the town of Khanozai and the city of Quetta." "He is boxed in," the unidentified source was quoted by the tabloid as saying, adding that US special forces were "absolutely confident" that he could not escape. According to the source, Osama moved into the area, "in the desolate Toba Kakar mountains," about one month ago from another area 240 kilometres to the south, the *Sunday Express* said. In Washington, a Defence Department spokesman declined to comment on the report. Taleban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar is believed to be with Osama, according to the report. The area is under surveillance from a geostationary spy satellite while US and British special forces await orders to move in, the newspaper said in its early edition, received late on Saturday. Al Qaeda is held responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that killed nearly 3,000 people in 2001. More recently, it has been suspected of supporting insurgent attacks on US forces in Iraq. On Thursday, General Richard Myers, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, said US forces were engaged in "intense" efforts to capture Bin Laden, but held back from saying where he might be hiding. "There are areas where we think it is most likely he is, and they remain the same," said Myers, who was speaking to reporters in Washington. "They haven't changed in months," said Myers. Asked whether the Al Qaeda leader was believed to be in Pakistan, the general replied: "Don't know that. We think in that border region somewhere. We don't know where it is precisely." The *Sunday Express* said it was also told in London by "a senior Republican close to the White House and the Pentagon" this past week that Osama had been located. "They have found Bin Laden," the source — described as an "intimate" of the family of President George

**Troops ready for operation**

**ISLAMABAD** — Thousands of Pakistani troops were yesterday preparing to launch a raid into the areas bordering Afghanistan if tribal elders refused to hand over wanted Al Qaeda suspects. The tribal leaders were last week given a deadline to capture and hand over the suspects as well as the local people accused of harbouring them, military officials said. "We have the option to go into action to do the job ourselves after the deadline," military spokesman Major-General Shaukat Sultan said. The focus of the manhunt is South Waziristan where many fugitives suspected of involvement in attacks against the US-led coalition and Afghan forces across the border in the Afghan provinces of Khost, Paktia and Paktika are hiding. Officials said the warning was issued to tribal elders in the semi-autonomous zone in early February and that a deadline had repeatedly expired. They said the military may decide to go ahead with operation at any time. The US military last week said that an operation was being prepared on both sides of the border. "We're moving in the direction of cooperative operations on both sides of the border — a hammer and anvil approach if you will," Lieutenant-General David Barno, the commander of the US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan said. Sultan said that any operation on the Pakistan side would be conducted by the country's own troops. "There has never been and there would never be any involvement of foreign troops in any operation our side of the border." — *AFP*

**CAUTIONARY NOTICE**

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**METHOD FOR DELIVERING FRESH FLAVOR IN AN ON-PREMISE BEVERAGE**

(Subject of US Application No. 60/287, 436 filed on 30 April 2001)

The invention relates to "Fresh flavor is delivered to an on-premise beverage at the point of dispense. Flavor compounds are incorporated in a separate component and then the separated flavor component is mixed with other beverage components at the time of dispense. More specifically, tea flavor compounds are incorporated in a separate sweetener component and then the tea flavor/sweetener component is mixed with other iced tea beverage components at the time of dispense".

The above owner claims all rights in respect of the above invention and will take all legal proceedings against any person or company infringing the said rights of the owner.

**Washington supports sale of arms to Islamabad**

**ISLAMABAD** — The Bush administration and majority of the Congress members are supportive of the arms sale to Pakistan, including P-3 maritime surveillance aircraft and Harpoon anti-ship missiles. The US-Pakistan security ties, which came to a halt after 1990 aid cut-off, have improved after Islamabad's role in the US-led anti-terrorism campaign. Giving details about Pakistan-US security cooperation, a diplomatic source said, six C-130s from Lockheed Martin for about \$75m under a Foreign Military Financing grant is also on the cards. The Pentagon had also notified Congress of an additional three pending major arms sales to Pakistan, which are worth more than \$300m. The six surveillance, six traffic control radars and 40 Bell 407 helicopters are meant to enhance Pakistan's ability to support 'Operation Enduring Freedom' and to secure its borders. — *Internews*

**Political school for women councillors launch on cards**

**LAHORE** — President General Pervez Musharraf will inaugurate the political school for women councillors and address their national convention at Islamabad on March 20. Women's Political Participation Project Manager Brigadier (ret'd) Shafiqat Mahmood disclosed this at the district government's seminar on 'Women in Politics' organised by the Ministry of Women's Development at the Jinnah Hall here. He said that special train would carry 600 councillors from all parts of the country to Islamabad for attending the convention. The women would not be imparted political education at the Islamabad school but at designated places in their own districts. The school would chalk out the programmes for training 3,000 woman councillors in code of conduct, communication skills, advocacy and other matters and despatch master trainers to the districts. — *Internews*

**Kasuri describes talks with India as resounding success**

**ISLAMABAD** — Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri has said that to begin talking about any solution to the Kashmir issue at the start of the Pakistan-India talks is like jumping the gun. "At the moment, the important thing is to focus on the peace process. Luckily, the first step and of course a very important one has been taken, and as they say well begun is half done," he said in an interview here yesterday. The foreign minister said that the recent Pakistan-India talks were a resounding success. "I say this because it showed the genuineness on the part of both the sides," he added. Kasuri said if either party had wanted to dilly-dally simply to delay the whole process, it could have done so on various pretexts and excuses and thus wasted another six months. This, the foreign minister said, would have certainly sent a negative signal to the people, and more importantly to the Kashmiris. People would have started feeling that Pakistan and India were talking for some other reasons like for example an attempt to play to the galleries, he said. Kasuri said it was a happy augury that neither party tried to reinvent the wheel. "It makes me abundantly happy as I have been talking about it over the past 15 months that we don't have to re-invent the wheel," he said. "The foreign secretaries in previous several rounds as well President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at Agra had already settled the basic items that needed to be discussed and even decided the format and level of talks," he added. — *Internews*

**Giant human billboard is back after long absence**

**LAHORE** — The giant human billboard made a comeback at Lahore's Horse and Cattle show after disappearing for the public eye in Pakistan for some time. The first time Pakistan saw anything like it was in 1974 when students from the National College of Arts filled the Horse and Cattle Show's stadium, held up fragmented cardboard images and attempted to form one giant fluff image. Lack of coordination hindered the complete success of this first attempt and it was not until 13 years later that the image book, with some 25 images compiled together into a flipbook, returned to the venue. This time everything fell into place perfectly. The thousands of participants forming the giant human billboard wowed the then president, General Ziaul Haq. Over the weekend the 2,500 people-strong human billboard made yet another comeback. Fakhar Ullah Tahir and Naheed Fakhar of Image Makers were behind the success and have been involved with the project since 1987. — *Internews*

**EU FMs to discuss nuke imbroglio**

**BRUSSELS** — The foreign ministers of European Union (EU) and its accession countries would discuss Pakistan's nuclear imbroglio in the upcoming meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council. An official source said here that discussion would be held after Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen presents his report on the recent EU trika visit to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. In the EU foreign ministers' meeting today, the current EU presidency also plans to ask the EU member states to expedite their respective probes into the purported "European roots" of nuclear black market. The meeting will also take note of a Malaysian police report alleging that some European nuclear middlemen have played a key role in the nuclear arms black market. The agenda of the second General Affairs and External Relations Council of Ireland's Presidency in Brussels includes a wide range of international, regional and European issues, besides a briefing by the head of the trika delegation, Minister Brian Cowen, on its meetings earlier this week in India, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the EU presidency official said. — *Internews*

**Young media migrants heading home**

**LAHORE** — British-Pakistani Sikandar Mufti has joined the ranks of foreign educated Pakistanis that have returned home to fight their own jihad of sorts with 'cameras and hardnosed optimism.' Mufti spent three years working on several West End productions including the Tony-award winning show *Rent*. In 2001, he decided to leave behind a promising career in London and return home to Lahore. Mufti, 27, is now a fulltime filmmaker and a part-time drummer. Film gigs for corporations and non-governmental organisations are few and far

between, he says. But this has not disheartened him or made him think twice about returning. And he is not alone. A number of young Pakistanis schooled at the best American and British universities have decided to come and make their name here. "In Pakistan, it is easier to make a name for oneself, to gain recognition," said Mufti, the son of a prominent lawyer. "This is because the industry is still developing. It hasn't as yet reached the saturation point of foreign countries." With Matteela, a collection of young filmmakers, Mufti has worked on docu-

mentaries for Action Aid, Save the Children UK and the Asia Foundation. Most recently, the group showed their works at the South Asian Film Festival in Kathmandu. Laaleen Sukhera, 27, was a communications major at Clarke University in Massachusetts and worked as an advertising executive on Madison Avenue in New York. "People take you more seriously when they discover that you have gained a degree in this field," she said, adding that a degree from a western university sometimes also means that one isn't adequately aware of the local market. Sukhera interned at the Oscar-

winning Merchant Ivory Productions and has just finished post-production on *After the Bradford Boil*, a documentary on race relations. She also runs an events planning company with her sister. Munizae Jahangir, also 27, graduated from McGill University with a degree in political science. While summing in Lahore, she got the opportunity to work on a number of small documentaries for human right organisations. Soon after graduating, Jahangir signed up for a film degree at New School University in New York. — *Internews*

OMAN NATIONAL TRANSPORT COMPANY S.A.O.C.									
Departure & Arrivals Timetable on Long Distance Coaches									
FROM MUSCAT					TO MUSCAT				
Rte	Dep. Time	Destinations	Arrive Time	Operating Days	Rte	Dep. Time	Destinations	Arrive Time	Operating Days
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Al Buraimi</b>					<b>Daily Services from Al Buraimi to Ruwi</b>				
41	13:00	Al Buraimi	17:40	Daily	41	13:00	Ruwi	17:40	Daily
41	15:00	Al Buraimi	21:00	Tue+Fri only	41	07:00	Ruwi	11:40	Wed+Sat only
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Sinaw</b>					<b>Daily Services from Sinaw to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
52	17:30	Sinaw	20:50	Daily	52	07:00	Ruwi	10:25	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Yankul</b>					<b>Daily Services from Yankul to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
54	14:30	Yankul	19:30	Daily	54	06:00	Ruwi	11:00	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Ibrai (Araqi)</b>					<b>Daily Services from Ibrai to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
54	08:00	Al Araqi	12:30	Daily	54	15:40	Ruwi	20:20	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Sur</b>					<b>Daily Services from Sur to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
55	07:30	Sur	11:45	Daily	55	06:00	Ruwi	10:10	Daily
55	14:30	Sur	18:45	Daily	55	14:30	Ruwi	18:40	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Fahud-Yibal</b>					<b>Daily Services from Yibal-Fahud to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
62	06:30	Fahud	10:30	Daily	62	07:00	Ruwi	11:00	Daily from Fahud
62	06:30	Yibal	11:15	Daily	62	12:30	Fahud	13:30	Daily
62	13:00	Fahud	17:00	Daily	62	12:30	Fanja	16:37	Daily
62	13:00	Yibal	17:45	Daily	62	12:30	Ruwi	17:30	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Salalah</b>					<b>Daily Services from Salalah to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
100	06:00	Salalah	19:00	Daily	100	06:30	Muscat	19:20	Daily
102	13:00	Salalah	02:00	Daily	102	11:00	Muscat	23:50	Daily
100	18:00	Salalah	06:40	Peak Days/Khareef	100	17:00	Muscat	05:30	Peak Days/Khareef
100	19:00	Salalah	07:40	Daily	100	19:00	Muscat	07:30	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Marmul</b>					<b>Daily Services from Marmul to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
101	06:30	Marmul	17:20	Daily	101	07:00	Muscat	17:50	Daily Winter
					101	06:30	Muscat	17:20	Daily Summer
<b>Services from Salalah to Dubai</b>					<b>Services from Dubai to Salalah</b>				
102	15:00	Dubai	07:00	Daily	102	15:00	Salalah	07:00	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Dubai</b>					<b>Daily Services from Dubai to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
201	06:00	Dubai	11:20	Daily	201	07:30	Muscat	13:40	Daily
201	07:00	Dubai	12:30	Daily	201	15:30	Muscat	21:35	Daily
201	13:30	Dubai	19:15	Wed+Thu	201	16:30	Muscat	22:35	Daily
201	16:30	Dubai	22:25	Daily	201	18:00	Muscat	00:00	Thu+Friday
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Sharjah</b>					<b>Daily Services from Sharjah to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
201	07:00	Sharjah	12:15	Daily	201	06:30	Muscat	13:40	Daily
201	16:30	Sharjah	23:15	Daily	201	15:30	Muscat	22:35	Daily
<b>Daily Services from Ruwi to Abu Dhabi</b>					<b>Daily Services from Abu Dhabi to Muscat (Ruwi)</b>				
202	06:30	Abu Dhabi	13:00	Daily	202	15:00	Muscat	22:15	Daily

For more information or Booking please contact the below Numbers:  
 Ruwi Bus Station 708522, 701294, Burjashwah Office 510438, Head Office Hot line 592948, Salalah Office 292773  
 (Website: www.ontcoman.com - E-mail: ont01@omantel.net.om)

PHILIPPINES

US rejection of food products: Officials to meet exporters

Govt plans P2.1 billion health project

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The government will implement a P2.1 billion health project over the next three years under the sub-specialty capabilities for heart-lung-kidney programme.

The project is expected to improve productivity of the labour force and raise the quality of life of the Filipino people, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

The Neda said that the project was expected to widen access to specialised services needed by the poor and lower working middle class patients, who are suffering from heart, lung and kidney diseases in Luzon and Visayas.

Diseases of the heart, lungs and kidney rank high in the country's list of leading causes of mortality, according to the Department of Health (DOH).

The project will improve the delivery of hospital care by developing a better functioning hospital referral system, where primary diagnostics can be done at the secondary hospitals and specialised care in selected regional tertiary hospitals.

It also intends to upgrade the skills of human resources by providing training to hospital personnel.

The project will benefit patients of the Bicol Regional Training and Teaching Hospital, the Western Visayas Medical Centre, and the Philippine Heart Centre.

Jonathan Uy, head of the Neda Public Investment Staff, said that the project would be implemented over a three-year period, which covers the signing of the contract, pre-installation, civil works, manufacturing, shipping of equipment, import processing of the equipment, handling, installation and testing of equipment, and training of the medical staff.

The Netherlands will fund the project through the ORET/MILIEV programme.

Thirty five per cent of the project cost will be offered as a grant, while the remaining amount will be offered as a loan payable at an interest of six per cent for 15 years and with a grace period of three years.

The DOH will implement and supervise the project. It will provide the necessary annual budget for the expenditure requirements, together with the recipient hospitals.

Prices of basic goods to remain stable

MANILA — The Macapagal-Arroyo administration has assured the people that prices of basic goods will remain stable and affordable despite the trend of increasing commodity prices in the world market.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it was going to implement several measures, including a "Bantay Bilihin" programme, so that prices of basic commodities will be stable within the next six months.

Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar Purisima said DTI was working closely with the Department of Agriculture (DA) to solve any supply problem, particularly the availability of chicken in the local market as a result of the bird flu scare.

"The prices of basic commodities have been stable in the last several months. However, we should start buying chicken to avoid an upward pressure on the prices of other food items, like hog meat and beef," he said.

Purisima said DTI was launching the "Bantay Bilihin" programme to monitor the prices of basic commodities, particularly beef, fish and other foodstuffs.

To prevent overpricing by retailers, he said the programme would require, among other things, the daily posting of suggested retail prices of basic commodities, like meat and fish products in wet and dry markets nationwide.

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) will meet Philippine food exporters and export consolidators to determine the veracity of reports that some 300 food products from 170 Philippine-based exporters were barred entry to the United States last year.

"Some of these products were shipped without the knowledge of the manufacturers and that these products are designed for the local market and not for export. It is also possible that the consolidators did not provide the necessary documents showing how these products were manufactured that led to the products' rejection in US ports," Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar V. Purisima said.

Secretary Purisima also clarified that the said products were not

rejected because of deficiency or non-observance of the hygienic manufacturing processes required by the US, but due to mislabelling, non-indication of nutrition facts, failure to indicate the production process, and/or lack of proper documentation.

"The DTI is strongly promoting food as one of our major exports products. But if the latest report is true, then this problem must be resolved at once since integrity of the products is at stake," Purisima said.

"It is such a waste of time, money and effort if we ship our products only to find out that the products are unacceptable because we did not follow simple rules," Purisima said. "But most importantly, we lost our reputation and image as a source of quality food products. We also lost market opportunities and the export revenues that should have been ours," he added.

The trade secretary has already

alerted the department to monitor the country's food exports. He has also instructed the Bureau of International Trade Relations and the Philippine Trade and Investment Centre in Washington DC to closely monitor developments and make necessary representation for the country's food exporters if need arises.

To ensure undisrupted exports of Philippine food products, the DTI, in coordination with other government agencies established the Food Certification/Accreditation Programme in 1997.

Purisima urged Filipino food exporters to avail of these accreditation programmes on good manufacturing practices and hazard analysis in an aim to make Philippine food products more acceptable to quality standards set by the international market.

He said the US and the European Union, two of the country's major

markets for food products, were already requiring exports of seafood products and fruit juices from other countries to be GMP (good manufacturing practice)-certified and HACCP (hazard analysis critical control point)-certified.

GMP refers to the sanitary facilities and operations of a food manufacturing plant while HACCP means the quality assurance process to ensure safety of a food product.

The department notes that so far, only a few of the 340 food existing food exporting companies registered with DTI are GMP and HACCP-certified.

The certification/accreditation programme also lined-up training programmes and seminars designed to inform and educate food exporters of the existing regulations namely: orientation on GMP, HACCP and Generic HACCP; training programmes on the development of a HACCP Plan; and technical assis-

tance in HACCP implementation, monitoring and audit.

The programme is being implemented by the joint management committee (JMC) composed of the Food Development Centre, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the Bureau of Food and Drugs, and DTI's Bureau of Export Trade Promotion. Heading the accreditation programme is the Export Development Council, a government-private sector-led body chaired by the DTI secretary tasked to oversee the development of the Philippine export industry.

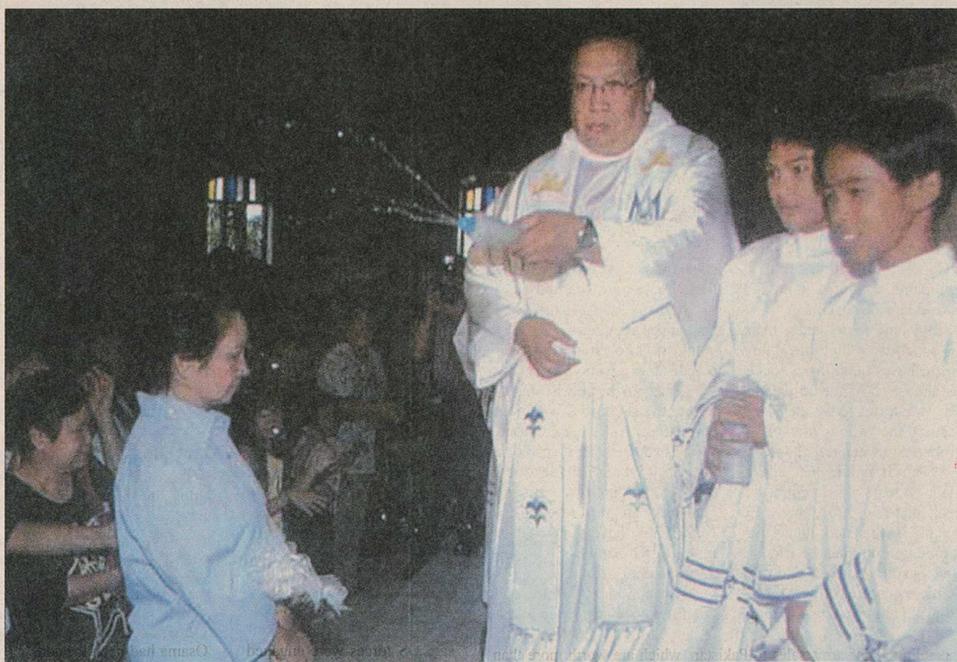
JMC issues a GMP/HACCP certificate that has a validity period of six months to one year, depending on the capability and compliance of the plant with standard requirements.

"We have to ensure that our food exports consistently meet international safety and quality standards in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace," said Purisima.

"Exporters eyeing to get a bigger share of the US and EU's lucrative market for food products should conform with the set standards, otherwise, the market will be dominated by other competing countries," he said.

Fresh and processed food products is the second top export earner of the 10 priority sectors earlier identified by the DTI as a major driver of growth the country's exports. From January to November 2003, the Philippines exported about \$1.045 billion worth of food products, an increase of 16.48 per cent from only \$898.037 million worth of food exports in the same period in 2002.

The EU and the US are the country's major markets for process food and marine products, accounting for seven per cent (\$93.80 million) and 21 per cent (\$275.67 million) of the total Philippine food exports in 2001, respectively.



BLESSINGS: Fr Sonny Ramirez blessing President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo with holy water during a mass held at the Our Lady of Manaoag Parish Church in Manaoag, Pangasinan, yesterday. — Malacañang photo

Teachers to get big pay for election duty

From Our Correspondent

ROSALES (Pangasinan) — Teachers, the workhorses in every election, can take solace in the fact that this year, they would be properly compensated.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday announced an increase in the election allowance of teachers from P1,000 to P3,000 to be paid earlier than usual.

The president made the announcement during the Pulong Bayan with some 6,000 teachers, students, farmers, senior citizens and women groups at the Rosales National

High School in Don Antonio Village here.

"We will increase your previous election allowance to P3,000 and will be given in advance," she said.

The unexpected announcement drew a big applause particularly from teachers present at the school's Estrella auditorium.

The president, in the Pulong Bayan, together with her vice-presidential running mate Senator Noli de Castro, advised the farmers to go into backyard tilapia-raising and use the high-yielding hybrid rice to increase their production and income.

Earlier, the president heard

mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of Manaoag in Manaoag, Pangasinan.

She raised the hands of the Lakas candidates in the province during the town fiesta of Binalonan.

After a media conference and private lunch with local officials in Binalonan, the president and her entourage made whistle stops in San Manuel, Asingan, and Sta. Maria before arriving in this town.

After an interview with a local cable network here, the president and her party are scheduled for another round of whistle stops in the towns of Balungao, Umingan, San

Quintin, Tayug, Natividad and San Nicolas.

Among the local officials who joined the president in the province were House Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr, Binalonan Mayor Ramon Guico, the president of the League of Municipalities of the Philippines (LMP), Pangasinan Governor Victor Agbayani, Vice-Governor Oscar Lambino, La Union Governor Victor Ortega, fifth district representative Conrad Estrella III, third district representative Generoso Tulagan, board members Robert Estrella, Marlyn Primicias-Agabas and other town mayors of the province.

It's too late for Poe to prove filiation: Tecson

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — A petitioner in the disqualification case against presidential candidate and movie actor Fernando Poe Jr of Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP) yesterday remained hopeful that he would win the case before the Supreme Court (SC) despite opinions of the "friends of the court" in favour of Poe.

Lawyer Ma. Jeanette Tecson said it would be too late for Poe to establish filiation and, subsequently, obtain status as a natural-born Filipino since his father, Allan Fernando Poe, had died on October 23, 1951.

Poe's supporters have expressed confidence that the concurring opinions of the amici curiae will finally put the issue of Poe's citizenship to rest.

"This will end in the dismissal (of the petition to disqualify Poe)," KNP spokesman and former Negros Oriental Representative Miguel Romero said.

Tecson refused to accept the consensus of the four amici curiae (friends of the court) that even illegitimate children — provided they can prove their blood relation with their Filipino fathers — should be allowed to run for public office.

"I remain confident that once the SC makes the legal evaluation, it will rule in our favour by granting our petition to disqualify (Poe)," Tecson said.

She insisted that the records of the 1935 constitutional convention show that only legitimate children can automatically follow the citizenship of their Filipino fathers. She said illegitimate children should take the citizenship of their mothers.

Tecson said that in Poe's case, he would have to carry the citizenship of his mother, American Bessie Kelly, because he was born before his parents married and is thus considered an illegitimate child. "Definitely," she said, "his being illegitimate is not yet a dead issue".

"We have consistently maintained that (Poe) has not presented any proof of filiation under any of the ways provided by the Civil Code," she said.

"He has not presented a will, record of birth or public document signed by his father... wherein (Poe) was categorically recognised as his son."

"Neither has he filed an action to compel such recognition and to show that he is in conscious possession of the status of an illegitimate child," she said.

Tecson recalled that one of the amici curiae, University of the Philippines (UP) Law professor Ruben Balane, enumerated the means by which a person can prove filiation, or relationship to one's father — through a record of birth, a will or public document signed by the father.

Poe, she said, "has not done that up to this time," adding that an action to compel recognition "can only be filed during the lifetime of the father."

Rebel shot dead in fresh attacks

ZAMBOANGA — Abu Sayyaf fighters struck again in separate areas in the southern Philippines, leaving one Abu Sayyaf fighter dead and a girl wounded, the military said yesterday.

An Abu Sayyaf member was gunned down on Saturday after he sneaked into an army camp in the southern island of Jolo and attacked a soldier with a machete, a military report said.

It was believed that the slain man was seeking to steal firearms when he was spotted by a sentry, prompting him to attack.

Another group of Abu Sayyaf fighters opened fire on houses in Talipao town on Saturday, wounding a young girl, the military said. The motive for the attack remains unknown.

A band of Abu Sayyaf gunmen also waylaid a motorboat off the island of Basilan on Thursday, robbing four fishermen aboard before taking their boat and forcing them to jump off and swim for shore, military spokesman Colonel Fredesvindo Covarrubias said.

Gloria ready for debate with Poe in any slum area

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — Malacañang has accepted the challenge of opposition front-runner, actor Fernando Poe Jr, for a presidential debate to be held in any slum area.

Official administration campaign spokesman Michael Defensor said President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo "is not partial to any venue as long as the debate is about programmes and policies and does not descend into a shouting match".

"No problem with us wherever it would be held," he said.

Poe's spokesman, Senator Vicente Sotto III, said the other day that the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP) wanted a debate in which the poor would ask the questions rather than a formal television debate. Two administration Congressmen, Representatives Prospero Nograles (Davao City) and Monico Puentevella (Bacolod City), expressed fears that this might be a ruse to turn the debate into "a showbiz beauty contest".

They called on Poe to accept the challenge "without preconditions" to prove that he is "no coward".

"How can a leader or a Pandáy be a coward?" Nograles asked rhetorically in a statement released to the press.

Poe played the role of a Pandáy (blacksmith) in a series of eponymously titled action fantasy movies.

For his part Defensor preferred any debate to be organised by a neutral party, like the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, which had reportedly offered to host the presidential debate.

Meanwhile, Malacanang yesterday brushed aside charges levelled by presidential candidate Brother Eddie Villanueva at President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as non-issues.

"The point here is who can really bring about changes in the country. Our president believes she has the experience and capability to change the system, change the economy, leadership, our system of governance. That is why she is run-

ning," presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye said in a radio interview yesterday morning.

The support drawn by the president is extensive and that further makes it a non-issue, Bunye added.

Bunye went further to say that Brother Villanueva's allegation of proffered inducements from emissaries of the president and former president Fidel Ramos for him to withdraw from the race is self-serving.

"Maybe he just needs issues to project himself so he keeps shooting off," Bunye said.

"What is important is that the president is running on the basis of good government and on a high level of campaigning," Bunye added as he emphasised they refuse to be drawn into the mudslinging going on.

The presidential spokesman also lamented the threat of some retired generals to foment civil unrest if Fernando Poe, Jr is disqualified from running.

"This kind of talk cannot improve the situation," Bunye said.

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## OPINION

## TIMES OF OMAN

ESTABLISHED: 1975

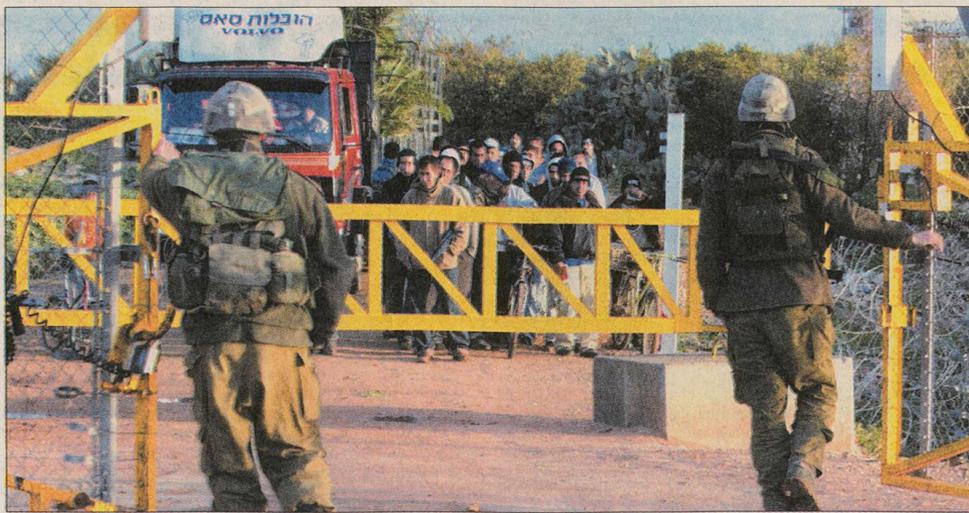
## Israel's PR stunt on eve of court hearing

THE world spotlight is bound to shift to the International Court of Justice in The Hague where hearings on the Israeli fence, or the "apartheid wall" as it is referred to by the Palestinians, will start today. The court will hear the three-day arguments before it gives an opinion on the legality of the wall which cuts deep into the Palestinian territories. The court's opinion is, of course, advisory in nature and hence non-binding. But a negative remark on the wall will not just be a formal sealing of international disapproval. More damagingly, it could impel the United Nations General Assembly to start lobbying for sanctions against Israel. It doesn't, of course, take an expert in international affairs to divine whether sanctions will be slapped on the Jewish state as long as the US sticks by its close ally. Nonetheless, efforts on such lines will help make Israel a pariah in the comity of nations. At the very least, a negative remark will confirm the Jewish state's solipsistic, grasping attitude in grabbing the land of the Palestinians so brazenly and barefacedly.

Much as the Israeli government puts on a brave face on the eve of the court hearing, its edginess is quite apparent. Its decision yesterday to dismantle some eight-kilometre stretch of the dratted wall that encloses the Palestinian village of Baka Al Sharkiya in the northern West Bank is a dead giveaway. While Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom says there is no connection between the two things, Justice Minister Yosef Lapid blurts out that the Jewish state will reap "very positive media spin" from the move. The confusion in the Israeli cabinet may have stemmed from a quiet flutter over the ICJ hearings. But what is pretty patent is that knocking down a minute portion of the wall is nothing but a public relations exercise. If the Israeli government thinks the court opinion would be influenced by this specious move, perhaps it is mistaken.

The court will have to assess the matter irrespective of such stunts and also irrespective of the martyrdom attacks which the Israelis claim as the main reason for the construction of the wall. In any case, martyrdom attacks cannot and do not validate occupation. Conversely, if Israel withdraws from the occupied territories, there wouldn't be martyrdom attacks.

No eyebrows will go up if Israel constructs a security fence along the Green Line — the armistice line of 1949. The problem here is that the Israeli wall juts deep into the occupied territories, which is violative of all international laws. Above all, it effectively forestalls a two-state solution because the route of the so-called fence is a barrier to the possibility of a viable independent state. One only hopes the ICJ's opinion will not be coloured by pressure from influential quarters.



**GATE TO THE FENCE:** Israeli soldiers opening a gate at the fence, built to separate Israel from the West Bank at the entrance to the Palestinian West Bank town of Qalqilya yesterday. The Hague-based International Court of Justice is scheduled to begin hearings today to rule on the legality of the obstacle of wire and concrete that Israel says keeps out martyrdom attackers, but Palestinians call it a land grab. — Reuters

## EU candidate states shocked by restrictions on workers

By Katka Krosnar

THE 10 European Union candidate countries are feeling betrayed by last-minute barriers being put up on the eve of enlargement in May to keep their workers out of western Europe, politicians and media reports say.

Free access to the labour market in the current, prosperous 15-nation EU was a major attraction for the accession states, eight of which are from the former Soviet bloc in eastern and central Europe.

It was this promise to be able to compete for jobs in the West which helped bring a "yes" vote in national referendums on EU

membership. The ten states set to join the EU in May are the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

But now these states, many of which have high unemployment, have found doors locked as almost all of the 15 existing EU countries say they will restrict the inflow of workers from the newcomer nations.

"This is unfair and unjustified. When the negotiations took place in 2001, many EU members insisted that they would not introduce restrictions and that our citizens could work in these countries after May 1," Slovak Foreign Minister Eduard

Kukan said.

"Since then nothing has really changed, so we don't understand why they are discussing these issues now," he said.

Germany and Austria had announced previously that they would insist on transition periods of up to seven years before workers from the new EU member states could come in without restrictions. But other countries which had previously vowed to keep their labour markets open, such as Britain, Sweden and Denmark, and most recently the Netherlands, have changed their tune. Only Ireland has vowed to keep the door open.

"All continental European countries have now taken meas-

ures to restrict the number of foreign workers. The reality is that the economic situation has gotten much worse in Holland. We have a high increase in unemployment," Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said in Prague, defending the change in attitude by his government. Such talk does not appease the accession countries.

"We knew that countries had the right to impose restrictions on our workers but what is most surprising is that countries such as Holland and Sweden, which had promised to keep their labour markets open, have now closed those doors," Czech Foreign Ministry spokesman Vit Kolar said.

## READERS' FORUM

ragging with courage, march ahead, but try not to get physical when you get the turn to rag.

Anup Arekkath  
Ruwi

## Tough task ahead

INDIA is shining. We can say firmly that there will be all-round, balanced development — industrially, agriculturally and educationally. However, it is a tough task to achieve in, say, two or three years.

● MAHESH Verma did highlight Bihar's prevailing condition. It's painful. While I did my schooling in a small town called Dalmianagar in Bihar, an express train would stop for only two minutes. There were only two cinema halls, a company club where we watched all Hindi movies, just two schools (they still exist at least on the net). The industries — paper, sugar, vanaspathi, cement — have all closed down owing to labour unrest and political turmoil. I have not visited the town for almost 20 years but I'm told the families of employees have all left and the residential complexes are all vacant.

● EVEN I thought R.P.S. Bhalla had tried to play an April Fool's prank. He will be sorely missed. But I am sure Bhallaji will keep in touch and keep writing to the *RF*.

Usha Santhosh  
Al Khuwair

## A pipedream

WHAT'S Congress trying to sell? (*Times*, February 20) highlighted how much the party is groping in the dark. The party is yet to realise that it is losing the grip on the voters. Worse, the Congress is yet to come up with a strong campaign against the ruling alliance. They failed to cash in on the record economic growth rate in 1988-89 while they were in power when Manmohan Singh initiated the liberalisation. The dice is cast against the Sonia-led Congress. The dream of Congress becoming the single largest party in the Lok Sabha looks like a pipedream.

● SONIA Gandhi's roadshow in Uttar Pradesh and Jaswant Singh's remarks on the surging economy and Advani's admission that farmers are not feeling good are to be analysed (*Times*, February 21). The Congress has come out with a slogan of people being cheated. If Congress is so conscious about accountability, what is its governments in Delhi and Karnataka doing?

● THE write-up on schoolchildren's obsession with cellphones focuses on the gravity of the problem (*Times*, February 21). The cellphone, if carried as a means of communication, is good but if it is carried as a status symbol, the social fabric which every parent would attempt to build in their child gets distorted.

Ushadevi Suddapalli & Dr S. Bhaskara Rao  
Ruwi

## Good idea

IT was thoughtful of K. Gurumurthi to come up with a party to honour R.P.S. Bhalla (*RF*, February 22). Let's give him an affectionate send-off. I cannot be there physically, but I'll be there mentally. I wish Bhalla and family all the best.

● USHA Santhosh, thanks for equating me with your grandpa back home (*RF*, February 22). Yes, I have progressive thoughts and am young at heart, but cannot say whether I am smart or a good writer. I am thankful to the *Times of Oman* for publishing my contributions in the *RF*. This would egg me on to write and, who knows, one day I may reach Arundhati Roy's calibre. Back home, *Gymkhana Club* magazine used to publish my articles while some newspapers displayed them in trash bins.

● AMIT Bhattacharjie and K.M. Divakaran have given vivid account of sensational Bollywood love stories. Enough is enough, and let us please move on.

Bhargavi Rahulan  
Sydney

## Beware of human piranhas!

EXPERTS in tropical fish are puzzled over how a flesh-eating piranha was found in the Thames. (*Times*, February 21). Strangely enough, no one has been bothered about the human piranhas in the city!

Mahesh Verma  
Qurum Heights

## \$6,000 per ball

The Pakistan Cricket Board stand to gain \$20 million during the forthcoming Indo-Pak series. The majority matches will be ODIs. That comes to over 6,000 greenbacks per ball bowled. And my friends say I don't know finance!

Avirat Vaishnav

## Thanks for the info

THANK YOU Mahesh Verma for correcting me on Shah Rukh Khan's partner. Yes, it is Gauri and not Mira — I always get confused between Gauri and Mira. All the same, there are still many more that may be added to the list of Bollywood lovers, such as the late Geeta Bali and Shammji Kapoor, Asha Bhonsle and late Rahul Dev Burman, Vyjantimala and Dr Bali, Saira Banu and Dilip Kumar, Babita and Randhir Kapoor, Neetu Singh and Rishi Kapoor, late Smita Patil and Raj Babbar, Poonam Dhillon and director Thakera (I forget his first name), Dipti Naval and Nana Patekar (in fact, Nana was also involved with Manisha Koirala too) and the latest Bipasha Basu and John Abraham. And to my *RF* friend Divakaran (*RF*, February 22), I also share your views of the good old times, though my kids tell me that I am not that old, despite the fact that I do not colour my scant pate.

Amit Bhattacharjie  
Ruwi

## Wonderful world

IF interstate and international migrations are a norm for deciding on "unity in diversity", then it's a wonderful world we live in. And if the divisiveness faced by them is just a thing of the mind or myth, that concludes everything; nothing has to change.

● THAT looks straight from the heart about Bihar, Mahesh Verma, and definitely you have kept your reputation on your one-liners this time around (*RF*, February 21).

Rajesh Chettupuzha  
Sohar

## From Our Archives

## February 1989

## Gold medal awarded

MUSCAT — The World Environment Centre has awarded its 1989 gold medal for international corporate environmental achievement to the Dow Chemical Company.

Dow is represented in Oman by Gulf Agriculture Materials, Muttrah.

## READERS' FORUM

## In the age of enlightenment...

WE, in this 21st century, are living in very 'enlightened' age of human history. We have gained freedom from the age-old concept of good and evil and are now free to gratify ourselves as we wish without the fear of 'oppression' by the flag bearers of morality in society. It is another matter that some conventionalists like P.J. Thomas and 'obscurantist' like this writer consider this 'progression' as what a fall (*RF*, February 17)! While using this newfound freedom we must not forget that "we are part of nature and we are free only insofar as we exercise our self-determination within the realities of human nature". (A.N. Whitehead). Today man is facing himself in a quite new way. This can be either exciting or devastating. Devastating if he rebels against his own good nature and compromises with faulty guidance of his inner weak self. Look at the birth and growth of a child. How weak and helpless a creature he is; wholly dependent upon love and care of his mother and family. His Creator already arranged beforehand all the provisions needed for his physical, biological and emotional well-being. Man is a gregarious being, who cannot live in isolation. Therefore, it is wrong to think that He who provided so much would neglect to provide guidance needed to live a harmonious social life. So man is a blessed being whose all needs including guidance has been dished out to him. This guidance came through two sources 1) intuition 2) religion. The origin of all the religions is same; it came from the Supreme, Creator, and Sustainer of all the worlds. If it is suspected that some miscues might have crept in religious teachings — we still find that most of the religions have many common moral standards, which when followed by society can maintain peace and harmony among themselves. Today we see that the overweening modern man looks upon himself as self-sufficient forgetting that all our gifts of knowledge and capacities — be they scientific, technical or institutional — come from our Creator, Lord of heavens and the earth. Man in his vanity and insolence mistakes God's gifts for his own achievement. The impure desires of man's heart often lead to destruction, for they are dictated by evil. The latest legalisation of the ignoble act of same-sex marriage in California now spread over to New Mexico, has thunderstruck the sane elements of humanity. The details of the scandal are daily appearing both in print and electronic media. Exhilarating demonstrations by gays and lesbians boldly displayed a placard: your religion is not my government. Should men get all that they hanker for? The boost these aberrant elements got will encourage them to demand more perverted decisions. Immediate action must be taken to nip the mischief in the bud; and make mends to undo the harm already done. I thought it is the "first drop of rain" when the human wisdom is let loose unbridled, but then remembered that last year a county court in Germany, approved the debased practice of 'wife swapping' as legal in response to a case put against such practice by some. No news of any reaction of the people appeared in the media, showing a general consensus in favour of the judgment! So, we now see, where the civilisation that was developed by our ancestors in centuries is heading for in this 'enlightened' era. It will not be out of place here to mention that whereas the monarchy and dictatorships are collapsing we still remain under the oppression of democratic rulers, i.e. 51 per cent of legislators make 49 per cent subservient to their dictates. I mean the recent legislation in a country, the torch-bearer of liberty, equality and fraternity, where a law is passed banning the wearing of a headscarf or turban by schoolgirls and boys. Who can stop them if tomorrow they wish to ban the wearing of shalwar and sari as well. Vive la France! We have to wait and see what more trouble stirs up from human wisdom, devoid of basic values.

In the end I quote a couplet from Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, for readers to ponder upon wistfully:

"O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy shoulders!  
O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door!"

Mahboob Rasool Wahhaj  
Al Khuwair

Prof. Irshad Ahmed  
Musannah

Shining?

IT is difficult to agree with the views expressed in the report, titled 'Unique India shining' (*Times*, February 18). How can one say that India is shining when the prime minister is making contradictory statements about the Ayodhya issue? President Dr A.P.J. Kalam is nursing many dreams about India. How could his dreams be realised when millions face poverty and diseases? India cannot progress without developments in villages.

Aloysius Panakkal  
Muscat

Why not?

AMIT'S idea about ragging and about those who rag (*RF*, February 21) is from the pre-historic period, maybe because he has not experienced it. Nigel Kuriakose has hit the nail on the head. Those are the basic rules in most of the colleges (engineering and medical). This I can vouch for, since I have passed out only a year ago from REC. Nowadays, the brightest and students from economically and educated families rag, not others. Those who rag do not go on to become criminals, whereas become good friends with their juniors. Yes, college helps in developing future lives, wherein ragging makes a shy and introvert student very confident to face the hurdles in life. And the concept of war and ragging are entirely different. In a war, if one fights, he might win one day; but if one alone goes against ragging he will be isolated during his entire college life, which is unthinkable. It will go on for a short period, after which you will gain valuable friendship from your seniors. All this pertains to hostel life, whereas day-scholar's life is entirely different. Also, parents should never complain to the management, which will only worsen matters for your children. Stay in a hostel, face

campina  
**COAST**  
milk  
Naranjee Hirjee

"Quote of the day"  
*The best answer to anger is silence*

## READERS' FORUM

Read it on the net at [www.timesofoman.com](http://www.timesofoman.com)

## Far ahead of times

IT was a matter of grief to learn that R.P.S. Bhalla is leaving Oman for good during the first week of April (if it is not a dream). *RF* members, in general, and those who attended his lunch, in particular, are going to miss him a lot. His imaginative, crisp and spicy contributions can, however, continue through the Internet, as Bhargavi Rahulan is already doing from Sydney. Bhalla is not at all the "best trash writer", as he has mentioned (*RF*, February 21), but is one of the most active and respected *RF* members who always thought ahead of time. He arranged the lunch when others were in thinking, planning and suggesting stage. Probably he was the one who first thought of an *RF* cricket team, now that he has suggested the "Award Ceremony". Here I have a difference of opinion, for example, without seeing me he has nominated me as the best grandpa. It is otherwise an honour and I wish to attain it but I think I have to work hard for some more years to achieve it (grandpa of two five-month-old twin sisters can't be grandpa of such an august forum, simple *pa* may, however, be all right). Similarly, G.V.K. Durga Ravi should be the "best all-round writer" as she writes equally well on all topics, especially the "city round-up". Her focus is so wide that a few weeks back when I saw a well-clad lady watching carefully some irregularities of the procedures and then arguing with the administration staff very logically, I thought of going to her and asking her whether she was my "RF mate" but then I remembered the fate of Salih Thacher's guess regarding his classmate and could not muster the courage. (Suggestion: *RF* should publish photos of contributors). I may now ask a similar question to Bhallaji: are you the same Bhalla who was a senior volunteer and helping teachers in the Basic AOL course which I attended in 2001? Well, it is a fact that one day we the expatriates have to leave Oman. I wish him all the best. His dream might come true, and if so, please do not forget us (when you become a minister).

● I AGREE with Usha Santhosh (*RF*, February 19) when she appeals to all in reply to Narendra Shukla's query (*RF*, February 18) that we should let Suraiyya's memories rest with her. I remember when Dilip Kumar visited his hometown Peshawar in Pakistan a few years ago he was quite upset when a film journalist asked him about his "favourite" heroines. He burst out in anger and asked the journalist why he (journalist) had been interested in spoiling peaceful lives of some grandmas.

Prof. Irshad Ahmed  
Musannah

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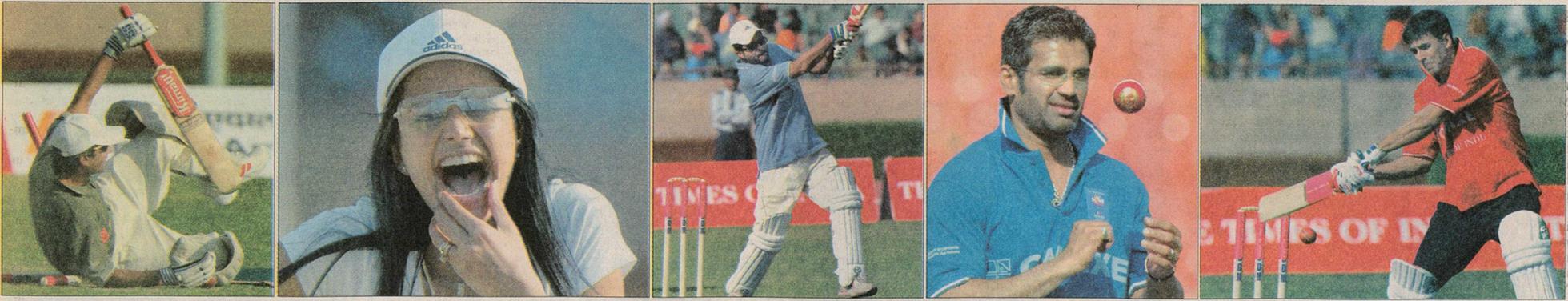
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INDIA

# Bollywood takes on Indian team ... for a cause



**FALL AND FROLIC:** Cricketer-turned-actor Ajay Jadeja, TV actress Mandira Bedi, actors Anil Kapoor, Sunil Shetty and Akshay Kumar during a charity cricket match in New Delhi yesterday. Mandira cannot control herself as Jadeja falls on to the stumps during the match, organised for the benefit of the 'Khushi' non-governmental organisation. — AFP

## Raveena weds like a princess



**BLISSFUL:** Raveena

**UDAIPUR** — Fulfilling her childhood dream of marrying like a princess, the *mast mast* girl of Bollywood Raveena Tandon last night tied the nuptial knot with Anil Thadani, a film distributor, in royal grandeur at a 17th century palace-turned into a five-star hotel in this northern city. The high-profile wedding ceremony was held at Jag Mandir Palace Hotel in traditional Punjabi khatri and Sindhi style with parents of both the bride and the groom performing the rituals.

The Jag Mandir Palace, located on an island on the famous Pichchola Lake, where Mewar Maharaja Karan Singh had held a reception for Mughal Prince Khurram who later become Emperor Shah Jahan more than 400 years ago, was decorated like a set of a Bollywood film with an exquisite blend of tradition with modernity in marriage ceremonies. The *barat* procession of the groom, with caparisoned horses, camels and torch bearers, reached the wedding venue in style.

Led by a local band, the procession started from Sunset Terrace of Fateh Prakash Hotel with many of the *baratis* dancing to the tunes of Bollywood's hit songs and after winding its way through a maze of narrow lanes of the city of lakes, reached the Banshi Ghat of Pichchola Lake where the groom and *baratis* boarded flower-decked boats, owned by former Udaipur royals, to reach Jag Mandir Palace. As the groom reached Jag Mandir, huge fireworks greeted the guests. A tight security ring was thrown around the palace and journalists, cameramen and TV news channels crew were kept out of the venue of the marriage ceremony. Wearing diamond jewellery Raveena, chairperson of the Children's Film Society, was looking like a princess beautiful. She wore the same wedding dress which her mother had 35 years back in her own marriage with film director Ravi Tandon. *The Lehenga* her mother wore in her marriage was redone by Raveena's dress designers. More than 5,000 locals gathered at the other bank of the lake to have a glimpse of the marriage of tinsel world glitterati.

Although they failed to get any glimpse of Raveena taking *saat phere* (circling the fire seven times) with Thadani, a divorcee, it did not dampen their curiosity and they watched the fireworks from across the lake.

Among those came to bless the couple were federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ravi Shankar Prasad, Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, general secretary of Samajwadi Party Amar Singh, cricketer Ravi Shastri and film actors Jackie Shroff and John Abraham. — PTI

## Sister Nirmala waylaid, robbed

**KOLKATA** — Armed bandits robbed the head of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity order on a lawless stretch of highway in Jharkhand, a spokeswoman said yesterday.

At least a dozen robbers waylaid Sister Nirmala Joshi, Mother Teresa's successor, and other nuns at a roadblock in Jharkhand on Saturday, Sister Christie, a spokeswoman for the Kolkata-based order, said.

She added that Sister Nirmala was unharmed. "They looted more than 40 vehicles that had to stop for the roadblock. The looting spree continued for one-and-a-half hours and they went away scot-free," she said.

The robbers forced open the door of the jeep in which Sister Nirmala and the other nuns were travelling and asked them to hand over their belongings.

The robbers later carried out a thorough search of the vehicle. "Robbers armed with rods and sickles, blocked the road with a fallen tree and robbed many occupants of vehicles of their watches, jewellery and cash but there were no injuries," Superintendent of Police Manvinder Singh Bhatia said.

Sister Christie said the driver of the vehicle, Father Anthony Xavier, was forced to hand over Rs1,000 (\$20).

"She is upset but not shaken by the incident," said Missionaries of Charity spokeswoman Sunita Kumar in Kolkata.

Sister Nirmala was born in Ranchi and was visiting the state after three decades, she said. — AFP, Reuters



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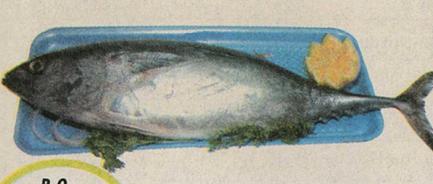
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INDIA

**PM launches social security scheme for unorganised workers**

LUCKNOW — Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday launched a social security scheme for the country's vast unorganised labour sector, offering health insurance and old age pension to them.

"For the first time after independence, my government has chalked out a plan to insure lives of workers of unorganised sector," Vajpayee told a gathering of workers here.

The prime minister, on a two-day visit to his parliamentary constituency Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, said his government fully appreciated the concerns and problems of unorganised workers and intended to solve those problems on priority basis.

No government prior to his had thought about their problems, he said.

"Rich do not need social security, but for the poor an umbrella of social security is a must to protect them in case of accidents, ill-health or untimely death," Vajpayee said.

Asserting the federal coalition government was committed to providing social security to unorganised workers, he said the scheme would be managed by Employees Provident Fund organisation.

**25 million kids immunised against polio**

NEW DELHI — Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee yesterday launched the nationwide second phase of polio immunisation programme by administering pulse polio drops to two children to symbolise the campaign to free the country from the crippling disease.

More than 25 million children in the age-group of five years were given the oral vaccine on the day.

Thousands of immunisation camps were set up and many a school converted into polio booths across the country, as hoarding and the state-owned electronic media goaded parents to get their children immunised by the health personnel.

Vajpayee administered the oral vaccine to two children — Achintaya and Khushi Verma in his home constituency of Lucknow as religious leaders in Uttar Pradesh, which has reported the largest number of cases in the country, joined the awareness campaign in great measure to dispel the misconception that the drops led to impotency.

The Delhi government deputed 14,800 personnel to also carry out door-to-door polio immunisation over next five days. Administering the drops to infants, Delhi Health Minister Yoganand Shastri said as many as 7,400 teams, comprising two personnel each, have been set up to carry out the polio immunisation programme for the next five days.

**DNA centre at Bangalore soon**

BANGALORE — Bangalore will soon have a DNA fingerprinting centre of its own, a top official of forensic science laboratory said.

Many criminal cases in the state at present were being sent to Hyderabad in the absence of DNA facility here, Dr B.M. Mohan, director FSL said.

The Rs30-million project has been cleared by the federal government which has also sanctioned the entire amount. However, at the state level an agreement has to be made between the centre for genetics and the FSL here, he said.

"We are hopeful of completing the necessary formalities at the state level by the end of March this year," he said.

The DNA centre at Bangalore, the sixth in the country, will carry out profiling the DNA from the crime exhibits for personal identification, he said. — PTI

● **Tell me a few things that you did in 1991. Your government didn't have full majority, you had to get a vote of confidence...**

The first thing I had to realise was that India's exchange rate had to be checked.

● **Was it too high?**  
Well, the rupee was at an unrealistic level, we had to depreciate it. But changing the rupee rate in India has always been a political problem. And here was a government which was a minority government, here was a government which had yet to win a vote of confidence... I went to the prime minister (and told him) we cannot wait till the vote of confidence...

● **Because in India, in the popular mind, we link the value of rupee with national pride...**

Yes. So the first thing we did was to adjust the exchange value of rupee in two doses. I had to do that because there were difficulties in going the straightforward way.

● **What was the straightforward way? Announcing devaluation?**

Devaluation... but the cabinet was not prepared. There was opposition from the president. He said, 'your government is

**Without Rao, 'I couldn't have done anything'**

yet to win the vote of confidence, how can you...'

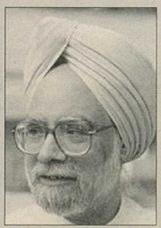
● **Mr Venkataraman?**  
Mr Venkataraman. So we found a way out. I instructed the Reserve Bank to announce a new intervention rate, after a few days I asked them to repeat it, and the result was that we brought about devaluation.

● **Without announcing it...**  
At least 25 per cent. The world got the message that here was a government, which, despite being a minority government, was able to take the toughest decisions. If you remember, the decision to adjust the exchange rate in the 60s, I think the decision could not be taken over a period of three years...

● **Until Morarji Desai came...**

No, I think the World Bank had proposed the depreciation of Indian rupee in 1962, ultimately it was done in 1966. In between, there were tensions within the government; it was not able to take a decision. But within 10 days of the Narasimha Rao govern-

In this second part, Dr Manmohan Singh draws attention to the inconsistency in the policies of the present government and its attempt to dismantle the public sector



ment, we took some of the most difficult decisions. Take for example the adjustment of the industrial licensing policy. We abolished the Licence Permit Raj within one month of our government and I was able to report in my budget speech that India...

● **Tell me something about your exchanges with Mr Narasimha Rao? Did he understand the need for change? Because both of you were brought up in a socialist milieu, he more than you...**

Well, Rao was most supportive. Without his active back-

ing I could not have done anything.

● **But he knew the risk...**  
Yes, he knew the risk. And he told me that if this thing succeeds, we will all claim credit, and if things don't work, well, we'll sacrifice... And I was prepared for that.

● **So you were marked out as a likely scapegoat... But were there moments of doubts, that things are going wrong?**

Well, I had some doubts when I presented my first budget, we had cut subsidies very sharply. Also, in the history of Indian business it's never

been done, we adjusted, reduced the fiscal deficit of the federal government by full 2 percentage points of the GDP. Therefore, we adjusted food subsidies, fertiliser subsidies. But then there was pressure from parliament and the government developed cold feet. At that stage, I protested. I gave my resignation to the prime minister. I said if you are going to go this way then I am not able to... But I must say that Rao backed me to the hilt, I think, in the first two years of our government.

● **But there are those who say that this was like Manmohan Singh's re-education. He taught and learnt something else, he was a socialist, and when crisis came, he made a complete turnaround.**

Well, I've always been a socialist in the sense that I regard the quest for equity, the quest for social equality as fundamental to running a modern economy, a modern society. If by socialism you mean a passion for equality, I am a socialist even then. But I've never been a socialist in

the doctrinaire sense of the term that all things must be done by the government.

● **So what is it that this government is doing by way of reforms that you disagree with?**

First of all, I do not agree with the way this government is handling the problems of the public sector. This government, for its ideological reason, wants to dismantle the public sector. Our view is public sector should be allowed to grow if the public sector can compete on an equal footing with the private sector. That profit-making public sector units, if they can compete, should be given every opportunity...

● **But why shouldn't they just become private? Why should the government run companies?**

Because there is a distinction between private profit and public profit. When public sector companies make profits, that becomes the asset for the nation to expand for reinvestment. Where are resources for education, for health going

to come from?

● **What else do you disagree with?**

Although this government talks of deregulation, it is a case-by-case deregulation. There is no consistent hand moving...

● **Is there anything that this government is doing which you not only agree with but also endorse? Maybe it's peace with China or Pakistan, it may be economic reforms...**

As far as peace with Pakistan is concerned, our party has had a structured approach... we've always been for talks of peace with Pakistan. Even at the height of the Kargil war, we were for talks of peace with Pakistan. Whereas what is the consistency of this government? The prime minister, one day, talks of *aa-par*, the other day he mobilises a million people, then suddenly there is a change, he goes to J&K, he talks of *insaniyat*... There has been no consistent hand as far as this government is concerned. — By arrangement with The Indian Express

Due to space constraint, the interview could not be carried in full. The final part will be published tomorrow

**Gandhi vs Gandhi**



**GENERATION NEXT:** Varun, Priyanka and Rahul

NEW DELHI — It is being billed as the war of the Gandhis as India moves into electoral mode.

Varun Gandhi, son of family black sheep Maneka Gandhi and one of the heirs to the dynasty that has supplied India with three Congress party prime ministers, declared his support last week for the ruling BJP.

He nailed his colours to the BJP mast just a month after his cousins, brother-and-sister duo Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi, were mobbed as they campaigned for the main opposition Congress party which dominated India's first half-century of independence.

The "Gen Next" family political soap opera looks like injecting the main drama into polls due in around two months that appear now as though they will be a walkover for the BJP and its allies against the secular Congress.

Asked if he would campaign directly against his cousins, seen as more photogenic and politically savvy than himself, the 24-year-old Varun said, "I will try hard not to campaign against Rahul and Priyanka because family and party are separate. But I will follow my party's ideals."

For political watchers, the move raises the tantalising possibility of a BJP Gandhi one-day battling a Congress Gandhi for India's leadership.

After the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) derided the Congress for seeking to exploit the Gandhis' dynastic appeal, analysts say it may use Varun in pivotal states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where the Gandhi name still has magic.

"The BJP's clever political managers think they have found a potent antidote" to Priyanka and Rahul, said political analyst Harish Khare.

Three generations of the family — Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi — served as prime ministers of India since the country's

independence from Britain in 1947.

Both Indira and Rajiv were assassinated, which makes many commentators liken the family to the tragedy-scared Kennedy clan in the United States and a gossip-hungry press devours every titbit about them.

The two Gandhi branches have been estranged since a tearful Maneka was ejected from, or stormed from, according to varying accounts, Indira's home in 1982 with a young Varun in her arms under the glare of TV lights after being shut out of politics when her husband died in a flying stunt.

Maneka's husband, Sanjay, was being groomed as Indira's successor but after his death his mother turned to her pilot son, Rajiv, later killed by a suicide bomber while campaigning in 1991.

Now, Rajiv's widow, Italian-born Sonia, heads a Congress that commentators say is drifting and may have one foot in the political grave.

After exiting the joint family home, Maneka, best known now in India as an animal rights champion, ran in the mid-80s against Rajiv and was trounced. In the late 1990s, she served an independent minister in the BJP-led government.

Now the move by her and her son to join the BJP deepens the family's political schism. For the moment, though, both sides are maintaining decorum, sending each other best wishes for the campaign.

Varun, who describes himself as "basically a poet and a writer," already has a book of published poems under his belt.

He said his move did not mean he was not proud of his family's role in freeing India from British rule.

The Congress led India through "its most glorious era," he said. "I do believe, however, what my family was true to was not a party but a value system, a tradition of self-sacrifice."

Media reports have said

Varun will join the BJP's youth wing and party officials say he might visit the region in the Hindi heartland state of Uttar Pradesh where his aunt Sonia will run.

The BJP rode to centre-stage in the late 1980s on a tide of Hindu revivalism but Varun said he did not view it as a communal movement whose goal was to promote a Hindu nation.

Varun called the BJP a "large-hearted" party but did not reject its argument that Sonia's foreign birth disqualified her from being prime minister.

"Foreign origin is an issue but not the main issue," he said, adding that he wanted to focus on governance and development. The BJP has sought to play up its economic record with the economy booming following a bountiful monsoon.

In a bid to make her Italian birth less of a campaign issue, Sonia Gandhi said yesterday that becoming prime minister was not a personal priority. "Let us see when the time comes," said Sonia, who has been busy trying to seal alliances with other parties to counter the BJP tide.

Press reports said the BJP persuaded the soft-spoken Varun he had a "bright" future in politics as long as the "right" people honed his skills.

He is too young to run yet and it is not known if his cousins, who are in their 30s, will contest in constituencies or just campaign.

Still, the question being asked is whether Varun will have the same pulling power as his cousins who were thronged by villagers crying "Priyanka, Rahul Zindabad" (Long live Priyanka and Rahul) during a swing last month through their grandmother's old constituency.

"The Gandhi *bachechas* (children) are here. It's not a re-run, it's a whole new episode," said *The Indian Express* in an editorial. "This saga has just begun. Enjoy." — AFP

**Sonia : I'm Indian**

She feels like a foreigner when she's abroad and becoming premier isn't her priority

NEW DELHI — President of the Congress party Sonia Gandhi yesterday said becoming a prime minister was not a priority before her and accused the BJP of raking up the issue of her foreign origin as the party-led government had "totally failed".



**SO PROUD:** Sonia

"For me, that is not a priority. Let us see when the time comes," she said in an interview to a private television channel when asked why the Congress was not coming forward on the issue of leadership of anti-BJP alliance. To a query whether she felt that her being born in Italy was a liability, the Congress president said it might work adversely with some voters but "I have never felt that I am a foreigner. I am an Indian absolutely."

"Wherever I go, especially in rural areas, in the midst of women and less fortunate people, I never feel that I am a foreigner. They never look at me as a foreigner because I am an Indian," Sonia said. "In fact, I feel like a foreigner when I go abroad," she said.

"I don't resent when they (BJP) talk about my foreign origin. It makes me laugh. Why should I resent when I completely feel like an Indian."

Asked whether her transition from a foreigner to an Indian had been completed, Sonia said: "The transition was completed long ago. After being part of a family which took part in the freedom struggle and laid down lives in the service of the nation, I have assimilated and imbibed a certain amount of these feelings." On her children Rahul and Priyanka joining active politics, she said it was "really silly" to repeat the same answer.

(Sonia's pet answer on such questions is that it was for her children to decide.)

Asked whether as Congress president she feels her children should be more involved in politics, she said: "I don't think I can answer that — I won't." — PTI

**Ash in the dock**

Cheating case hearing on Feb. 27

MUMBAI — In response to a summons issued by a local court, Aishwarya Rai and her family members would appear before a magistrate on February 27 in a cheating case filed by a real estate agent against them. Magistrate S.Y. Shishode had issued the summons on January 10 last month and it has been already served on the respondents by Bandra police station. Aishwarya's lawyer Ramesh Singh said here yesterday. The agent Krishna Kumar Shetty filed a private complaint in Bandra court alleging that during 1998 he had rendered services to help Aishwarya's family in buying a 3,000 square feet flat in Bandra. However, they did not pay him brokerage as agreed by them, Shetty alleged.

According to Shetty, the flat in La Maid building in suburban Bandra was jointly purchased by Aishwarya, her father Krishna Raj, mother Brinda Raj and brother Aditya for Rs17.5 million and they had agreed to pay him brokerage of two per cent of the value of the flat, which worked out to Rs375,000. Shetty said in the complaint that he had served a legal notice on them asking them to pay the brokerage charges. But they did not respond and he filed a complaint in the court charging the actress and her family with cheating and criminal breach of trust in respect of their agreement. — PTI

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SPORTS

# Cricket revival set to spur Pakistan-India peace process: Raja

**KARACHI** — The revival of cricket between Pakistan and India next month would play a vital role in normalising relations between the neighbours, Pakistan Cricket Board chief executive Ramiz Raja said yesterday.

"We feel that the revival of cricket brings both the countries to the threshold of many good things," Raja said.

"With the ice broken ... we would see multiplying effects of free travel between India and Pakistan, ease in visa restriction and trade regulations."

Cricket is a passion in both countries, who have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947. Bilateral matches remained suspended between the two countries since 2000 amid rising political tensions.

New Delhi revived sporting links in October last year, which paved the way for the Indian cricket team's first tour to Pakistan in 15 years, after Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee initiated the peace process by offering a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan in April. The ball was set rolling on Saturday with the announcement of the itinerary of five One-day Internationals and three Tests between March 13- April 17.

"This is a great moment in the sporting history of Pakistan and India and it's great that cricket is given a chance to promote peace and friendship," said Raja, who led a Pakistan side in India's Independence Cup in 1997. But Raja also urged fans on both sides to check their emotions, which run high when India and Pakistan play cricket as players on the losing side face the wrath of the dejected fans.

Pakistani players received death threats following their defeat against India in the 1996 World Cup quarterfinal at Bangalore while Indian authorities had to evacuate Eden Gardens in Kolkata due to crowd trouble when Pakistan came close to beating India in a Test match on their last tour in 1998-99.

Raja believed the PCB faces a gigantic task in organising the series with just 17 days left.

"We have been working round the clock and know the enormity of the task of hosting the matches, providing security to the tourists, tickets and other logistics but we are up to it and hope that it would be a successful series."

India's team arrive in Lahore on March 10 and play a warm up One-day game the following day. They play the first of five One-day games in Karachi on March 13. However, the authorities have dropped Karachi and Peshawar as venues for Test matches for security reasons.

Meanwhile, former players and cricket officials from Karachi yesterday voiced disappointment that the port city has been ignored in the next month's historic cricket series with India and vowed to lodge a protest over the decision.

"The PCB had knelt down before India and by not including Karachi as the Test venue have taken dictation from the BCCL," Sirajul Islam Bukhari, secretary Karachi City Cricket Association, said.

BCCL said the decision to drop Karachi and Peshawar over security fears was taken on an Indian government's advice following a visit by its delegation which assessed security in Pakistan last week.

"Karachi is safe for Indian blind team which is due to play two matches here," said Bukhari.

Bukhari said his association officials will meet the provincial governor to lodge a protest but he ruled out a boycott of the One-day game scheduled in Karachi on March 13. "Boycott would be a drastic decision and in the best interest of the country we would not boycott the only match given to Karachi," the KCCA official said.

Former Pakistan captain Hanif Mohammed said he was disappointed over India's decision of rejecting Karachi. "I am disappointed, Indians should have been bold enough to play in Karachi which is the premier centre of the country," said Hanif, who featured in the first Indo-Pak series in 1952. — *AFP*

## Portsmouth stun Liverpool

**LONDON** — Substitute Richard Hughes gave Portsmouth a shock 1-0 victory over Liverpool in their FA Cup fifth-round replay yesterday to set up a quarterfinal against holders Arsenal.

Liverpool's England striker Michael Owen fluffed a penalty before Hughes lashed a low shot into the far corner of the net after 72 minutes to decide a tense encounter at Fratton Park.

It was the Scottish midfielder's first goal for Portsmouth, who have only won the FA Cup once, in 1939. They will face Arsenal, where Hughes was once a trainee, at Fratton Park in the last eight on March 6.

Harry Redknapp was delighted with the performance of his injury-hit Portsmouth side, who are fighting relegation from the Premier League. — *Reuters*

## Clijsters bags Antwerp crown

**BRUSSELS** — Belgium's world number two Kim Clijsters secured her first title on home soil by making short work of defeating Italy's Silvia Farina Elia 6-3, 6-0 to win the Antwerp Diamond Games yesterday. Clijsters followed up her success in last week's Paris Open to claim her 21st WTA singles title.

"It is great to play on home soil with 15,000 fans rooting for you I must say," said Clijsters, who was beaten by Venus Williams in last year's final and lost to Iroda Tulyaganova in the only other final she has contested in Belgium in 2001.

"Playing Silvia is never easy. I knew from the start that she does not give away many points and I had to think a lot before attacking aggressively. The fact that I won in two sets and quite easily proves that I am in a good form."

It was Clijsters's sixth successive victory over the Italian.

Clijsters broke Farina Elia's second service game but her opponent broke back immediately and it wasn't until the eighth game that the Belgian broke again to lead 5-3, from which she served out to take the set.

Hitting heavy topspin and long ground strokes Clijsters then romped through the second set as Farina Elia's resistance evaporated.

"Kim is strong all year round and I found she



**RICH REWARD:** Belgian Kim Clijsters celebrates her victory with the gold and diamond racket in Antwerp. — *AFP*

played her best tennis all week long in Antwerp," said the number eight seed.

"I fought very hard in the first set but then my energy left me." — *Reuters*

# Defoe spares Spurs blushes

**LONDON** — Wasteful Tottenham Hotspur threw away a 3-1 lead in an extraordinary 4-4 draw with 10-man Leicester City yesterday while Birmingham City also recovered from two goals down to draw 2-2 at local rivals Aston Villa.

Jermain Defoe scored his second goal of the game two minutes from time at White Hart Lane to avert another disastrous defeat for Spurs by a battling Leicester side that recovered from 3-1 down to lead 4-3 at one stage.

At Villa Park, Stern John scored an equaliser in the fourth minute of stoppage time to give Birmingham a dramatic draw against Villa.

The eight-goal tally at White Hart Lane meant Spurs' last four games have featured a remarkable 28 goals. The way they tossed away their lead mirrored their extraordinary 4-3 FA Cup defeat at home by 10-man Manchester City on February 4 in which they led 3-0.

Within six minutes against Leicester they were in front when the visitors' former Spurs keeper Ian Walker helped a Michael Brown free kick into his net.

Spurs defender Gary Doherty, who endured a nightmare performance, then swivelled and miscued an attempted clearance into his own net to hand Leicester their equaliser before Defoe's angled drive restored Spurs' lead.

Robbie Keane made it 3-1 with a low drive after a free kick in the 27th minute of a



**DELIGHTED:** Tottenham Hotspur's Michael Brown, centre, celebrates scoring the opening goal against Leicester with teammates Robbie Keane, left, and Simon Davies at White Hart Lane, London. — *Reuters*

frantic first half.

Leicester's former Spurs striker Les Ferdinand gave them hope six minutes into the second half but James Scowcroft then earned a straight red card for a late tackle on Spurs full back Mauricio Taricco.

City were not finished, though. Incredibly ex-Spurs player Ben Thatcher equalised with a header after 72 minutes and five minutes later Marcus Bent made it 4-3 after Doherty's back pass sold keeper Casey Keller short.

Defoe, though, saved Tottenham's faces with a thunderous close range finish, his fourth in three games since signing from West Ham United.

Events were barely less dramatic at Villa Park. Villa led 2-0 through a first-half strike by Darius Vassell and a

rocket shot from German midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger two minutes into the second half and the home side squandered a hatful of other chances.

Birmingham, who did the double over Villa last season, halved the deficit with Finn Mikael Forssell's neat finish on the hour.

Then with the final seconds ticking away, Trinidad and Tobago striker John, on as a City substitute, pounced to fire a rebound high into the net, denying Villa victory in the 100th league meeting between the two teams.

The results meant Villa went seventh on 37 points, with Birmingham eighth on 36. Spurs are 10th on 34 points while Leicester stay second from bottom on 22, one less than fourth-bottom Portsmouth.

English Premier League leading scorers:

- 19 - Thierry Henry (Arsenal).
- 18 - Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United).
- 17 - Alan Shearer (Newcastle United).
- 16 - Louis Saha (Manchester United, 13 for Fulham) 12 - Nicolas Anelka (Manchester City), Robbie Keane (Tottenham Hotspur), 11 - Juan Pablo Angel (Aston Villa).
- 10 - Les Ferdinand (Leicester City), Mikael Forssell (Birmingham City).
- 9 - Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink (Chelsea), Michael Owen (Liverpool), James Beattie (Southampton).
- 8 - Robert Pires (Arsenal), Paul Dickov (Leicester City), Hernan Crespo (Chelsea), Andy Cole (Blackburn Rovers), Paul Scholes (Manchester United).
- 7 - Frederic Kanoute (Tottenham Hotspur), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Teddy Sheringham (Portsmouth), Juninho (Middlesbrough), Jason Euell (Charlton Athletic), Kevin Nolan (Bolton Wanderers), Alan Smith (Leeds United), Darius Vassell (Aston Villa).

English Premiership table (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	26	19	7	0	51	17	64
Man Utd	26	18	3	5	50	24	57
Chelsea	26	17	4	5	47	21	55
Newcastle	26	10	11	5	37	27	41
Charlton	26	11	7	8	37	32	40
Liverpool	25	10	8	7	36	27	38
Aston Villa	26	10	7	9	32	30	37
Birmingham	25	9	9	7	25	28	36
Fulham	26	10	5	11	38	37	35
Tottenham	26	10	4	12	39	42	34
Bolton	26	8	10	8	32	40	34
Southamp.	26	8	10	10	26	32	32
Mid'brough	25	8	7	10	27	31	31
Man City	26	6	9	11	36	38	27
Blackburn	26	7	6	13	38	43	27
Everton	26	6	8	12	31	39	26
Portsmouth	25	6	5	14	28	39	23
Wol'hampt.	26	5	8	13	24	52	23
Leicester	26	4	10	12	37	51	22
Leeds	26	5	6	15	24	51	21

## Martin, Kidd lead Nets to 13th successive win

**NEW YORK** — Kenyon Martin had 23 points and 13 rebounds and Jason Kidd narrowly missed another triple-double as the New Jersey Nets won their 13th straight game, 97-84 over the New Orleans Hornets in East Rutherford on Saturday.

Martin also had four blocked shots and four steals as the Nets tied the longest winning streak in the NBA this season.

San Antonio and Detroit have also won 13 straight games. New Jersey coach Lawrence Frank improved to 12-0 since taking over from the fired Byron Scott.

Frank tied the North American sports record for most wins by a coach at the start of a career, matching the mark of Joe Morgan of the Boston Red Sox in 1988 and Jim Price of the 1884 baseball New York Giants.

Richard Jefferson added 21 points for the Nets, who won for the seventh straight time at home.

Kidd finished with 11 points, nine rebounds and nine assists. He needs one more triple-double to tie him with former Boston Celtics great Larry Bird with 59.

The Hornets saw their three-game winning streak end against a tired Nets team that played the night before in Toronto.

Jamal Mashburn led the Hornets with 28 points and 13 rebounds. Baron Davis added 17 points.

In Miami, Dwyane Wade scored 28 points to out-duel fellow rookie Carmelo Anthony and give the Miami Heat a 97-81 upset win over the Denver Nuggets in Miami.

Lamar Odom had 21 points and 13 rebounds for the Heat, which is on a season-high four-game winning streak.

Odom scored 21 of his points in the pivotal third quarter, when Miami out-scored Denver 35-21.

Anthony scored 16 points for Denver, but had his worst shooting game since the third game of the season, going just 3-for-20.

He had scored 20 or more points in nine straight games. Udonis Haslem had 12 points and 10 rebounds for Miami, while Eddie Jones chipped in with 11 points.

Andre Miller scored 15 points for the Nuggets, while Voshon Lenard added 14 for Denver, losers of six of their last eight road games.

In Milwaukee, Elton Brand had 31 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Los Angeles Clippers past the Bucks 105-103. Quentin Richardson added 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Clippers. — *Reuters*

## Prasanna takes on Lazar for men's title

**MUSCAT** — Top seed Guru Prasanna and second seed Nigel Lazar will clash for the men's singles crown of the Annual Badminton Tournament of the Indian Social Club Muscat at 7.30pm this evening.

Prasanna and Lazar have both been in good touch and have made it to the summit clash with confident victories.

Prasanna scored a convincing 15-5, 15-3 semifinal victory over the highly fancied Mamooty, while Lazar played a solid game and overcame anxious moments to outlast third seed Percy Pereira 15-9, 15-11. Percy could not hold on to a 9-6 lead in the second game during which both players exchanged some exciting rallies. Percy worked hard but Lazar's brilliance was too hot to handle.

The finals of the ladies singles and the men's doubles are also scheduled to be played

this evening. Top seed Avantika Vaishnav will take on second seed Tessa Davis in the ladies finals while Guru Prasanna and Nigel Lazar will join hands in their bid to win the men's doubles title. In the final this evening, the second seeded duo will take on top seeds Ronnie and Percy Pereira.

Second seeds Guru Prasanna and Avantika Vaishnav toppled the top seeded combo of Percy Pereira and Bhavna Hari to claim the mixed doubles title. In the final which was dominated by the men on either side of the net, Avantika chipped with brilliant play at crucial moments and helped Prasanna to overcome Percy and Bhavna 15-7, 15-10 for the title. Nigel Lazar and Samuel Varghese beat Pascal Coelho and Mallyaya Gangaram 21-5 to win the jumbled doubles title.

## Hulbert makes short work of Gopakumar

By Our Sports Reporter

**MUSCAT** — Mark Hulbert proved to be in great form as he stormed into the men's singles third round of the 21st InterContinental Muscat Annual Open Tennis Championship.

Playing the second round match against K. Gopakumar, Hulbert had no problems in advancing with a 6-1, 6-1 verdict.

Reaching the second round of the women's singles were Elsbeth Haez and Ioshiro Ito. Haez eased past Ayse Kazdal 6-1, 6-1, while Ito survived a second set scare before toppling Zeinep Kazdal 6-3, 6-7, 6-4.

The second round matches in the veteran's doubles witnessed one-sided encounters with the combo of Jihan K & De Silva beating Paul Bagshaw & Alan Nicks 6-1, 6-1, and the pair of Adil Ghouse & Shivaji Ganguly trouncing Simon Karam & Khattar Atassi 6-2, 6-0.

Meanwhile, reaching the boys under-10 singles third round was Jake Dennis, who beat Yasu Sakaguchi 6-2, 6-4. Top seed Sabra Al Bakry blanked Georgie Hackett 6-0, 6-0 to make the third round of the girls under-12 singles.

## Headpins trounce Pin Action

**MUSCAT** — Headpins trounced Pin Action 11-0 in the Golden Gate Mixed Bowling League being played at the Sheraton Oman Bowling Centre. The verdict put Headpins on top of the leaderboard.



**MONTH'S BEST:** Phoebe Rush and Orly Corpuz

Headpins bowled three handicap games over 700, beating Pin Action by 322 pins. Highest bowler for Headpins was Susan Durnford, who scored games of 177, 173 and 140.

Also bowling well was Dave Senior, who bowled three good games 171, 156 and 127. Highest bowler for Pin Action was Jonathan Tabago, who scored 148, 170 and 163.

In the other match, Golden Gators beat Ballbusters 8-3 in three close games. For Golden Gators, Geoff Sergeant had a high game of 180 Highest bowler for Ballbusters was Bob Lloyd scoring 160, 114 and 170.

The match between Spare Us and Strikers saw all-round high scoring games with both the teams having two handicap games over 700. Spare Us won one game and the high game.

Highest bowler of the day was Phoebe Rush for Strikers scoring 167, 184 and 205 to get a 556 series — the highest female series of the league so far. For Spare Us, Ahmed Al Farsi bowled a high series of 533 with his games of 156, 181 and 196.

Meanwhile, Phoebe Rush and Orly Corpuz was declared the bowlers of the month (January 2004). The awards were sponsored by InterContinental Hotel Muscat.

# MCS inch towards title, Engine Mart march on

By Our Sports Reporter

**MUSCAT** — Matrah Cold Stores (MCS) registered eighth win in a row beating Bahar CT in the OCC-organised His Highness Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal Memorial Cricket League Tournament B Division game sponsored by Raha Poly Products on Friday at the OAC I ground.

In one of the lowest scoring games played this season in the division, Bahar were bundled out for a mere 136 in 25.2 overs as their batsmen were restricted by excellent bowling by the MCS bowlers. Abdul Ghaffar (36), Syed Junaid (30), Syed Maqsood (26) and

Mohammed Nadeem (22) were the only batsmen to provide some resistance to the MCS attack as all others failed to enter into double figures. Zahid Hussain with three wickets for 19 runs and Mohammed Ali with three wickets for 16 runs proved too good for Bahar. Jaison Manjila picked two wickets conceding 27 runs.

In reply, MCS reached their target in just 19.1 overs to register eighth consecutive victory in the tournament, inching towards the championship title. Openers Anil John (44 in 32 balls, 6 fours, 1 six) and Syed Kaleemullah (17) put on a 58-run opening wicket partnership until the fall of the lat-

ter. With the next wicket falling with only one run added to the score, Zahid Hussain (18) joined Anil and the two together put on 29 runs when the opener was sent back for the third wicket to be followed by Zahid for the fourth wicket on 93.

Bahar struck again for the last time with the scoreboard reading 120. Jaison Manjila (23) and Bhavesh Mehta remained unbeaten as the two ensured a comfortable 5-wicket victory. Abdul Ghaffar returned with 3 wickets for 33 runs for Bahar.

**Brief scores:** Bahar CT 136 all out in 25.1 overs (Ghaffar 36, Junaid 30, Maqsood 26, Nadeem 22, Zahid 3/19, Ali

3/16, Jaison 2/27) lost to MCS 138 for 5 in 19.1 overs (Anil 44, Jaison 23 not out, Ghaffar 3/33).

**Engine Mart win:** Engine Mart overpowered Shanfari CT in an easy nine-wicket win, aided by some brilliant batting performances by the three top order batsmen in the Al Ansari Trading-sponsored C Division game played at the PDO ground on Friday afternoon.

Batting first after winning the toss, Shanfari scored a respectable 197 for 5 in their allotted 25 overs. Earlier, openers Shueb Anwar (24) and Amila Don registered a decent 44 run in 7 overs before the fall of the formers wicket. With the second falling on 58, Amila



**IN COMMAND:** Pakistani batsman Fayaz plays a delivery against India during their blind teams' second One-day match in Karachi. — *Reuters*

and the two drop bat, Varadarajan Ramesh (50 in 39, 3 fours, 1six) together played some sensible cricket to register a 124 runs partnership until the opener was dismissed for 88 scored in 62 balls with 10 hits to the boundary and a huge knock over the ropes.

With the next two wickets falling on 187, Shanfari were restricted to 197 for 5 at the end of the innings. Young Imran Younus was the most successful bowler for Engine Mart with 3 wickets while Iqbal Sheikh picked up two wickets.

Chasing a target at less than 8 runs an over for a win, Engine Mart openers Khalique, Ahmed and Khalid Jamal dis-

played some wonderful batting performance as the two put on a 107 runs before Khalique was dismissed on 64 scored in just 24 balls with ten fours and two knocks beyond the ropes.

Khalid then continued his onslaught along with Mudassar Iqbal to remain unbeaten on 87 off 47 balls with 13 boundaries and one six while Mudassar Iqbal was not out on 25 as their side reached the target of 198 in just 16.3 overs.

**Brief scores:** Shanfari CT 197 for 5 in 25 overs (Amila 88, Varadarajan 50, Shueb 24, Imran 3/32, Iqbal 2/42) lost to Engine Mart LLC 198 for 1 in 16.3 overs (Khalid Jamal 87 not out, Khalique 64, Mudassar 25 not out).

SPORTS

# Sri Lanka clinch last-over thriller over Australia

**DAMBULLA** — Chaminda Vaas bowled a tight last over amid mounting tension as Sri Lanka stunned world champion Australia by one run in the second One-day International here yesterday.

Australia needed eight runs in the final over to win the match, but left-arm fast bowler Vaas controlled his yorkers remarkably well to concede just six runs, much to the delight of his teammates and a sizeable crowd.

Michael Bevan (24 not out), regarded as the game's best finisher, required six off the last delivery but could manage only three with a lofted shot as Australia scored 244-5 in reply to Sri Lanka's 245.

The hosts squared the five-match series 1-1, having lost the opening game by 84 runs at this venue on Friday.

Hard-hitting Andrew Symonds (36 not out) threatened to spoil the Sri Lankan party after being recalled by Sri Lankan umpire Peter Manuel, who initially ruled the batsman out.

Symonds was given out lbw by the umpire despite edging a Kumar Dharmasena delivery on to his pads. He was then on 10 in a total of 190.

The dejected batsman was returning to the pavilion when recalled by Manuel, who changed his decision following a brief conversation with New Zealand umpire Billy Bowden.

"There was nothing wrong in recalling Symonds because one should play the game fair," said Sri Lankan captain Marvan Atapattu.

Atapattu was praised for his sportsmanship by match referee Mike Procter.

"I thought the way it was handled out there was terrific," said Procter.

"You have to take your hat off to Marvan and his team for the manner in which they accepted the decision.

Symonds is one of those players that can win a game with a few blows and it was a big call from Marvan at that stage of the game."

"The umpire thought



**OVERJOYED:** Sri Lankan cricketers celebrate their one run victory over Australia in Dambulla. — Reuters

through his initial decision and realised he had made a mistake — it was a hugely courageous decision to do what he did," Procter added.

Symonds, however, could not change his team's fortunes despite a couple of lusty blows in the end.

Vaas's match-winning last

over also overshadowed superb efforts from Matthew Hayden (93), skipper Ricky Ponting (69) and left-arm spinner Michael Clarke (5-

35). "There was a lot of pressure bowling the last over," said Vaas, the only seamer in the Sri Lankan team.

"But I used my experience, tried to bowl yorkers and it happened. I just wanted to put the ball at the right spot."

The Sri Lankan fast bowler had the last laugh on a pitch tailor-made for spinners, finishing with 3-48.

Hayden and Ponting adapted themselves well to the conditions to overcome Sri Lanka's spin threat, adding 148 for the second wicket to raise visions of a victory.

Both the batsmen curbed their strokes and relied more on singles and twos to keep the scoreboard moving, but their team still could not complete the job.

"I am proud of the boys," said Ponting, who became the third Australian after Mark Waugh and Steve Waugh to complete 7,000 runs during his half-century.

"I thought we batted pretty well but fell just short. We bowled and fielded well to restrict their total as they

looked set to get around 270."

Earlier, Clarke grabbed a maiden five-wicket haul to help Australia restrict Sri Lanka on a slow pitch.

Sri Lanka were on course for a big total after a 121-run stand for the opening wicket between Sanath Jayasuriya (55) and Atapattu (47) before fumbling in the closing overs. Clarke led the Australian fightback with late strikes as Sri Lanka lost their last eight wickets for 53 runs in the closing 12 overs.

Atapattu initially did the

bulk of scoring before being run out following a smart piece of fielding by his counterpart.

Ponting dived to his left to stop an Atapattu on-drive, quickly regained balance and then hit the stumps at the non-striker's end with an underarm throw to catch the batsman short of the crease.

Kumar Sangakkara (39) and Mahela Jayawardene (38) then added 70 for the third wicket, but Clarke did not allow Sri Lanka to capitalise on the closing overs. — AFP

**SCOREBOARD**

<b>Sri Lanka</b>	M. Atapattu run out ..... 47	<b>Australia</b>	M. Clarke c Chandana b Vaas ..... 0
S. Jayasuriya lbw b Symonds ..... 55	M. Hayden c Jayawardene b Dharmasena ..... 69	R. Ponting c Vaas b Chandana ..... 93	D. Marnock c Atapattu b Vaas ..... 5
K. Sangakkara c Bevan c Harvey ..... 39	M. Jayawardene c Ponting b Clarke ..... 38	A. Symonds not out ..... 26	A. Gilchrist c & b Vaas ..... 0
M. Jayawardene c Ponting b Clarke ..... 38	T. Dilshan b Clarke ..... 11	A. Gilchrist c & b Vaas ..... 0	M. Bevan not out ..... 24
T. Dilshan b Clarke ..... 11	R. Kaluvitharan run out ..... 0	U. Chandana c Gilchrist b Clarke ..... 4	R. Arnold lbw b Clarke ..... 10
R. Kaluvitharan run out ..... 0	K. Dharmasena run out ..... 2	C. Vaas c Lee b Clarke ..... 5	K. Dharmasena run out ..... 2
U. Chandana c Gilchrist b Clarke ..... 4	M. Muralitharan not out ..... 2	M. Muralitharan not out ..... 2	Extras (b-1 lb-7 w-9) ..... 17
R. Arnold lbw b Clarke ..... 10	Extras (b-1 lb-6 w-8 nb-7) ..... 32	Total (all out, 49.5 overs) ..... 245	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-0 2-148 3-170 4-190 5-192
C. Vaas c Lee b Clarke ..... 5	Total (all out, 49.5 overs) ..... 245	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-121 2-122 3-192 4-216 5-220 6-225 7-226 8-236 9-242	<b>Did not bat:</b> B. Hogg, J. Gillespie, B. Lee, I. Harvey
K. Dharmasena run out ..... 2	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-121 2-122 3-192 4-216 5-220 6-225 7-226 8-236 9-242	<b>Bowling:</b> Vaas 10-0-48-3 (3-w), Dilshan 6-0-32-0 (2-w), Dharmasena 10-0-40-1 (2-w), Muralitharan 10-0-49-0, Chandana 9-0-40-1, Arnold 2-0-9-0, Jayasuriya 3-0-18-0 (2-w)	<b>Result:</b> Sri Lanka won by one run.
M. Muralitharan not out ..... 2	<b>Bowling:</b> Gillespie 7-0-36-0 (6-w), Lee 6-0-39-0 (7-ab 1-w), Harvey 9-0-38-1, Symonds 10-0-45-1 (1-w), Hogg 10-1-35-0, Clarke 7.5-0-35-5	<b>Third match:</b> February 25, Colombo (d/n).	<b>Fourth match:</b> February 27, Colombo (d/n).
C. Vaas c Lee b Clarke ..... 5		<b>Fifth match:</b> February 29, Colombo	

## Blignaut's hat-trick destroys Bangladesh

**HARARE** — A devastating hat-trick by Zimbabwe bowler Andy Blignaut put Bangladesh on the brink of defeat on the fourth day of the first Test at the Harare Sports Club.

Bangladesh were already facing a mammoth task in trying to reach 353 runs for victory after Zimbabwe declared their second innings closed on 242-8.

But Blignaut, supported by a pair of wickets for seamer Douglas Hondo, destroyed any slender hopes Bangladesh may have retained.

Blignaut ripped out Hannan Sarker for 10, then took Mohammed Ashraful and Mushfiqur Rahman out on their first ball.

With Hondo snatching Habibul Bashar for his third duck in succession the tour, as well as Shahriar Hossain for just one run, Bangladesh were in ruins at 14-5.

At the close they were

hanging their heads at 25-5 and needing more than a miracle. The humiliation lasted just six overs and took less than half an hour and set up a final day today that will surely be a routine mop-up operation for the Zimbabweans.

Finding themselves with a first innings lead of 110 an hour after play began yesterday, Zimbabwe steadily built up a large lead.

Sean Ervine, who scored

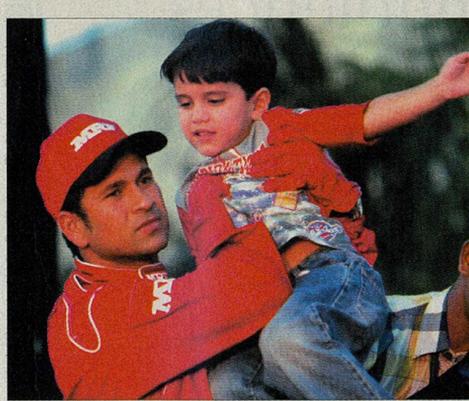
86 in the first innings, added 74, while Tendata Taibu, who had made 59, weighed in with another 58.

Zimbabwe had looked vulnerable at 90-4, but the Taibu-Ervine partnership was worth 90 runs and Bangladesh were steadily being put on the rack.

Home team captain Heath Streak did not bat because of a muscle spasm in his back, incurred in the dressing room before play. — AFP

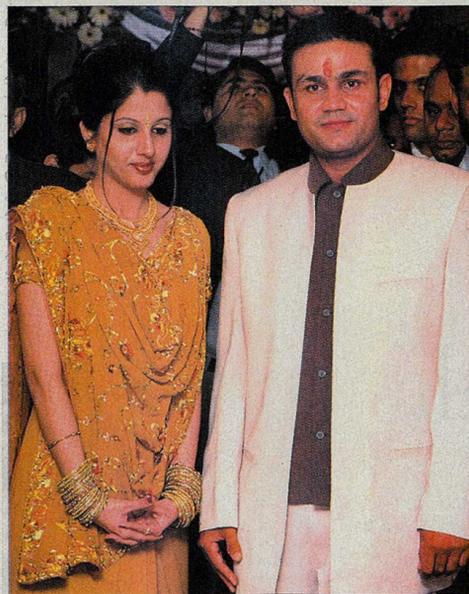
**SCOREBOARD**

<b>Zimbabwe first innings</b> 441 (S. Ervine 86, G. Ewing 71)	6-237, 7-234, 8-242.
<b>Bangladesh first innings</b> 331 (M. Ashraful 98)	<b>Bowling:</b> Baishya 16-1-65-2 (1w), M. Islam 12-4-24-1 (1w), Rahman 9-0-49-0, Rafique 20-3-62-2, M. Islam Rama 7-0-40-2.
<b>Zimbabwe second innings</b>	<b>Bangladesh second innings</b>
D. Ebrahim c Sarker b Baishya ..... 31	H. Sarker lbw b Blignaut ..... 10
T. Gripper c Mashud b Monjurul Islam ..... 5	S. Hossain lbw b Hondo ..... 1
G. Carisle run out (Sarker) ..... 33	H. Bashar lbw b Hondo ..... 0
S. Ervine c Mashud b Baishya ..... 3	R. Saleh not out ..... 6
T. Taibu c Habibul b Rafique ..... 58	M. Ashraful c sub (T. Friend) b Blignaut ..... 0
S. Ervine c Baishya ..... 1	M. Rahman c Taibu b Blignaut ..... 0
M. Manjural Islam Rama 74	M. Islam Rama not out ..... 4
A. Blignaut b Manjural Islam Rama ..... 32	G. Ewing c Mashud b Rafique ..... 4
G. Ewing c Mashud b Rafique ..... 1	Extras (1b, 1b, 2nb) ..... 4
R. Price not out ..... 1	Total (for 5 wkts, 14 overs) ..... 25
Extras (2lb, 2w) ..... 4	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-12, 2-14, 3-14, 4-14, 5-14.
Total (for 8 wkts declared, 64 overs) ..... 242	<b>Bowling:</b> Blignaut 4-1-12-3 (2nb), Hondo 6-1-8-2, Ervine 3-1-2-0, Price 1-0-1-0. — AFP



**CHAMP AND THE LITTLE ONE:** India's star batsman Sachin Tendulkar holds his four-year-old son Arjun while promoting kart racing at a racing circuit in Bombay yesterday. — AFP

## Sehwag is engaged



**BIG DAY:** Indian cricketer Virender Sehwag and his fiancée Arti Singh after his engagement ceremony in New Delhi. — Reuters

**NEW DELHI** — Set to open a new innings of a kind, Indian cricketer Virender Sehwag got engaged to New Delhi girl Arti Singh at a solemn ceremony here yesterday. Sehwag, clad in a white suit, slipped the engagement ring into golden saree draped Arti's finger at the function attended by close relatives and friends at City Park Hotel, Pitampura. Himself a simple and reserve person off the field, the 24-year-old star cricketer was impressed with Arti's down-to-earth nature and will tie the nuptial knot on April 22, four days after the Indian team returns from Pakistan, family sources said. The 'Prince of Najafgarh' was stumped by the homey maiden from Delhi, who was also the unanimous choice of our family, they said. Arti, who belongs to a middle-class Jat family, is in her early twenties and currently pursuing a diploma course. She would keep home for Viru, sources added.

Sehwag is expected to be picked for the 40-day tour of Pakistan where India will play three Tests and a five-match One-day series. A security cordon by the Delhi police and hotel security staff was thrown around the venue and media persons were not allowed to enter the hall where the ceremony took place. — PTI

## Hewitt outlasts Ferrero to win second title of season

**ROTTERDAM** — Lleyton Hewitt lifted his second title in three tournaments this season, fighting back to defeat second seed Juan Carlos Ferrero 6-7 (1/7), 7-5, 6-4 yesterday for victory at the 842,000-euro (\$1.06 million) Rotterdam World Tennis event.

Hewitt, the world number 13 now primed for a move back into the top ten, needed two hours, 40 minutes to earn victory after losing his first and only set of a productive week at the Ahoy Stadium.

Hewitt started the year with a trophy at Sydney and suffered his only loss of the season in the fourth round of the Australian Open against world number one Roger Federer. The Australian, who turns 23 tomorrow, earned 161,000 euros (\$204,000) while Ferrero picked up 85,140 euro (\$108,000).

The match was a re-run of a Davis Cup clash in the final last December, when Hewitt also prevailed against the Spaniard.

Ferrero had done it tough all week, needing to beat three Dutch opponents and playing in five tie-breaks in his first four matches. — AFP

## Lankan wins Pakistan golf championship

**KARACHI** — Sri Lankan Lalith Kumara won Pakistan's national championship here yesterday, beating an Indian duo in the race to become the best South Asian golfer.

Kumara, 25, from Colombo, finished with a nine-under-par 285 to leave the Indian duo

Harinder Gupta and Vikrant Chopra in second and third place respectively in the championship, which also involved golfers from Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Pakistan won the international team event while Sri Lanka grabbed the Jayawardene Trophy. — AFP

## SA halt India's winning streak

**DHAKA** — South Africa halted India's winning streak with a narrow three-run win in the super league match at the ICC under-19 World Cup here yesterday.

After South Africa elected to bat and made 226 for five, India recovered from a middle order collapse to run the Africans close before being all out for 223 in 47.1 overs at the Bangabandhu Stadium.

Robin Uthappa (25) and Shikhar Dhawan (66) put on 86 runs for the opening wicket as India began their reply strongly.

But they slid to 130 for six and then 161 for eight before some unflinching batting from Yikram Solanki (29) and Abhishek Sharma (43) brought them inches close to victory.

While Virmon Philander (2-37) took the crucial wickets of Dhawan and captain Ambatti Rayudu, it was Vincenzo Pennanza (3-41) who gave South Africa the victory with his intelligent bowling in the nerve-racking final stages. — PTI

## Best game of my career, says Vaas

**DAMBULLA** — Left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas described his match-winning performance for Sri Lanka against Australia yesterday as the best game of his long career.

The 30-year-old Vaas followed three wickets for 48 with a nervous final over performance as Sri Lanka levelled the five-match series at 1-1 with a one-run victory.

Australia, chasing 246 for victory, needed eight runs for the final over. Skipper Marvan Atapattu considered bowling leg-spinner Upul Chandana but then handed the ball to Vaas.

Andrew Symonds and Michael Bevan scored just two runs off the first four balls and could not hit a needed boundary off the last two. "Marvan (Atapattu) asked me to bowl and I just tried to use all my experience to bowl six yorkers," said Vaas, who won the man of the match award.

"I have played 220-odd matches but I think this was the best match that I have played," he added.

The other highlights of Vaas's One-day career include a world record eight for 19 against Zimbabwe in 2001 and a hat-trick against Bangladesh in the 2003 World Cup.

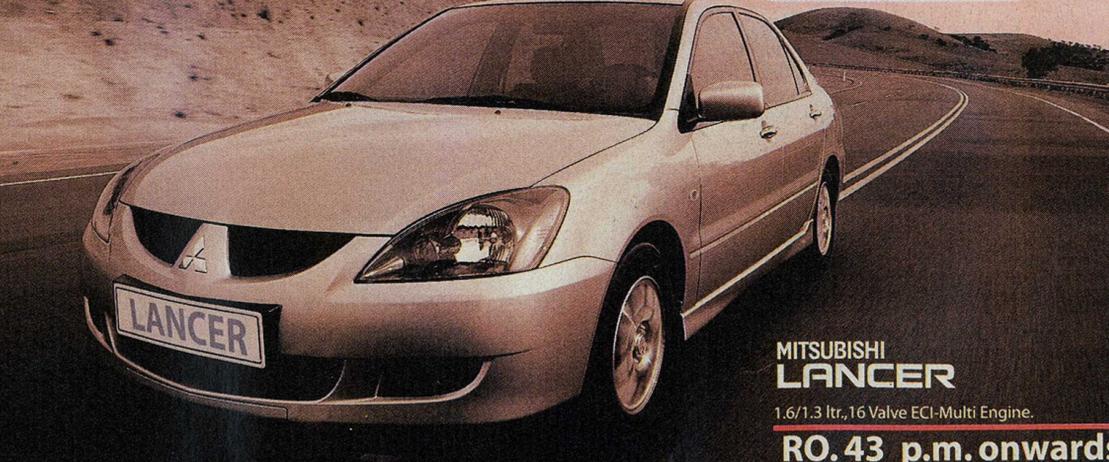
Atapattu praised his seamer, saying: "You can't ask more than that." However, Atapattu was disappointed with the manner in which Sri Lanka lost seven wickets for 29 runs at the end of their innings. "Having scored 245, we thought it was a good score but the way we finished the innings was not too good," he said.

"We did not plan enough at the end and if we had concentrated on getting ones and twos we would have got around 270-odd."

Australian skipper Ricky Ponting was still upbeat despite the narrow defeat.

"The guys will take a lot of confidence out of knowing that we can perform as well as we did today on a very worn Sri Lanka wicket," he said. — Reuters

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## Thank You

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all who conveyed their condolences through telephone calls, faxes, e-mails, cables, letters and newspaper advertisements on the sad demise of  
**my beloved mother.**

Your kind and sympathetic words  
have been a source of great strength  
through this difficult time.

**Saud Salim Abdullah Bahwan Al Mukhaini**

# No-frills bring flying thrills to Asia's masses

SINGAPORE — As the white and red AirAsia plane, a Boeing 737-300, prepared to land at Singapore's Changi Airport on its maiden flight last week, chief executive Tony Fernandes walked into the cockpit to view his latest conquest.

The landing was a sweet moment for the maverick Malaysian entrepreneur following his persistent struggle with the Singapore government for permission to fly his no-frills airlines into the city-state.

"It was very emotional for me. As a young kid, I used to fly on MSA (Malaysia-Singapore Airlines) to come to Singapore with my mum," Fernandes told reporters travelling on the inaugural flight.

"So to actually fly in on your own company is kind of cool. So I had to be there. I requested the captain whether I could sit with him."

Fernandes' trail-blazing effort is revolutionising air travel in the region as more budget airlines prepare to bring the flying experience to millions of Asians who have never taken a plane in their lives because of prohibitive prices.

The Malaysian budget carrier has expanded hub operations to Thailand and is keen on setting up a joint venture in

Singapore, where two more no-frills rivals — Tiger Airways and ValuAir — are set to take flight this year.

Peter Harbison, managing director of the Australia-based Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, said "dozens" of no-frills carriers were expected to emerge in the next 10 years.

Fernandes relishes an encounter with a Singapore taxi driver who thanked him because he and his family flew on an airplane for the first time to have a holiday to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

AirAsia's call centre in Bangkok is a beehive of activity as 40 young Thais process 6,000 calls daily, including inquiries and bookings from first-time flyers, its manager Nuanphan Manuk said.

Star buys are tickets to Phuket and Chiang Mai, both popular Thai resorts.

Flying a budget airline is a pleasant experience for short-haul flights, even without the amenities offered by standard carriers, such as free meals, drinks and inflight movies or music.

On AirAsia for example, the cabin is clean despite the quick turnaround time at airports. Seats are covered with black leather and the floor is laid out with a red carpet.

Passengers have to pay for food, water and other beverages

ages sold by flight stewardesses, dressed in glaring red suits. But for one who has had a heavy meal before boarding, in-flight meals are unnecessary.

To those who need food, prices are affordable. For the two-hour Singapore-Bangkok flight, prices range between 20 baht (51 US cents) for a hot drink and 100 baht for a snack pack of light food, a fruit drink and a pen.

But the ultimate attraction is the ticket cost which can be 70 per cent cheaper than those charged by regular airlines.

British tourist Alex Alden, 25, who was aboard the maiden Singapore-Bangkok flight on February 16, said he was happy to give up services normally seen as routine on premium carriers to get a cheaper ticket.

"I don't care about any pampering. It's a short-haul flight," said Alden of St Albans, England. "The price is good for my budget."

Singaporean businessman Ronald Chen, 29, said he was impressed with the service despite having to pay for water and snacks that normally come free. "The price makes travelling more accessible to everybody for holidays. It will encourage young people like myself to travel," Chen said.

— AFP

# Undercurrent remains bullish; no sign of volatility

By Palazhi Ashok Kumar

MUSCAT — During the week ended February 19, 2004 (February 15-19), the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) 30-share index posted a marginal fall of 0.37 per cent (1.09 points) at 295.55 points compared with 296.64 points registered in the preceding week.

In general, the undercurrent remained fundamentally bullish and securities displayed a mixed trend. There had not been any signs of high volatility and the market mood was more or less in line with the region.

## Market Watch

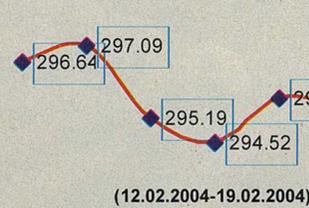
Precisely, the 1.09-points fall in MSM-30 share index can be attributed to the mixed market behaviour and the conservative approach of small and big players. In principle, institutional investors have been adopting a well-diversified investment policy since June-end 2003 and since then, the capital gains and losses have been remaining relatively comfortable and trading volume in terms of shares traded and traded value registering impressive growth.

During the week under review, the MSM trading volume registered an increase of over six per cent at RO17.77 million compared with RO16.75 million recorded in the previous week as the aggregate number of securities traded rose from 7.3 million to over eight million with regular, parallel, third and bond markets witnessing an all-round growth in volume.

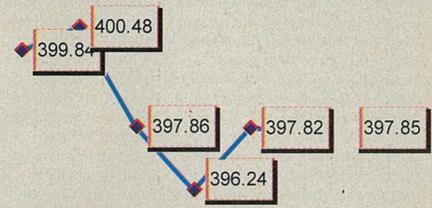
The number of shares traded in the regular market rose from 3.2 million to 3.5 million, parallel market from 3.7 million to 4.1 million, third market from over 347,000 to over 354,000 and the number of bonds traded rose from over 212,000 to over 898,000.

The brokerage, Global Financial (Parallel Market) registered the highest volume during the week with the number of shares traded and traded

MSM-30



BANKING & INVESTMENT



## MSM scoreboard for the week ended Feb. 19, 2004

GAINERS	Wk. Close 19.02.2004	% Gain	Shares Traded	52-Week High	Mkt. Cap RO Million
Muscat Finance	3.54	10.625	17,624	3.55	23.08
Areej Vegetables	2.95	9.665	500	2.95	6.78
Transgulf	1.74	11.53	293,700	1.8	7.06
Dhofar Beverage	1.54	10	500	1.54	11.78
Oman Chlorine	1.71	6.2	143,844	2	7.9
LOSERS	Wk. Close	Loss Baisa	Shares Traded	52-Wk Low	Capital RO Million
National Aluminium	2.4	200	13,150	1.5	3.357
Shell Oman	7.3	160	13,200	6.15	10
Al Jazeera Services	3.09	110	128,682	2.41	5.77
Renaissance Services	5.77	100	73,574	1.32	6.29
Al Khaleej Polypropylene	2.95	90	67,950	2.33	3.726
VOLUME	Regular	Parallel	Third	Bond	Total
Shares Traded	3.53 million	4.13 million	0.354 million	0.898 million	8.01 million
Traded Value RO Million	8.51	7.03	0.113	2.11	17.77

value reaching 1.4 million and RO2.83 million, respectively. The scrip declined 30 baisa at RO2.150 (RO2.180). The 52-week high is RO2.240 and low is RO0.860.

In terms of gains on market

prices, Muscat Finance, Areej Vegetables, Transgulf Industrial, Dhofar Beverage and Oman Chlorine were top gainers of the week, and National Aluminium, Shell Oman, Al Jazeera Services, Al

Khaleej Polypropylene and Renaissance Services, top losers.

Though the undercurrent remained steady, technically, the Banking & Investment sector stocks — the most active

segment on MSM — did not witness all-round fresh interest except the daily-traded stocks such as National Bank of Oman, Alliance Housing Bank, OIB, Onic Holding, Transgulf, BankMuscat, etc., etc. Banking & Investment sector index lost 1.99 points last week at 397.85 points compared with 399.84 points, showing a net fall of 0.5 per cent.

In general, bank shares such as NBO, BankMuscat and Alliance Housing Bank exhibited losses on account of profit-taking. Over 251,894 shares of Alliance Housing Bank were traded last week. However, the price lost 50 baisa and closed at RO1.880 (RO1.930) after touching a weekly high of RO1.970 on the first day of the week. The 52-week high is RO1.970 and low is RO0.860. The improved working results of the bank for the year 2003 maintain the scrip at the current levels and the week's fall is simply profit-taking.

National Bank of Oman lost 30 baisa at RO3.070 (RO3.100) after touching a high of RO3.150, and 159,268 shares changed hands during the week. The 52-week high is RO3.200 and low is RO1.250.

Continued on Page 20

# BAE injects \$10m into Oasis

ABU DHABI — Defence and aerospace giant BAE Systems is to pump \$10 million into Oasis International Leasing, the Abu Dhabi-based firm announced yesterday.

The cash injection is a loan convertible into shares when a planned rights issue takes place, Oasis said in a statement.

"This is a significant vote of confidence in Oasis Leasing by our largest shareholder. It will provide new money which can be used to capitalise on the opportunities in the leasing market," said chairman Mohammed Saif Al Mazrouei.

The deal was signed in Abu Dhabi by Al Mazrouei and by John MacBeath, BEA's managing director, industrial and business development. "As a founder shareholder of Oasis Leasing, BAE Systems now underlines its long-

standing commitment to Oasis Leasing and to the development of the United Arab Emirates' financial services sector," said MacBeath.

At the end of 2003, Oasis' asset portfolio included 21 aircraft on lease to major regional and international flag carriers and a 50 per cent stake in a capsize dry-bulk vessel.

The company aims to build from today's \$560 million value to \$1.2 billion by 2006, with investments in aircraft, shipping, infrastructure and power plant financing. The cash injection would "enable us to take advantage of the business opportunities that are beginning to emerge as the aircraft leasing industry continues to recover and the world's major airlines reorganise and put in place new financing strategies," said CEO Gordon Dixon. — AFP

# Ringgit peg review not on Malaysia's agenda, says govt

KUALA LUMPUR — Economists and exporters have backed Malaysia's decision to maintain its five-year-old ringgit peg to the dollar despite a fall in the US unit, saying it has guaranteed financial and economic stability by keeping out rogue currency speculators.

Second Finance Minister Nor Mohammed Yacop said last week the government saw no need to review the peg at this time, despite calls from some quarters that the ringgit should be a free floating currency as it had been before 1998.

But Nor Mohammed was quick to add that Malaysia had "no ideological attachment" to having a currency peg and would do away with it if it served the national interest.

Nor Mohammed said that if the US dollar weakened to \$1.40 to the euro and to less than ¥100 to a dollar, the government would have to seriously consider a review.

"If the two currencies strengthen to beyond those levels (against the dollar), we do not want the ringgit to be out of whack," he was quoted as saying by the *Edge Financial Daily* on Friday. In 1998 Malaysia pegged the ringgit at 3.80 to the dollar amid the turmoil of Asia's financial crisis. The government said then the fixed rate was not intended to be permanent.

Azrul Azwar, an economist with MIDF-SISMA Securities, said that the floating of the ringgit would allow currency speculators to strike at the currency as had occurred prior to 1998.

"At this moment, there is no justification to tinker with the peg. It has done more good than harm," he said.

Azrul said any review of the peg should take into consideration the ringgit's position vis-a-vis currencies in regional countries that are Malaysia's key trading partners.

"For one thing, the ringgit has not depreciated much against regional currencies and there is no fear of imported inflation," he said. Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers vice-president Paul Low also believed there was no reason to repeg or float the ringgit, even if the yuan was revalued. The dollar peg had strengthened and safeguarded the economy, he said.

Malaysia's economic outlook remains strong and the government has predicted growth of 5.5 to 6 per cent for 2004, up from 4.5 per cent expected for 2003.

"No one knows if the weakness of the US dollar is of long-term or short-term. We just cannot shift the ringgit peg," he said.

"The current rate of the ringgit is attracting more tourists and students to Malaysia. It is boosting economic activities," he said.

However former treasury official Malek Merican warned that the maintenance of the fixed exchange rate would result in the continued and needless depreciation of the Malaysian unit as the dollar sank. — AFP

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OTC GROUP  
THE SYMBOL OF CARE

Oman Trading Establishment LLC

Olympus Camedia C5000

By Kevin Washington

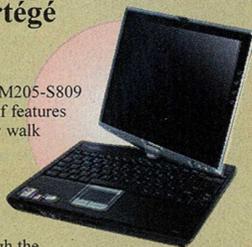


MORE than a few friends and colleagues have asked me recently which digital camera to buy. Most of them want to print 8-by-10-inch photos, spend less than \$500 and be able to slip their new toy into a shirt pocket.

While the Olympus Camedia C5000 Zoom Digital Camera (\$400) is a bit big for carrying in a shirt pocket, it otherwise fills the bill for anyone who wants quality in a small package for less than \$500. The Camedia C5000 is a 5-megapixel camera with absolutely wonderful optics. Its digital images can be printed up to 11-by-14-inch and are sharp and colourful. And if you don't like what you're seeing on your camera monitor after you've begun firing away, the camera has 12 shooting modes, such as a super macro mode which allows you to focus on an object an inch away from the lens, and full manual control so that you can make adjustments in exposure and sharpness. In addition to its photo capabilities, it also shoots brief QuickTime movies. You can add an external flash with the hot shoe or use the built-in flash, which produced nice indoor pictures at a recent party. While I am a fan of compact flash cards, the Olympus xD card that ships with the camera offers solid performance. Moreover, unlike the old Smart Media cards, the xD cards are being created with capacities up to 512 megabytes right now — and might reach capacities of 8 gigabytes in the future. So you can buy a large-capacity card if you're going on vacation and want to keep shooting for weeks. I'm not excited by the proprietary rechargeable battery. But it's fair to say that since I misplaced the recharger, I have been able to shoot dozens of photographs without having to charge the battery.

— LA Times-Washington Post

Toshiba Portégé M205-S809



THE Toshiba Portégé M205-S809 offers a nice balance of features that lets it successfully walk the line between ultra-portable notebook and tablet PC, and mobile technology, like hiking, is all about balance. Although the M205 lacks an internal optical drive, it comes bundled with a USB DVD/CD-RW combo drive. Toshiba's convertible notebook can swivel into a tablet and includes support for wireless, Ethernet, and dial-up networking. It also has one VGA and two USB ports, as well as a PC Card and an SD Card slot. Although the M205 is more expensive than Fujitsu's LifeBook T3000, it's worth it.

**The good:** Bundled USB combo drive; light, uncluttered design; wireless on/off switch; SD Card slot; SXGA display.

**The bad:** Mediocre performance; pricey. Shopping for a tablet is a little like packing for an extended camping trip: every ounce of creature comfort you throw in the bag weighs on your performance and endurance.

**The bottom line:** The Portégé M205-S809 successfully combines the performance of a notebook with the functionality of a tablet, but it's expensive and fails to outpace other convertible tablets.

Machines T3025

PICK up the eMachines T3025 and you'll get a system that's well suited right out of the box to handle most office chores and to tack-

le some multimedia apps, such as editing photos and ripping MP3s. And with its open AGP slot, fast Athlon XP processor, surprisingly spacious hard drive, and more memory than you'd expect for the price, this budget PC will grow with you: you can replace the onboard graphics with an advanced graphics card, should you find your calling as a digital video editor or a 3D gamer. You could choose the 17-inch LCD that eMachines bundled with the system.

**The good:** Fast Athlon XP processor with strong allotment of memory; AGP slot gives you an option to improve the graphics; spacious hard drive; first-rate LCD.

**The bad:** Integrated graphics leech 64MB of system memory; system not customisable until after purchase; bundled two-piece speakers are only passable.

**The bottom line:** The eMachines T3025 offers a strong mix of features and performance for the price; it's a solid budget buy if you want to upgrade down the road.

Motorola V600

LAST year, Oscar nominees received the Motorola T722i, an envy-inspiring phone. Taking its place at this year's Academy Awards is the Motorola V600, which doesn't have the most innovative design but packs plenty of features to complement a movie star's jet-set lifestyle. This Bluetooth-enabled flip model allows world-roaming on GSM 850/900/1800/1900 and GPRS, sports a built-in camera and speakerphone, and offers a rich 65,536-colour display. Though competitively priced compared with other AT&T mobiles of its class, the V600 still doesn't come cheap, costing \$299 with a two-year contract.

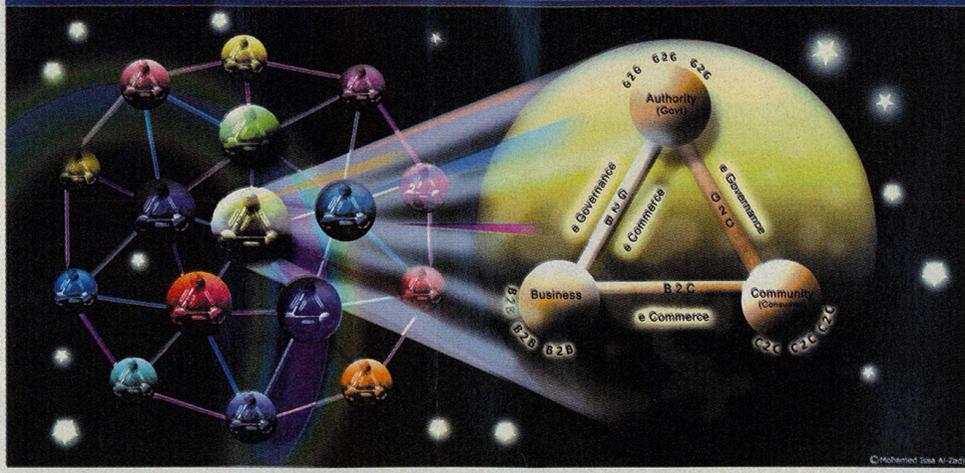
**The good:** Along with quad-band world-roaming and a bright colour screen, the V600 provides a respectable 5MB of shared memory for storing photos and video clips. Speaking of movies, the built-in camera does double duty as a video recorder. You can even dub your own soundtrack. Another bonus: You can sync Outlook appointments with a cable or a Bluetooth wireless connection.

**The bad:** A built-in speakerphone is a mobile must-have, but its implementation in the V600 is disappointing. You can't activate the feature until you've placed or received a call. We also wish the phone supported next-generation EDGE; the technology will enable data-delivery speeds of 70Kbps to 135Kbps when its networks are built out later this year.

**The bottom line:** This Motorola has a lot of promise and will serve nominees well. But for those of us who don't get goody bags, the V600's \$299 price is steep, especially when you consider that smart phones can be had for less.



The Information Marketplace



What's Google's answer for the future?

By Joel Achenbach

IN the beginning before Google a darkness was upon the land.

We stumbled around in libraries. We lifted from the *World Book Encyclopaedia*. We paged through the nearly microscopic listings in the heavy green volumes of the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. We latched onto hearsay and rumour and the thinly sourced mutterings of people alleged to be experts. We guessed. We conjectured. And then we gave up, consigning ourselves to ignorance.

Only now in the bright light of the Google era do we see how dim and gloomy was our pre-googleian world. In the distant future, historians will have a common term for the period prior to the appearance of Google: the Dark Ages.

There have been many fine Internet search engines over the years — Yahoo!, AltaVista, Lycos, Infoseek, Ask Jeeves and so on — but Google is the first to become a utility, a basic piece of societal infrastructure like the power grid, sewer lines and the Internet itself.

People keep finding new ways to use Google. It is now routine for the romantically savvy to Google a prospective date. "Google hackers" use the infiltrative powers of Google to pilfer bank records and Social Security numbers. The vain Google themselves.

It was about three years ago that the transitive verb "to Google" entered the lexicon, but it was only last year that Google passed all rival search engines in the number of queries handled — now upwards of 200 million a day. So phenomenal is its success that some industry watchers think an initial public offering of Google stock could raise \$20 billion and trigger a second dot-com boom.

"You build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door," Stewart Brand, computer guru and president of the Long Now Foundation, says of Google. "A wider path, I think, has never been beaten in the history of the world. It's an astonishing mousetrap story."

In the dotcom world, nothing stays the same for long, and it's not clear that Google will forever maintain its dominance over such ferocious rivals as Yahoo! and Microsoft. But the business story of Google is less interesting than the technological one: If information is power, then Google has helped change the world. Knowledge is measurably easier to obtain. Google works. Google knows.

The world used to be transformed by voyages of discovery, religious movements, epidemic globe-circling diseases, the whims of rulers and the depredations of armies. But over the centuries, technology has emerged as the primary change agent, the thing that can shrink a planet, undermine dictators and turn 14-year-olds into publishers.

The question is, who's going to build the next mousetrap? What will it do? The laboratories of Internet companies are furiously trying to come up with the next generation of search engine. Whatever it is and whatever it's called, it will likely make the current Google searches seem as antiquated as cranking car engines by hand.

In the early days of search engines, finding information was like fishing in a canal: You might hook something good, but you were just as likely to reel in an old tin can or a rubber boot. Now you often find exactly what you want. One reason Google works so well

today is that there's so much for its robotic crawlers to explore. Google initially searched about 20 million web pages; the company's home page now boasts that it searches 3,307,998,701 pages.

"In 1996, if you tried to Google someone, if Google existed, it wouldn't have been a very satisfying experience," says Seth Godin, author of a number of best-selling e-books. "We hit a critical mass of really valuable stuff that was online, I think, about 2000."

The expansion of the information universe makes the navigational tool all the more valuable. And yet the search function at first seemed to be an unglamorous computer application. The pioneering search engine companies, including Yahoo!, Excite, AltaVista and Lycos, wanted to transform themselves into

any other bells and whistles.

But what results! Google has farms of computers working in parallel. You can put in a couple of words and — gzzzzt! — get 600,000-plus results within some preposterously brief amount of time. (Google brags about it: "Search took 0.17 seconds." Showoffs!)

Google, the creation of Stanford graduate students Sergey Brin and Larry Page, is like many other search engines in its basic operation. It has powerful software programs that automatically "crawl" the web, clicking on every possible link, scouting the terrain. What has made Google special is that, in assessing the quality of sites, it takes note of how many other pages link to any given page. This is an old idea from academia, called citation analysis. If many websites link to a particular page, the page rises in Google's vaunted "page rank" and is more likely to be on the first page of the search results.

"You're getting the advantage of the group mind," says Paul Saffo, a research director at the Institute for the Future.

This is a key concept: As the web has grown, it has developed a kind of embedded wisdom. Obviously the web isn't a conscious entity, but neither is it a completely random pile of stuff. The way one part links to another reflects the preferences of web users — and Google tapped into that. Google, in detecting patterns on the web, harvested meaning from all that madness.

This points the way to one of the next big leaps for search engines: finding meaning in the way a single person searches the web. In other words, the search engines will study the user's queries and web habits and, over time, personalise all future searches. Right now, Google and the other search engines don't really know their users.

For example, Saffo isn't really interested in the stuff that most people look for when they do a web search. He's one of the premier futurists of Silicon Valley and fondly recalls the days, back in the 1980s and early 1990s, the pre-web era, when the Internet was the reserve of the technological elite who posted their brilliant thoughts on electronic bulletin boards. Now, everyone from about third grade up has an e-mail address and loiters around the web as though it's the corner 7-Eleven. The results of a web search reflect the tastes of a broad swath of ordinary Americans who in some cases are still wearing short pants.

"The more people get on the web, the more the web becomes the vaster wasteland that is the successor to the vast wasteland of television. I don't care what the majority of people are looking at, because the majority of people are really boring," Saffo says.

He needs a better search engine. He needs one that knows that he's a big-brain tech guru and not an eighth-grader with a paper due.

"The field is called user modelling," says Dan Gruhl of IBM. "It's all about computers watching interactions with people to try to understand their interests and something about them."

Imagine a version of Google that's got a bit of TiVo in it: It doesn't require you to pose a query. It already knows! It's one step ahead of you. It has learned your habits and thought processes and interests. It's your secretary, your colleague, your counsellor, your own graduate student doing research for which you'll get all the credit.

To put it in computer terminology, it is your intelligent agent.

— LA Times-Washington Post

In the dotcom world, nothing stays the same for long, and it's not clear that Google will forever maintain its dominance over such ferocious rivals as Yahoo! and Microsoft. But the business story of Google is less interesting than the technological one: If information is power, then Google has helped change the world. Knowledge is measurably easier to obtain. Google works.

something snazzier, a "portal," the full gee-whiz Internet Century home page that would offer the user a link to everything between here and Neptune, plus plane tickets.

But the history of computer technology is full of companies that failed to see the potential glory right in front of them. In the early 1980s, IBM thought that the "operating system" within the computer wasn't nearly as important as the hardware, the box itself. And then Microsoft, which benefited from that oversight, became so focused on software programs that it was slow to capitalise on the Internet revolution, leaving Netscape to create the first commercial web browser. And then almost everyone underestimated Search.

Not Google. When the company debuted in September 1998, it looked like a throwback. This wasn't a portal. The home page showed mostly white space, anchored by a little rectangle, a box, perfectly blank. Fill in blank and get results. This was plain ol' boring Search, without news headlines, plane tickets, e-mail or

Morpheus's new version  
Morpheus 4.0, Music City/Streamcast

By Michael Tedeschi

DESPITE the entertainment industry's best efforts, file swapping on peer-to-peer networks — not all of which is even illegal — remains a reality. Morpheus 4.0 aims to provide a unified front end to all these services, hooking into not just the widely used Gnutella networks but also the smaller, more esoteric eDonkey and FastTrack systems. A quicker tabbed interface makes it easier to hop between such key functions as file searches and activity monitoring; the helpful option of downloading the same file from multiple sources at once, however, remains absent.

Some parts of Morpheus are just excess baggage: Its bloated Library and Player don't offer any new playlist features, the chat service is full of inane banter, and the bundled adware, stuffed in the download to help Streamcast cover its development costs, pops ads across your screen. At least Morpheus is upfront about what adware get installed where, and how to remove it (afterward, you'll have to click through repeated error messages telling you to reinstall the full, ad-soaked thing).

Forget about it

Mafia

By Monty Phan



IF working for the mob is really this tedious, then perhaps this video game *Mafia* could be used as a deterrent against

choosing a life of crime. Ever since *Grand Theft Auto 3* shot to popularity in 2001, plenty of games have tried to emulate its free-roaming, mission-style play. On the surface, *Mafia* seems a 1930s-era version of *GTA 3*, with one major difference: It's not nearly as fun. As Tommy Angelo, a taxi driver in a fictional Prohibition-era US city, you start off on the right side of the law, until two mobsters end up in your cab while fleeing from members of a rival family. When the rival family's goons track you down to exact some revenge, you take off to the hangout of the two mobsters you helped, thereby entering their ranks. The game's fictional city, Lost Heaven, is large and detailed, populated by pedestrians, 30s-style cars and electric trolleys. Much of the beginning of the game involves driving around, which is a good way to learn the layout of the city, but it's not that fun. First of all, most of the cars are the same.

True to the vehicles of the era, they don't go that fast and they handle poorly, so turning too sharply can send your car tumbling or fishtailing out of control.

Then there's the most annoying aspect: load times. The city's layout includes an island in the centre, and each time you enter or exit the island via a bridge, the game pauses for about a minute to load. This would be somewhat acceptable if you had to cross the bridge only occasionally, but that's not the case. Many missions send you from one side of the city to the other, and it's just not fun to play through all the pauses. Finally, the game isn't that innovative. The control scheme is awkward, making Tommy difficult to manoeuvre, which can be frustrating, especially during shootouts. Breaking the speed limit or crashing into another car will draw the cops, and the level of enforcement — from paying a fine to coming at you in full force — depends on how serious your crime and whether you do what the police tell you. Otherwise, get ready for that high-speed, 45-mph chase.

Unlimited action

Champions Of Norrath: Realms Of EverQuest

By Tom Ham



THIS EverQuest spinoff demands no familiarity at all with the title gamers call "EverCrack" for its time-sucking addictiveness. You don't have to spend weeks learning EQ's exhaustive online universe — but after Champions' easier initiation, you



may find yourself drawn in just the same. Champions takes place hundreds of years before the EverQuest timeline; you play a barbarian warrior, a high-elf cleric, a ranger, a wizard or a shadow knight in a war against an invading horde of orcs and goblins. The basics of Champions' 45 levels stay fairly constant — enter an area, fight the bad guys you run into there, pick up stuff afterward — but things are never the same twice. The game randomly draws new dungeons and generates and places new items out of an inventory of more than 10,000 objects. So that rare, flaming sword you find in a lake won't be there the next time, and neither will the lake. In addition to the usual, experience-driven "levelling up" development of your character, you can buy individual abilities and spells with skill points earned by surviving long enough. Your weapons and armour can also be endowed with magical strength by some gems and rare stones found in dungeons. This game opens up still further when you get into its multiple-player possibilities: Champions supports four players in one room or online (using Sony's Network Adaptor for the PS2 and, if you want to chat with your competitors, USB keyboards or headsets). And unlike EverQuest, this online action is free. — LA Times-Washington Post

## New virus on the loose

ANOTHER virus is on the loose, but few people know about. In this article I will briefly write about the virus and ways to detect and remove it as well.

The virus is called NetSky, and like most viruses, it arrives via e-mail. How it works is that the virus once it affects a system, spreads to other mapped drives. Also, it tries to locate the address book inside the affected system, then sends itself to the users saved on the address book.

Now how do we know if the e-mail is a NetSky virus? It might arrive from the e-mail address skynet@skynet.de or from a fabricated (fake) e-mail address. The subject of the e-mail can be from the following that I gathered from Internet websites:

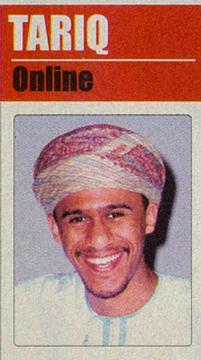
- fake
- for
- hello
- hi
- immediately
- information
- it

- read
- something
- stolen
- unknown
- warning
- you

The message body can be from the following:

- about me
- anything ok?
- do you? that's funny
- from the chatter
- greetings
- here
- here is the document.
- here it is
- here, the cheats
- here, the introduction
- here, the serials
- i found this document about you
- i have your password!
- i hope it is not true!
- i wait for a reply!
- i'm waiting ok
- information about you
- is that from you?
- is that true?
- is that your account?
- is that your name?
- the writer of this document!

- my hero
- read it immediately!
- read the details.
- reply
- see you
- something about you!
- something is fool
- something is going wrong
- something is going wrong!
- stuff about you?
- take it easy
- that is bad
- that's wrong why?
- what does it mean?
- yes, really?
- you are a bad writer
- you are bad
- you earn money
- you feel the same
- you try to steal
- your name is wrong



- disco
- doc
- document
- final
- found
- friend
- jokes
- location
- mail2
- mails
- me
- message
- misc
- msg

Along with the e-mail is an attachment file, and below are some of the names of the file:

- aboutyou
- attachment
- bill
- concert
- creditcard
- details
- dinner

- nomoney
- note
- object
- part2
- party
- posting
- product
- ps
- ranking
- release
- shower
- story
- stuff
- swimmingpool
- talk
- textile
- topseller
- website

The above names were taken from the Internet. Therefore, be careful whenever you open e-mail and attachments from the above list. What happens if the attachment is clicked by accident? A fabricated error message is displayed to fool the victim. The virus then alters the system configuration specifically the Windows directory and places a file called services.exe. Also, it makes some changes to the system

registry and places some keys to load the file automatically. Below is what is added: HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run "service" = C:\WINNT\services.exe -serv

However, the anti-virus software must be up-to-date in order to detect and recognize the virus. You can download the definitions (update) from your respective vendor (be it McAfee or Norton or others). For those who are already infected, you can download a program to scan and remove the virus <http://vil.nai.com/vil/stinger>.

Please note that the virus currently infects Windows Operating systems only.

*If you have a particular problem with or if you have an interesting or intriguing aspect about computers, I would like to know about it. Just send me e-mail at <http://www.tariq.net>. I would be happy to help you solve it. Your problem and my solution will be published in the next issue of Tariq Online*

## In Japan, wireless vision of future

By Anthony Faiola

IN search of a chic cafe hidden in the neon alleys of a teeming Tokyo business district, Hiroki Wai activated the global positioning system on his cellphone and punched in the cafe's phone number. Instantly, a detailed map appeared and a perky female computer voice was navigating Wai toward a hot date with a \$9 latte.

"Now turn left, now turn right, walk straight ahead... Hurray, you're here!" the voice chirped from his receiver. A satellite in Earth orbit charted his progress on a full-color street grid displayed on the screen of his cell phone.

"The cellphone is way past being just a phone in Japan," said Wai, 32, a systems engineer who wakes up with his phone alarm at 6:30am and then uses the phone almost every waking hour to send and receive dozens of e-mails, link remotely to his home-office PC, download music and read newspapers, even novels, during his daily commutes. "For us," he said, "the cell phone is now a way of life."

The cellphone market in the United States is set for a major shake-up after the announcement recently of a \$41 billion buyout of AT&T Wireless by Atlanta-based Cingular Wireless, with the merged juggernaut poised to quicken the rollout of such advanced services as access to the mobile Internet and other third-generation, or 3G, technologies. Behind the rush to boost cellphone uses in the United States lies a less flattering truth: In recent years, America has lumbered forward like a John Deere tractor on the mobile information superhighway, while Japan has zoomed ahead like a Z-car.

Technologies considered experimental or novel in the United States have already gone mainstream here, giving rise to an unparalleled cellphone culture. Today, Japan offers a fascinating glimpse into a possible future for Americans: life in a wireless world through the cellphone.

About 70 million Japanese — 55 per cent of the population — have signed up for Internet access from their cellular phones, a threefold increase from 2000. Cellphones, or *keitai* in Japanese, are closing in on computers as the device of choice for surfing the Internet. While the Japanese are using their cellphones in the same way many Americans use their laptop computers or personal digital assistants, they also are pulling out their phones to watch TV, navigate labyrinthine city streets with built-in GPS systems, download music, take and transmit home movies, scan bar-coded information, get e-coupons for discounts on food and entertainment, pay bills, play Final Fantasy, even program karaoke machines.

While at least some of these uses are expected to become commonplace in the United States, Japan's penchant for the cutting edge, the cute and the compact has given rise to a particular, occasionally peculiar, *keitai* culture.

Many young people today even describe their cell phones as extensions of themselves. On subways and trains throughout Japan, *keitai* addicts, oblivious to the world

## Proper care yields smooth computing

By James Gallo

WHILE computers have the ability to bring home users endless entertainment, and fun, anyone who owns one knows that without proper care, computers also offer equal amounts of frustration.

That is precisely why people should protect their investment with routine maintenance. In an age of rampant viruses, spyware and browser hijackings, most owners know that they should have a virus program, spyware catcher and firewall. Routine cleaning of the fans, defragmenting the hard drives and making sure you use the "Check Disk" feature from time to time can stave off minor and major problems on a Windows-based PC.

Disk defragmenting is an important aspect of helping your computer to run smoothly, according to Microsoft.

"This feature organizes files on the hard disk which allows faster system performance. Disk Defragmenter should be used approximately every six months or when PC users detect a delay in their system's overall performance," says Tracy Overby, product manager for Microsoft Windows' client division.

When a computer saves a file, it breaks it up into many pieces — sometimes thousands of pieces — and spreads them throughout the hard drive. If those pieces are reassembled from time to time into a complete file, the processor has fewer problems retrieving it from the hard drive.

On a defragmented drive, the processor can read the pieces of the file in a logical order. That speeds up access and makes programs run faster.

While Windows has a built-in defragmenter, the Windows version sometimes does not do its job as well as it could, according to Raxco, a company based in Gaithersburg, Maryland, that has developed programs that it says defragment the hard drive more fully, quickly and effectively. Raxco's Perfect Disk 6.0 program (\$44.99 for one computer) defragments all of the files on a computer hard drive, whereas, according to Raxco, Microsoft's built-in defragmenter will skip over some files. Moreover, Microsoft's defragmenter requires 20 per cent of the disk space to be free in order to defragment, while Raxco says Perfect Disk needs only 5 per cent of the disk space to do its job.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Perfect Disk and the Windows defragmenter is the way that they work, according to Raxco officials. Windows' defragmenter takes several passes at the hard drive, chipping away at the data. Perfect Disk defragments in one pass and makes it harder for the drive to become fragmented again as you use your computer, they say.

Defragmenting regularly can save huge amounts of time and aggravation.

Pulling multiple files into specific locations on the hard drive can speed up how a program handles each of hundreds or thousands of files on a hard drive, says Bob Nolan, Raxco chief executive officer. In a corporate setting where a program may need to handle thousands of files, this can be a huge time saver.

"We've seen some absolutely horrible scenarios," Nolan says. "There was a pharmaceutical company with Lotus Notes databases that were in thousands of pieces. We've even seen servers where the disk was so full that it took 15 minutes to log on."

While defragmenting your computer may help it to run smoothly, it is certainly not the only answer to frustrations. Dan Hartman, owner of Discount Computer Services in Baltimore, has a few other recommendations.

"One thing I usually recommend is to run Windows update often. This will often prevent viruses from coming in through security back doors," Hartman said. Users can download and run the latest Windows updates through Microsoft's website.

Mike Menefee, owner of A Plus Computers in Baltimore, also recommends cleaning out temporary Internet files.

"Temp files can help load one particular page more quickly, but if it goes for a while, thousands of files will just build up and the computer has to search through them, making it run slower in the end," Menefee said.

Although not generally recommended for casual computer users, cleaning the physical computer can be a good maintenance measure too. Since computers can get very hot, it is good to occasionally clean (or have a professional clean) the fans inside the computer. This requires opening the case and gently cleaning the fan, Hartman said.

# Apple's iPod



## mini comes up big

By Rob Pegoraro

FINALLY, somebody has outdone the iPod. After years of unsuccessful attempts by Creative, Dell, Rio, Samsung and others to knock Apple's MP3 player off its pedestal, we've got a player that makes the iPod seem like the oversize, clunky relic it (now) is.

That player is Apple's iPod mini, a \$249 gadget not much bigger than a cell phone. It packs the old iPod's virtues into a smaller, lighter, sturdier, more elegant and cheaper design.

Just like its older sibling, the iPod mini stores days' worth of music in the MP3 and AAC formats, including downloads from Apple's iTunes Music Store. It fits in any pocket and quickly connects to any moderately new PC or Mac.

But instead of 15, 20 or 40 gigabytes of disk space to store an entire music library, the mini's hard drive, measuring 3.7 gigabytes, can only hold a 950-song slice of your collection — a scant 63 hours of non-stop listening.

In return, the mini rewards you with a breathtakingly small-size and shape. It weighs 3 7/8 ounces with its headphones and measures 3 5/8 inches long by 2 inches wide by just over a half-inch thick.

The mini's skin — a single piece of anodized aluminium in a choice of five colours — is fingerprint-proof and resists scratches far better than the old iPod's shiny plastic and metal. Only the white expanse of its "ClickWheel" control still picks up dirt with the same ease as its predecessor.

That ClickWheel is a revelation. The old iPod was rightly praised for condensing its controls into one scroll wheel and five buttons, but the mini needs only the scroll wheel and one button to provide the same functions — its play/pause, rewind, forward and menu buttons have been merged into the new ClickWheel, arranged in the same intuitive north-south-east-west layout as the first iPod's controls.

A press of any part of the ClickWheel will wake up this thing (there's no on/off switch, since it goes to sleep automatically if left alone; a small switch next to the headphone jack locks its controls if necessary).

Two more taps have you browsing through your music library by playlists, artists, albums, songs, genres or composers. The iPod is smart enough to speed up its scroll rate as you spend more time scanning a large list — when browsing by artist, one spin around the ClickWheel

takes you from AC/DC to Chuck Brown, but two scoot you all the way to U2.

The only tricky part is knowing when to brake your scrolling to land on a particular track.

Once you've found a song, you don't need to lift a finger off the wheel to adjust volume (spin it), pause it (push its south end), skip to the previous or next song (press east or west once), rewind or fast-forward within a song (press and hold east or west) or navigate up to a song list (press north).

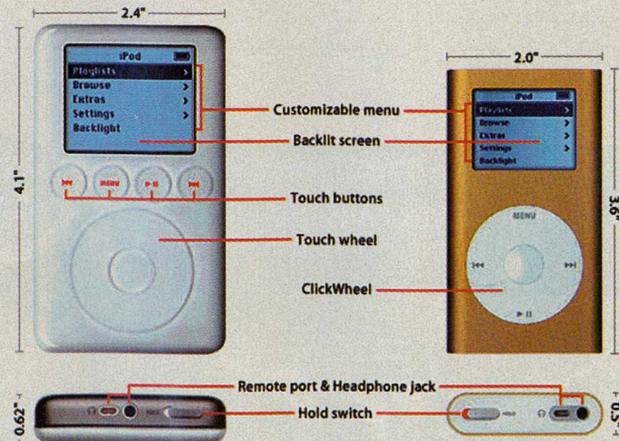
The old iPod worked fine, but this is better.

The closest thing I could find to the mini, Rio's \$199 Nitrus MP3 player, needs four buttons, a thumbwheel and a four-way miniature joystick to provide the same basic functions as the mini's

apparently not programmed to perform a device-compatibility check, offered to reset the mini's firmware. That lobotomised the player until I could revive it with a newer version of the software.

Unsurprisingly, the mini feels more at home on a Mac (OS X 10.1.5 or newer) than on a PC (Win 2000 or XP). The software is easier to install and doesn't litter the desktop with shortcuts to itself, and Apple's iSync program stores your contacts and calendar list on the mini for quick look-ups on its sharp, back-lit, liquid-crystal display. But Windows users can get the same functions with a growing variety of third-party iPod programs; see [www.ipodlounge.com](http://www.ipodlounge.com), for instance.

The mini can also be used as a removable hard drive to transfer files back and forth — and, unlike the old iPod, it comes



ClickWheel.

I tried the iPod mini on short walks, my Metro commute and during jogging — Apple's optional, \$29 armband kept the thing clamped to my arm, but its earbud headphones wouldn't stay in place — and everything worked fine. Battery life, at about 10 hours, exceeded Apple's estimate of eight hours.

With regular use, the internal rechargeable battery will expire after a few years; Apple says it will offer owners a \$99 battery replacement service after the one-year warranty runs out.

The only glitch I encountered came during the initial install, when an older copy of Apple's Windows iPod software,

with both FireWire and USB 2.0 cables in the box, so you can move it from a PC to a Mac without buying extra hardware.

At \$249, the iPod mini costs more than flash memory-based MP3 players. But unlike earlier iPods, the mini is small enough to be used in their place. So you can pay \$100 for a gizmo that carries 30 or so songs, or shell out \$250 for one with 30 times the capacity.

On the other hand, \$300 would buy almost four times as much storage in the entry-level iPod. But unless you just can't live without having your entire music library in your pocket — the mini iPod's more than enough.

— LA Times-Washington Post

Technologies considered experimental or novel in the United States have already gone mainstream in Japan, giving rise to an unparalleled cellphone culture. Today, Japan offers a fascinating glimpse into a possible future for Americans: life in a wireless world through the cellphone

around them, their hyperactive thumbs furiously typing e-mails on cell phones, have become ubiquitous, even stereotypical sights. One Tokyo TV station recently broadcast a reality show featuring a teenage girl whose cellphone was taken away for one week. She was reduced to tears when she finally got it back.

"I get separation anxiety when I am away from my cell phone. It is part of my identity now," confessed Yoshihisa Amano, 26, who works for a software company in central Tokyo. When he makes or receives a call, Amano creates an identity for himself by projecting an animated character onto the other party's phone screen. Amano controls his alter ego's emotions — showing sadness, rage or glee — by pressing different phone keys, and can change characters to suit his mood or caller.

"My *keitai* is also a video phone, so my callers can actually see me, and I can see them, if we choose," Amano said. "I might not always be looking my best when they call, so I like the characters instead," he said.

On train platforms and highway billboards, cell phone ads dominate the cityscape. The ads underscore the idea that hot new laptops no longer impress the affluent young Japanese; only the latest-model cell phones are turning heads or winning status among peers.

"Cellphones have created extensions of personal space in Japan," said Yuichi Kogure, who teaches a class on *keitai* culture at Tokyo's Toita Women's College. "You take your world with you when you have your *keitai* in your hand. In the *keitai* world, people forget where they are, and women (with cellphones), for instance, can be seen putting on makeup or brushing their hair in the subway, something considered highly rude in Japan in the past. But now, people are walled inside their own little world with their *keitai* and aren't even aware of what they're doing in public."

But some people complain that so much messaging and surfing with cellphones has resulted in people communicating more, but talking less.

Mutsumi Mukaigawa, 26, an apartment concierge nursing a coffee at Starbucks with one hand, holding her cellphone, decorated with a silver-plated dangling bauble, in the other, has been sending more *keitai* mails and making fewer calls to her parents, who live four hours north of Tokyo. "My mother just last weekend said my father was sad because I call less and less," she said. "But *keitai* mail is just so much easier." — LA Times-Washington Post

BUSINESS

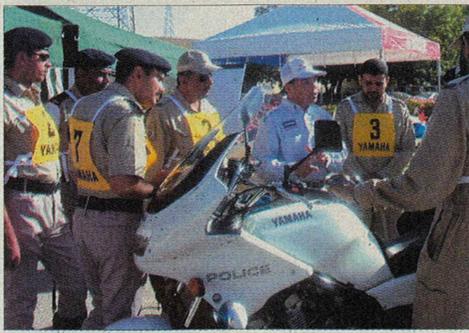
# Zubair Auto provides Yamaha training programme for ROP

MUSCAT — Zubair Automotive LLC, the authorised distributor of Yamaha motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and power products in Oman, has conducted a motorcycle training programme for the Royal Oman Police (ROP) at the ROP stadium, Wattayah.

Instructors from Yamaha Japan, Hidenobu Toh accompanied by S. Ishikawa conducted the training. Zubair Automotive made all the training arrangements and provided Yamaha motorcycles for this seminar.

The "one-to-one" training process taught the participants the technique of getting the best out of the products by exploiting it to its maximum potential.

The training, which also included fundamentals, acted as a reminder to professional drivers. The training content included riding postures and techniques, including the recommended methods of shifting gears, braking, sharp turns, quick stops/swerves,



**HONING SKILLS:** ROP officials during the training programme.

quick stop in a turn, riding over obstacles, fast U turns and traversing hills.

Hidenobu Toh, the instructor, demonstrated the best way of handling and manoeuvring the motorcycles to all the participants. He also performed some special tricks for the spectators.

Yamaha's six decades of racing experience, the "never

compromise" attitude and its legendary innovative technology has brought to the world, the finest beauties in motorcycles and ATVs.

The entire range can be viewed at the state-of-the-art Yamaha showroom in Athaiba. The full Yamaha range is supported by the best after sales services from Zubair Automotive.

## BeckerConviser launches CPA Review course

MUSCAT — BeckerConviser is all set to launch its 2004 CPA Review course based on the new computer based test. With more than 325 locations worldwide, it has been the No.1 trusted company providing the CPA Review for the last 50 years.

BeckerConviser, along with its parent company, has invested over \$25 million to prepare for the new computer-based test. In 2001, it started following information released by the AICPA and NASBA regarding the new CBT. By late 2002, it had fine-tuned analysis of the content specification outline changes and re-engineered its course by adding simulations and the new testing medium.

By offering three course deliveries, class room, online and CD-ROM, the new candidates will be able to customise their preparation to fit their schedules, their financial limitations and its AICPA imposed deadlines. BeckerConviser will release more updates shortly.

## Oman Air appoints Omani graduates

MUSCAT — Oman Air recently employed many Omani graduates who have undertaken training courses in software programming and computing at Bahwan Cyber Tek Group.

These young Omanis will be sent to India to receive condensed training courses in the same field. This is in cooperation with the Ministry of Manpower.

Oman Air is implementing many plans to Omaniise its positions. Cyber Tek has honoured Oman Air for its valuable efforts in this regard, a press note from Oman Air noted yesterday.

All of this is in accordance with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's directives to make available all possible opportunities for young Omanis to prove themselves and give them a chance to work in different fields of activities.

# IIA Oman chapter organises seminar



**ONE FOR THE ALBUM:** IIA Oman Chapter officials during the seminar.

### By Our Business Reporter

MUSCAT — The Oman Chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors has organised a seminar at the Hotel Crowne Plaza.

The highlight of the event was the opening address by the IIA Oman Chapter president, Mohammed Al Musafir. He welcomed the new members to the internal auditing profession, and also appreciated the seriousness among candidates to pursue this profession.

He also announced the launch of the IIA Oman Chapter website, which is incidentally the 100th website of the Institute of Internal Auditors, USA. The presidential address was followed by a joint presentation by Philip Stanton and Ahmed Al Esry, managing partner and manager, respectively, of Ernst & Young on 'How Internal Audit is a value and not a cost to the organisation'.

Stanton has 16 years of experience in internal audit profession and touched on the

important aspects of internal auditing like traditional vs risk-based auditing and importance of audit quality reviews and the need to train more Omanis in the IA function.

Most members of the IIA Oman Chapter participated in the event, which was concluded after a special note of thanks by the secretary Amal Al Khabouri. The event stressed on the need for internal auditors to add value to their organisation's business by using internal audit skills as per the professional practices' framework of IIA. The need was also stressed on continuing professional education by such interactions and other means.

The IIA Oman Chapter was established in June, last year and targets to provide immense benefits to internal audit practitioners, executive management, board of directors, and the government bodies with standards, guidance and information, etc.

The chapter aims to become the focal point for interaction among the internal

audit community by imparting professional education and internal auditing skills to its members as per IIA framework.

The IIA Oman is an affiliate of the Institute of Internal Auditors, which was established in 1941, and is an international professional association with global headquarters in Altamonte Springs, FL, USA.

The IIA has more than 85,000 members in internal auditing, risk management, governance, internal control, IT audit and education.

The institute is the recognised authority, principal educator and acknowledged leader in certification, research and technological guidance for the profession worldwide.

The IIA presents conferences and seminars, produces educational products, certifies qualified audit professionals, provides quality assurance reviews and benchmarking and through the IIA Research Foundations conducts research projects.

## SK Corp. revamps board

SEOUL — SK Corp.'s board decided yesterday to oust three members in a reshuffle aimed at improving governance in a battle with foreign shareholders' over management control at the lucrative South Korean oil refiner, officials said.

The three outgoing board members include SK Group chairman Son Kil-seung who was jailed last month on charges of syphoning off corporate money.

Son, 62, has been at the centre of corruption allegations which prompted an inquiry by prosecutors into illegal funds raised by top businesses to finance South Korea's 2002 presidential elections. The board would field seven outside directors instead of five to improve governance, SK officials said, adding SK Group owner Chey Tae-won would lead the 10-member board as the refiner's chief executive.

The new outside directors include former prime minister Cho Soon and former Korea Gas Corp. chief Nam Dae-woo, who were also recommended by Mocoano-based Sovereign Asset Management for SK Corp.'s new board.

The board also proposed a committee controlled by outside directors who will oversee the company's reform.

SK Corp.'s managing director Yoo Jeong-jun hoped the change would be endorsed at a shareholders meeting on March 12.

"I am confident that we can beat Sovereign in a vote," he said, adding the board's decision reflects Chey's determination to improve corporate governance. The decision comes after a battle between Chey and foreign shareholders for management control of the key unit of South Korea's third largest conglomerate.

Sovereign, which holds a direct 14.99 per cent stake in SK Corp., has been challenging management which it claims has acted more in the interests of the controlling family than ordinary shareholders. — AFP

# MSEC launches SMS service

MUSCAT — Mustafa Sultan Electronics Co. LLC (MSEC), the leading trading company in Oman dealing with Philips, Whirlpool, Akai, Minolta cameras, Rhoxxon Cookers and Haier brand, has launched an SMS messaging service in its professionally manned service centre at Qurum.

MSEC has become the first electronics company to launch SMS messaging at its service centre. As per the service that is launched all customers who have given their items for repair in the service centre will receive information about its status via SMS. This will help towards achieving better and clear communication resulting in improved customer satisfaction. MSEC has three showrooms in the capital at Al Khwair, Qurum and Ruwi. It also has a showroom in Salalah.



**AT YOUR SERVICE:** Customers who have given items for repair at the MSEC service centre will receive information about its status via SMS.

## Vessel movement forecast at Salah Port

VESSELS ALONGSIDE													
VESSEL NAME	VOY	ROT. No	FLAG	POB	GRT	NRT	LOA	BRT	CARGO	LPNO	ETA	ARRIVED	AGENT
61	MY MAERSK AVAN	6414	400226	UK	LONDON	14460	4094	155.9.5M	CONTAINERS	PORT QASIM/PORT QASIM	21.02.04.1700	21.02.04.0200	MAERSK
62	MY SEAL AND MARINER	6419	400224	MARSHALL IS.	MAURIO	32629	11614	258.9.2M	CONTAINERS	MUSCAT/JEDDAH	21.02.04.1545	21.02.04.0430	MAERSK
63	MY SEAL INDEPENDENCE	6406	400197	MARSHALL IS.	MAURIO	32629	11614	258.9.2M	CONTAINERS	JEBEL ALI/JEBEL ALI	21.02.04.0100	21.02.04.0130	STAR
64	MY PHOENIX	6541	400217	ANTIGUA	HAMBURG	18668	6531	158.7.0M	CONTAINERS	JEBEL ALI/JEDDAH	21.02.04.0635	21.02.04.1130	STAR
23	MY WAIL	01	400240	KOREA	WANSAN	1475	1271	90.55.5.5M	L-CEMENT	ADEN/ROSSAU	18.02.04.0855	TBA	DHOAR
24	MY CEM CARIBE	7194	400210	ST. VINCENT	KINGSTOWN	3812	1053	112.3.5.0M	L-CEMENT	MUKALLAMUKALLA	18.02.04.0130	TBA	SSMS
27	FT OSMAN REIS -3	0410	400411	COSCOBOS	MORONO	217	64	36.6.2.8.5M	FROZEN FISH	SEASEA	06.12.03.1330	TBA	SSMS

ARRIVALS													
VESSEL NAME	VOY	ROT. No	FLAG	POB	GRT	NRT	LOA	BRT	CARGO	LPNO	ETA	TID	AGENT
MY MAERSK KALAMATA	6406	400226	GRECE	PIRAEUS	7636	4143	104.12.2M	CONTAINERS	MUMBAI/JEDDAH	21.02.04.0300	21.02.04.1200	MAERSK	
MY MAERSK BERGEN	6406	400227	SINGAPORE	SINGAPORE	14663	9664	159.7M	CONTAINERS	TUTUBORNI/SIDHOUT	21.02.04.0500	21.02.04.2300	MAERSK	
MY FEMINITE	27		BAHAMAS	NASSAU	4693	15604	275.11.0M	BUNKERING	FARROU/MAILLAO	23.02.04.1100	TBA	GAC	
MY SAFARI PRIME	0418	400258	BAHAMAS	NASSAU	1484	756	218.0M	CONTAINERS	PORT QASIM/PORT QASIM	21.02.04.1200	21.02.04.2100	MAERSK	
MY ERANDIPOUS	001		PANAMA	PANAMA	1370	10297	182.75.0M	CRUW CHANGE	ADEN/KANDIA	23.02.04.2133	TBA	GAC	
MY MAERSK ANTHEP	0407	400232	SINGAPORE	SINGAPORE	14890	8004	155.95M	CONTAINERS	ADEN/COCHIN	23.02.04.1700	TBA	MAERSK	
MY NORASA NOOR	0401		TBA	TBA	TBA	TBA	153.90M	CONTAINERS	TBA/PORT QASIM	23.02.04.1700	24.02.04.0600	MAERSK	
FV APAB-1	6391	400241	KOREA	PUSAN	348	188	48.8M	FROZEN FISH	ADMAN/SOMALIA	23.02.04.1800	TBA	OSCC	
MY CEMPAK	0704		ST VINCENT	KINGSTOWN	3212	1749	115.0M	L-CEMENT	MUKALLA/TBA	24.02.04.0400	TBA	SSMS	
MY SANIYDA	3140	400219	PANAMA	PANAMA	13812	TBA	27.77.0M	PASSENGERS	COLOMBO/TBA	24.02.04.0400	TBA	GAC	
MY MAIT MAERSK	0405	400231	DENMARK	SKOVHOLMEN	5710	2547	283.11M	CONTAINERS	JEDDAH/T PELEPAS	24.02.04.1200	25.02.04.0900	MAERSK	
MY MAERSK GORNE	0404	400234	FRANCE	FOF/FRANCIS	8873	2581	283.11M	CONTAINERS	T PELEPAS/JEDDAH	24.02.04.2000	TBA	MAERSK	
MY VIKING PANTAN	0409	400233	CYPRUS	LIMASSOLA	1878	927	168.0M	CONTAINERS	COLOMBO/COLOMBO	25.02.04.0000	TBA	MAERSK	
MY VIKING OTTOKR	0409	400236	LITHUA	MAIBROJIA	1685	802	244.9M	CONTAINERS	VALMUKALAR/PELEPAS	25.02.04.0100	TBA	MAERSK	
MY CAE ROTROS	0405	400230	CYPRUS	LIMASSOLA	8576	450	148.7M	CONTAINERS	VICTORIA/SAMBARI	25.02.04.0800	TBA	MAERSK	
MY MAERSK CAROLINA	0403		TBA	NORFOLK	9608	3057	282.0M	CONTAINERS	MUMBAI/SAMBARI	25.02.04.1400	TBA	MAERSK	
MY MAERSK DORLIN	0403		ANTIGUA	BREEMEN	2897	282.0M	CONTAINERS	JEDDAH/SAMBARI	25.02.04.1700	TBA	MAERSK		
MY LUDON	13584		CYPRUS	LIMASSOLA	2429	1304	88.25.3.0M	L-CEMENT	MUSCAT/MUSCAT	26.02.04.0400	TBA	SSMS	
MY PLETO	0402		ANTIGUA	WILLEMSTAD	2722	943	184.9M	CONTAINERS	DORRAN/PORT LOUIS	26.02.04.2000	TBA	SSMS	
MY SEALAND SICHUAN	0402		GREECE	PIRAEUS	7480	11490	344.13M	CONTAINERS	SUEZ/JEBEL ALI	27.02.04.0001	TBA	MAERSK	
MY PHOENIX	0412		ANTIGUA	HAMBURG	18668	6531	158.7M	CONTAINERS	TBA/TBA	28.02.04.1600	TBA	STAR	
MY MDL DISCOVERY	0402		TBA	TBA	TBA	TBA	TBA	CONTAINERS	TBA/JEDDAH	28.02.04.1200	TBA	MAERSK	

## Shipping schedule at Port Sultan Qaboos

CONFIRMED ARRIVALS					
Flag	Vessel	Arrived	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Cyp	STK-1029	22.02	-	Containers	SSS

FORWARD ARRIVALS					
Flag	Vessel	Arrv. date	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Are	Yatch Al Maha	-	-	Bunker Vehicles	KN
Pan	Hual Oceania	23.02	110	Containers	KN
Are	Jebel Ali	23.02	-	Containers	HB
Tur	Barrier	23.02	-	Containers	ASA
Ind	INS Sarvekshak	23.02	-	Visit	SSA
Cyp	Elizabeth Boye	23.02	-	General Cargo	KR
Cyp	Orient Resolve	23.02	-	Containers	SSA
Cyp	Southern Imperial	23.02	750	Akyl Benzene	TBL
Cyp	STK-1029	24.02	-	Containers	SSS
Cyp	Sima Toubia	24.02	-	Containers	SSS
Pan	MSC Ariane	24.02	-	Containers	UHS
Pan	Lilac Ace	25.02	-	Vehicles	ASA
Gbr	LT Relume	25.02	-	Emna Work	ISS
Pan	Western Ondina	26.02	-	Timber	TBL
Pan	Drion Leader	26.02	655	Vehicles	GAC
Pan	Ocean Highway	27.02	757	Vehicles	HB

# Undercurrent remains bullish; no sign of volatility

**From Page 9**  
BankMuscat lost 60 baisa at RO5.490 (RO5.550) and 149,500 shares were traded. BankMuscat bond (par value: RO2.380) gained 10 baisa at RO2.650. The number of bonds traded stood at 526,017. The bank's convertible bond (par value: RO1.084) and non-guaranteed bond remained steady at RO1.120. Bank Dhozar bond gained 20 baisa (par value RO1.000) at RO1.130 and 220,000 bonds traded. The bank's share however remained unchanged at RO3.030 and only 24,000 shared changed hands during the week.

Other than the week's top gainer Muscat Finance, active finance and leasing company stocks such as United Finance and Al Omaniya remained steady and gained 10 baisa each at RO1.910 and RO2.890, respectively. Both UFC and Al Omaniya had announced encouraging working results for the year 2003 and expected to maintain the tempo during the current year as well. The Industry Sector index gained 0.34 per cent or 0.73 points at 217.63 points (216.9). Services Sector index, however, lost 0.41 per cent at 147.3 points (147.9 points).

The total number of companies rose from 76 to 78, while total number of contacts declined from 5,294 to 5,061.

The domestic economic indicators also show signs of growth. With crude prices remaining stronger in international markets, more signs of economic growth are emerging in the region.

Fiscal positions of the six-member Gulf states are seen improving because of higher oil prices and reduced pressures on public finance.

The prices of Oman crude (April delivery) rose from over \$28, a barrel last week, to over \$29.6, a barrel on February 19, and to \$29.75 a barrel on February 20. The Opec decision to cut official output ceiling by one million bpd from March 1, 2004 will also help oil prices to remain higher in the international markets.

The best quality crude — Texas — price is already hovering higher at over 35.7 a barrel. Internationally, the spill-over effect on financial assets because of the unprecedented rise of the euro against the dollar has also been the key focus of most investors dealing in real estate, stocks and other commodities.

Arab and US investors' investments in Europe and Asia have become costlier and project costs in the US and some regional markets have come under the pressure of cost escalation. However, exporters are benefiting to a greater extent.

Most world stock indices displayed a mixed trend on their last trading day, February 20. Dow closed 45.7 points down at 10,619.03, S & P 500 lost 2.95 points at 1,144.11 and the UK's FTSE-100 declined 0.60 at 4,515 points. India's BSE-30 was down 4.38 points on February 20 and Nikkei 225 lost 33.11 points at 10,720.69. Hang Seng was up 1.15 points at 13,868.37 and KLSE 3.06 points at 861.72 points.

With the domestic weighted average rial Omani lending rates hovering well below 2.5 per cent and deposit rates stand significantly lower, investment interest in the domestic stock market is showing good signs of growth and returns. However, investors are advised to remain well informed, conservative and cautious, before taking investment decisions, and strictly follow expert recommendations.

WHEN MAN WAS JUST BEGINNING TO DISCOVER CARS...

WE WERE ALREADY RACING ACROSS FINISH LINES.

- 1907 Semmering Hillclimb
- 1908 Brookland speed record - 118.7 km per hour average
- 1939 Mercedes - Montevideo class win and 2nd overall
- 1952 Class champions in European Regional Championship
- 1961/2 Monte Carlo Rally class wins
- 1974/5 Class wins in RAC Rally
- 1994 Victory in 2 Lt FIA World Championships
- 1998 Winner of 2 Lt European Championship
- 2000 Fastest overall stage time in Rally of Spain

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AMERICA

**Bush's family dog, Spot, is dead at 14**



**FIRST DOG:** Spot

WASHINGTON — Spot, the first family's 14-year-old dog, was euthanised after suffering a series of strokes, the White House said.

"The president and Mrs Bush and the entire Bush family are deeply saddened by the passing of Spot," a White House statement said. "A loyal and loving companion, Spot was a beloved member of the Bush family for nearly 15 years. She will be missed."

Born at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue during the George H. W. Bush administration, the English Springer spaniel was overshadowed by more famous Bush pets.

First there was Millie, Spot's mother, who in 1990 wrote a book with then-first lady Barbara Bush, her owner. *Millie's Book* was a "dog's-eye perspective on behind-the-scenes goings-on at the Bush White House," according to *Publisher's Weekly*, where it spent 23 weeks on the best-seller list; the book raised \$900,000 for literacy programmes.

As if being born to a famous mother were not enough, Spot also lost the presidential limelight to Barney, the Scottish terrier that President Bush gave to his wife, Laura, three years ago. Adored by both Bushes — the president has described Barney as "the son I never had" — the little black dog is featured on the White House website in an annual Christmas video showing his view of things.

There is a long history of presidential pets making news.

Lyndon B. Johnson once angered dog lovers throughout the country by hoisting one of his two beagles — which were named Him and Her — by the ears.

Franklin D. Roosevelt used his Scottish terrier Fala as a political weapon in a 1944 campaign speech against Republicans, who had accused him of sending a navy destroyer — at taxpayers' expense — to the Aleutian Islands to pick up the dog, which had been left behind there. — *LAT/WWP*

**Kerry challenges Bush to debate**

WASHINGTON — The two leading Democrats seeking to challenge Republican President George W. Bush appealed to voters in interviews published yesterday as frontrunner John Kerry challenged the president to debate their Vietnam war-era military service.

In separate appearances on ABC television's *Face the Nation*, Kerry, a senator from Massachusetts, and North Carolina Senator John Edwards each sought to convince voters he would be the best Democrat to challenge Bush.

Kerry, who holds a wide lead in the race for the 2,162 delegates needed to secure the nomination at the party's national convention in Boston in July, has sought to focus the campaign on Bush.

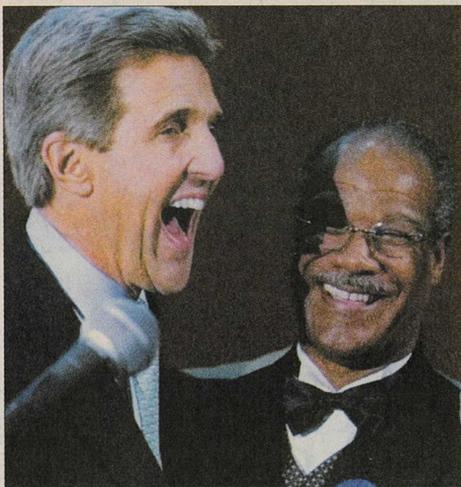
Edwards is hoping to win enough delegates in the March 2 "Super on Tuesday" primaries in 10 states to keep his underdog campaign alive until the convention.

"I'm somebody who comes from outside Washington. ... I can bring the changes to this country that need to be made," the 50-year-old first-term senator told ABC.

Kerry meanwhile challenged Bush in a letter to a debate after accusing the president's reelection campaign of attacking his Vietnam-era military service and his Senate voting record on military and security issues.

"Over the last week, you and your campaign have initiated a widespread attack on my service in Vietnam, my decision to speak out to end that war, and my commitment to the defence of this nation," Kerry wrote.

"As you well know, Vietnam was a very difficult and painful period in our nation's history, and the struggle for our veterans continues. So it has been hard to believe that you would choose to reopen these wounds for your



**HEARTY LAUGH:** John Kerry, left, with a supporter at the end of a news conference at Atlanta's Hartfield International Airport. — Reuters

**52pc don't want Bush reelected**

WASHINGTON — Fifty-two per cent of registered voters don't want President George W. Bush to be reelected to a second term in office while 43 per cent disagree with that view, according to a new opinion poll released yesterday.

But the *Newsweek* magazine survey showed 38 per cent of registered voters said Bush was somewhat likely to be reelected this year, while 31 per cent said this outcome was very likely.

At the same time, only 48 per cent of Americans polled approved of the way Bush is handling his job as president, the same as one week ago.

In the wake of the controversy over the president's service in the National Guard at the time of the Vietnam War, 49 per cent of those surveyed said they were inclined to believe that Bush fulfilled obligations while 33 per cent had serious doubts over it. And 58 per cent said they believed Bush was an honest person by nature while 34 per cent do not see him that way, according to the *Newsweek* poll. — *AFP*

personal political gain. But, that is what you have chosen to do.

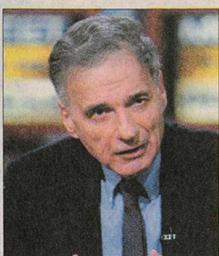
"I will not sit back and allow my patriotism to be challenged." — *AFP*

**Nader to run for president as independent**

WASHINGTON — Consumer advocate and 2000 Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader announced yesterday that he is running again for the White House, brushing aside concerns among Democrats that his candidacy would spoil their party's presidential chances.

"I've decided to run as an independent candidate for president," not representing the Greens, he said on NBC television's *Meet the Press* programme.

Nader is blamed by many Democrats for former vice-president Al Gore's achingly narrow defeat by George W.



**IN THE FRAY:** Ralph Nader

Bush in the 2000 presidential vote. In 2000, Nader convinced many Democratic vot-

ers that there was little difference between then Texas governor Bush, and Gore, who served as vice-president under Bill Clinton, and he restated that viewpoint yesterday.

"Both parties are flunking, Republicans with a D-minus and Democrats with a D-plus," Nader said. "It's time to change the equation."

Nader said he made his decision "after careful thought," despite dire warnings from Democratic party leaders that his bid might threaten the prospect that a Democrat will be able to defeat Bush in the November 2004 election. — *AFP*

**Key soaps set to wind down**

NEW YORK — *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, and *Frasier*, are among television mini-series that won US cult status in the last several years but are due to wind to a close in the coming weeks, leaving countless television viewers bereft of their favorite programmes.

The final episode of *Sex and the City* will reveal if protagonist Carrie will stay in Paris with her new beau, a Russian artiste played by Mikhail Baryshnikov, or whether she will opt for New York and Mister Big, her on-and-off boyfriend of six years — a fitting subject for a series that placed single life in the spotlight for the six seasons of its duration.

For weeks, the media has been speculating over the series' grand finale. Fans who descended on the set in the last few days of filming urged a teary-eyed Sarah Jessica Parker, *Marry Big!*

But stars and producers note the importance of going out at the height of success. Those who worked on *Friends* — due to run its last episode May 6 — say the same.

*Friends* final hour-long episode will be preceded by a two-hour review of the years the show lasted.

As long ago as October, *Newsweek* had *Losing Friends* on its front cover. "Not many TV characters have entered our living rooms and our

hearts like *Friends*," it lamented at the time.

Fans are clearly feeling it. "That show is the only reason why I work days — so I could watch them every night," one person despaired on the Internet. The networks are equally emotional, especially NBC, which is due to lose another hit series, *Frasier*, a week after *Friends* goes off the air after 11 years.

The show, capturing the trials of an insecure Seattle psychiatrist, has five Emmy Awards to its credit for best comedy series. NBC last fall pinned its hopes on *Coupling*, a series adapted from a British comedy on the sexual adventures of half a dozen people in

their 30s, but has already axed it due to poor ratings. Now comes the thorny issue of a successor.

Those that remain in the ratings battle include the newer *Law and Order* and *ER*.

"The business is very cyclical," said Joe Adalian, editor in chief of specialist magazine *Variety*, who blames the situation "lack of patience and the need to get immediate profits and rating results."

"A lot of good ideas haven't found their way into the marketplace or, if they have got on the air, they haven't been given enough time to find an audience. It's 'get success quick'," he said. — *AFP*

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**Muscat Festival**

**Congratulations to the Winners!!!**

The organizing committee of Muscat Festival 2004 announces the winning ticket numbers for the Muscat Festival Visitor's Raffle (Draws held on 18,19 & 20 Feb' 04):

Draw held on 18-02-04			Draw held on 19-02-04			Draw held on 20-02-04		
a)	Toyota Corolla	409463	a)	Toyota Corolla	416626	a)	LEXUS car	1389
b)	Laptop computer	112240	b)	Laptop computer	260042	b)	Laptop computer	421844
c)	Gold Bar	20970	c)	Gold Bar	132030	c)	Gold Bar	134891
d)	Gold Bar	409154	d)	Gold Bar	130582	d)	Gold Bar	5203
e)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	385245	e)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	55496	e)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	119955
f)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	385604	f)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	132247	f)	Shopping voucher worth RO 500	448032
g)	Air Ticket Manila-Beirut-Muscat	377789	g)	Air Ticket Muscat-Manila-Muscat	380145	g)	Air Ticket Muscat-Beirut-Muscat	114051
h)	Air Ticket Muscat-Karatchi-Muscat	377574	h)	Air Ticket Muscat-Mumbai-Muscat	136052	h)	Air Ticket Muscat-Karachi-Muscat	426604
i)	Air Ticket Muscat-Manila-Muscat	404710	i)	Air Ticket Muscat-Bangkok-Muscat	400996	i)	Air Ticket Muscat-Manila-Muscat	429602
j)	Air Ticket Muscat-Mumbai-Muscat	377843	j)	Air Ticket Muscat-Cairo-Muscat	433313	j)	Air Ticket Muscat-Mumbai-Muscat	438255

The winners are requested to redeem their prizes at the Muscat Festival Department (Muscat Municipality Head Office) within the official working hours by producing the winning ticket and Identity Card.

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