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TIMES OF OMAN

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Princess Aiko is to be heir to Japan throne: Reports

Page 4

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 23, 2005

Pakistan steps up push for pipeline project with Iran, India

Page 7



Laura thanks US troops in Germany

Page 10



Pearl now! Going Gold!

Your favourite newspaper celebrates 30th anniversary

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Yesterday, the number one English-language newspaper of Oman spoke, unveiling a story of a bold vision that became a reality, taking listeners on a journey through the last 30 years of its life, about how it saw more of the world and still yearned for more and how it looked up at the stars and saw a fathomless, bright and exciting future that beckoned it with open arms.

This was the *Times of Oman* speaking. And the spotlight was on this star newspaper as it turned Pearl, taking readers along the historic path it has traversed these past three decades.

It spoke passionately; it spoke about its challenges, how it overcame them and how it has entered a new age where it was still breasting the tape by all means, and is as eager as it was 30 years ago, brightly looking forward to see, learn more and pass it to generations of readers the flame of knowledge, information, news, slices of Omani life and chunks of the world scenes.

This was, in brief, the story of the *Times*, which it unveiled yesterday at a function at Crowne Plaza to mark its 30th anniversary, which was attended by ministers, ambassadors, top Omani government dignitaries and other senior officials in a slick, audio-visual format.

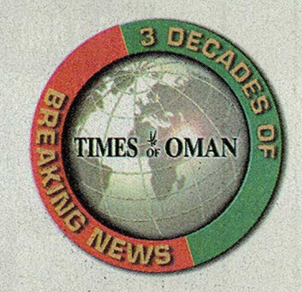
Thirty years ago, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed the birth of a rare star – Oman's first English newspaper — the *Times of Oman*. Rare, because there was no English language newspaper, no TV or even an English FM radio then.

And in such a scenario, an English-language newspaper was quite an exciting prospect, which became true, thanks to the vision of one man who thought it possible and made it happen.

● *Continued on Page 4*



PEARL TIMES: Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali and Mohammed Al Zubair cutting a cake at a function held at Crowne Plaza yesterday to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the 'Times of Oman' — **Photo by Rodolfo Alfonso**



● **More photos in 'Leisure' — Page 24**

● **40-page anniversary special pullout with today's edition**

Brazilian message for HM

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has received a written message from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil dealing with the good relations between the two countries and matters of joint interest.

The message was received on behalf of His Majesty by His Highness Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq Al Said, representative of His Majesty the Sultan when he received in his office yesterday Celso Amorim, foreign minister of Brazil.

The meeting was attended by Saif bin Mohammed Al Abri, secretary-general of the representative of His Majesty the Sultan's office and the delegation accompanying the guest. — *ONA*



BOOSTING TIES: His Highness Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq Al Said receiving the message.

Five royal decrees issued

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has issued five royal decrees.

Royal Decree No. 18/2005 identifies the term of the current session of Muscat Municipality's municipal council.

Article one of the decree states that the current session of Muscat Municipality's municipal council shall be four years starting on February 26/2002.

The decree comes into force from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. 19/2005 amends some of the provisions of the Social Insurance Law.

● *Continued on Page 4*

Cables of greetings

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty wished the Sultan of Brunei and his people further progress and prosperity.

● *Continued on Page 4*

At least 420 dead as quake hits remote Iran villages

ZARAND (Iran) — At least 420 people were killed when a powerful earthquake struck Iran before dawn yesterday, leaving weeping villagers to claw through the rubble of their mud-brick homes in search of missing family and friends.

Whole villages were flattened by the force of the quake in the southeastern province of Kerman, the deadliest since December 2003, when more than 30,000 people perished in the ancient city of Bam, 200km away. Hospitals in the region were overwhelmed and officials warned that the casualty toll could rise further as rain and blocked roads made it difficult to reach stricken mountain villages.

Provincial Governor Mohammed Ali Karimi said at least 420 people had been killed and 900 injured, in the quake that measured 6.4 on the Richter scale, adding that the authorities feared the toll could increase further. Most of the dead were in the Zarand region north of the provincial capital of Kerman.

Villagers scrambled to pull bodies from the rubble of their houses, wailing in distress amid roads strewn with debris.

● *Continued on Page 4*

HM condoles with Khatami

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of condolences and sympathy to Dr Sayyed Mohammed Khatami, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the victims of the earthquake which hit southeast of Iran. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the president, the bereaved families and to the Iranian people. — *ONA*

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MUSCAT — Oil prices per barrel in the world markets yesterday:

Type	Delivery	Price
Oman Crude	Apr.	$42.59
Dubai Crude	Apr.	$41.16
Merban Crude	Apr.	$45.25
Arabian Light	Apr.	$41.62
Arabian Heavy	Apr.	$37.72
N. Sea Brent W.	Apr.	$47.23
Texas Int. (Cushion)	Feb.	$48.32

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Alawi holds talks with Brazilian foreign minister



BOOSTING TIES: Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah with Celso Amorim yesterday. — ONA

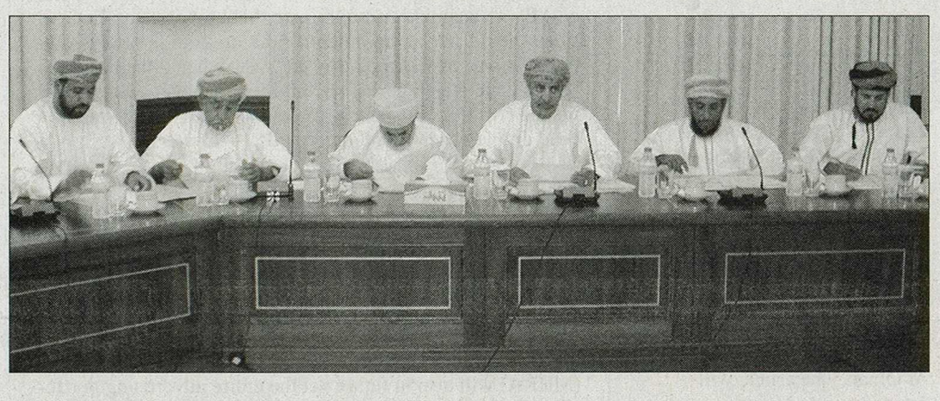
MUSCAT — Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, minister responsible for foreign affairs, received here yesterday Celso Amorim, foreign minister of Brazil.

During the meeting, relations between the two countries were discussed. The conversation also touched on preparations by Brazil to organise a summit between Arab countries and South American states which is scheduled to be held in Brazil in May, in addition to a number of current developments at the regional and international arenas.

The meeting was attended by Ahmed bin Yousef Al Harthy, head of the Arab department; Salim bin Rajab Ba Omar, deputy head of the minister's office department; Dr Badr bin Mohammed Al Hinai, deputy head of the European department for the America's affairs, and other officials at the Foreign Ministry.

The guest left the country at noon yesterday. He was seen off by Mahmoud bin Ali Al Rahmah, head of the protocols at the Foreign Ministry — *ONA*

OCCI agriculture, fisheries panel meets



IN SESSION: Ali bin Ahmed Al Harthy presiding over the session yesterday.

MUSCAT — The agriculture and fisheries committee at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday held its regular meeting under the chairmanship of Ali bin Ahmed Al Harthy.

The committee discussed topics related to developing capabilities of agriculture and fisheries sector to increase its contribution to the GDP. It also discussed a plan to hold a seminar on the investment opportunities available in the agriculture and fisheries sector at the OCCI this year. A number of authorities including the Agriculture and Fisheries Ministry, OCCI, Oman Development Bank and Sultan Qaboos University will participate in the proposed seminar. — *ONA*

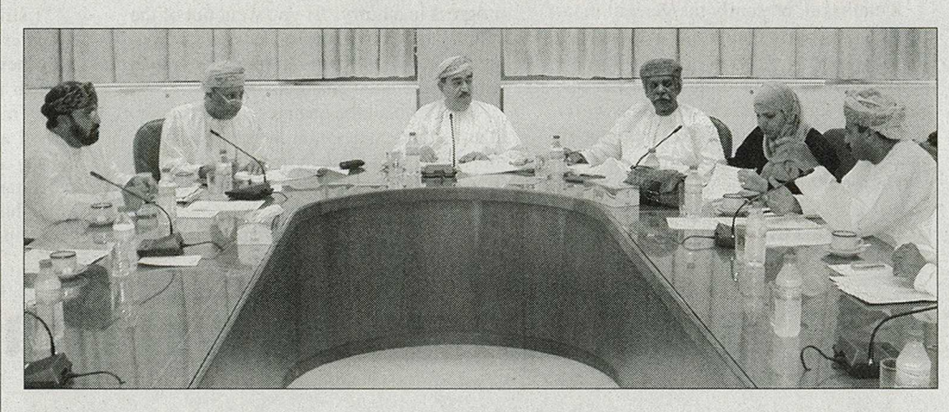


DEPARTURE: Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalili leaving for Amman yesterday. — ONA

Grand mufti leaves for Jordan

MUSCAT — Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalili, grand mufti of the Sultanate, left here yesterday for Jordan to attend the meeting of the international committee which will undertake planning and supervision of the International Islamic Conference scheduled to be held in the Jordanian capital Amman later in the day.

Sheikh Khalili was seen off by the Jordanian ambassador to the Sultanate and several officials at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. — *ONA*



REVIEW MEETING: Habib bin Abdulnabi Macki presided over the second meeting of a team preparing for the family-owned companies' conference scheduled for December 4 to 6. The conference seeks to develop family owned companies and tackle the obstacles encountering them. — ONA

Pak defence official leaves after visit



DEPARTURE: Lieutenant-General Shahid Siddiq Tirmithi being seen off yesterday.

MUSCAT — Lieutenant-General Shahid Siddiq Tirmithi, director-general of the joint staff command in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, left here yesterday with his delegation after a several-day visit to the Sultanate.

Tirmithi was seen off at Seeb International Airport by Air Commodore Said bin Hassan Al Shidad, assistant chief of staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces for administration, and some officers. — *ONA*

SA arts, crafts, cartoons exhibition

MUSCAT — A South African arts, crafts and cartoons exhibition will open at the Omani Society for Fine Arts gallery today under the patronage of Sheikha Aisha bint Khalfan bin Jumiel Al Siyabiah, president of the Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI). The exhibition, which will run till February 28, will include 38 modern works of fine art, 45 photographs, cartoons and handiworks. — *ONA*

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Fun, food at Omantel festival in Marah Land

MUSCAT — Omantel is organising today a festival to celebrate the launch of its new 33 per cent reduction of the international telecom tariff in cooperation with Marah Land at the Qurum Natural Park.

The festival is to feature several entertaining and exciting activities of interest to all quarters and residents in the Sultanate. This includes entertaining games, competitions, magic shows and various displays. Draws will also be conducted for valuable prizes which include free international calls. Omantel and Marah Land will treat visitors with various world dishes from the food corner in Marah Land.

The festival is part of Omantel's promotional campaign for the fresh reduced international calls tariff. The festival also reflects Omantel's close tie-up with the community and its salient social and family role. Omantel's new international telecom tariff reduction will take effect from March 1. The fresh reduction will help both Omanis and residents make cheaper international calls.

Omantel dedicated 4,000 entry coupons to enable the public attend the festival. All they have to do is bring in the promotional add in the daily newspapers and get free entry to Marah Land, enjoy free access of kid games and have free meals.



OMAN RADIO

06:00	Opening, Royal Anthem, The Holy Quran, Preview of Morning Programme, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty, Headlines, Preview Update
06:15	Breakfast Show
06:30	News Headlines — Weather
07:00	News Bulletin
07:15	Breakfast Show
09:00	Headlines
09:05	DJ's Choice Show
11:00	News Highlights
11:05	DJ's Choice Show
12:00	News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Preview of Afternoon Programmes
12:05	Vintage Top/Euro Hit
01:00	News Headlines
01:03	The Afternoon Groove
02:30	News Bulletin
02:40	The Afternoon Groove
02:58	Weather Forecast and Pharmacies on Duty
03:00	Preview of Evening Programmes
03:02	The Afternoon Groove
04:00	Drive Time Show
06:00	News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty
06:02	Drive Time Show
06:30	News Bulletin
06:40	Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty
06:45	Guest of the Week
07:00	Music Quiz
10:00	News Bulletin
10:15	Jazz Cafe
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

WEATHER

Partly cloudy skies over Musandam with chance of rain which might extend to parts of Al Batinah and Al Dahirah regions. Clear to partly cloudy skies over the rest of the Sultanate with chance of early morning fog patches over isolated parts of Al Wusta region and Dhofar.

Winds: Over the Sultanate winds will be easterly to southeasterly light to moderate.

Sea State: Slight seas over the Oman's coastal water with maximum wave height of one metre.

Maximum today: 26C
Minimum tonight: 16C
Relative humidity: 30 to 70 per cent
Sunrise 06:33am — Sunset 06:07pm

Salalah
Maximum today: 28C
Minimum tonight: 20C
Relative humidity: 65 to 90 per cent
Sunrise 06:45am — Sunset 06:29pm

Temp	Max	Min
Seeb	26	18
Khasab	26	18
Dibba	26	17
Mad'ha	29	15
Buraimi	28	19
Ibri	28	17
Fahud	28	17
Sohar	25	16
Suwaiq	26	17
Rustaq	28	15
Sumail	29	18
Nizwa	28	17
Saiq	17	08
Jabal Shams	12	04
Bahla	27	16
Adam	27	18
Mudhebi	27	16
Ibra	28	15
Sur	30	19
Ras Al Hadd	25	18
Masirah	26	19
Duqm	25	19
Haima	29	16
Marmul	26	15
Mhout	28	20
Thumrait	27	17
Salalah	27	22
Qairoon Hairiti	20	15
Mina Salalah	26	24
Al Halaniyat	26	23
Jabal Samhan	19	13
Jabal Qamar	18	14

Temperatures recorded in other cities: Muscat 25, Abu Dhabi 27, Dubai 25, Sharjah 25, Ras Al Khaimah 25, Doha 23, Manama 21, Riyadh 27, Makkah 35, Madinah 31, Jeddah 30, Kuwait 20, Sanaa 28, Aden 29, Mukalla 30, Baghdad 17, Beirut 17, Amman 15, Damascus 16, Cairo 20, Teheran 12, Karachi 25, Bombay 29, Ankara 09, Geneva 00, Bruxelles 03, Frankfurt 00, Paris 01, London 04, New York 02, Tokyo 08, Rome 09, Amsterdam 02.

Prayer Timings



Dhuhr	12:25pm
Asr	3.44pm
Maghrib	6.11pm
Isha	7.37pm
Tomorrow	
Fajr	5.12am

EVENTS

- The international conference on biosafety, organised by the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, will conclude on February 23.
- Lecture on 'Pain in the Neck' on February 24, at 8am, at Al Amal Medical and Health Care Centre. (Information on 682052/686298).
- Course on Customer Relationship Management by Solomon Vijayanand on February 27 and 28 at Ideas Management Consultants at Ideas Management Consultants (Information at stev@ideas-consulting.com).
- Lecture on 'Use the power of positive language in Quran' on February 27, at Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture.
- Interactive workshop on 'Finance essentials for today's managers' on February 27 and 28, at Grand Hyatt Muscat, by Prof. Anil Sood, fellow of IIM, Ahmedabad. Information on 9599018/24787217/24787204. Email chroman@omantel.net.om
- The Gujarati Wing of Indian Social Club is organising a lecture by senior consultant Rima Khadra, Dubai, on 'Nutrition-Obesity and Diet', at ISC Hall, Darsait, on March 9, 8pm.
- Khalfan Al Esry will give lecture on 'Mother, you are so dear to me' on March 13, at Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture.

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Five royal decrees issued

● *From Page 1*

Article one of the decree says that attached amendments to the Social Insurance Law shall be enforced.

Article two states that the decree shall be published in the official gazette and come into force as from the beginning of the month following its publishing with the exception of the attached table No. (3) which comes into force from the date of publishing at the official gazette. Clauses (1 and 3) of article (20) and article (20 repeated) which becomes effective as from July 2005.

Royal Decree No. 20/2005 approves the Sultanate's joining the World Health Organisation's framework agreement on combating tobacco.

The decree empowers the authorities concerned to lodge the agreement joining documents, in accordance with its provisions.

The decree becomes effective from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. 21/2005 endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the international guarantees agreement on transferred equipment and its attached aircraft equipment protocol.

The decree empowers the authorities concerned to undertake the aforementioned agreement and protocol joining procedures, according to their provisions.

The decree comes into force from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. 22/2005 declares the Southern Highway (Qurum Naseem Roundabout) road project specifies in the attached memo and diagram as a public utility project.

The decree empowers the authorities concerned to expropriate through direct implementation required establishments and land plots for the project, in accordance with the provisions of expropriation law for public interest.

The decree becomes effective from the date of issue. — *ONA*

Cable of greetings

● *From Page 1*

HIS Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has also sent a similar cable of congratulations to President Baharat Jaj Deo of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on the occasion of his country's independence anniversary. His Majesty expressed his best wishes to the president and his people.

HIS Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a congratulatory cable to Dr Pearlette Louisy, governor-general of Saint Lucia, on the occasion of the independence anniversary of her country. His Majesty expressed his best wishes to the governor-general and her people.

— *ONA*

Egypt names new envoy to Israel after 4-year break

CAIRO — Egypt yesterday named a new ambassador to Israel, in the latest rapprochement between the two countries following a four-year diplomatic haitus over the Jewish state's handling of the Palestinian uprising.

Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit said the Israeli government had approved the nomination of Mohammed Asim Ibrahim as Egyptian envoy, which follows the return of Jordan's ambassador to Tel Aviv two days ago.

Ibrahim — Egypt's third envoy to Israel since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1979 — is a former ambassador to Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Jordan and Egypt, which are the only Arab states to have signed peace treaties with Israel, announced the return of their ambassadors after a Middle East summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm Al Sheikh on February 8. — *AFP*

Pearl now! Going Gold!

● *From Page 1*

Today, the Sultanate joins in celebrating the 30th birthday of its star newspaper. The 30 years have sped by in a blaze of media activity, which saw the *Times* reach the pinnacles of its existence and media excellence.

"Thirty years ago, on February 23, 1975, Oman witnessed the birth of a star, we named it the *Times of Oman*, the first English language newspaper," Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the brains behind the paper, its founder and editor-in-chief, proudly declared in his speech at the glittering anniversary bash.

"And we are extremely happy to say that 30 years on, the *Times* is shining more brightly than ever, serving as a beacon of hope for thousands of Omanis and expatriates alike," Essa said.

Earlier, Mohammed Al Zubair, adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for economic planning, and Essa jointly cut the 30th anniversary cake signalling the inauguration of a gala birthday party where the guests and the *Times* team jointly celebrated this momentous occasion.

The key guests included, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal Al Busaidi, secretary-general of the Council of Ministers, Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, minister of commerce and industry; Sheikh Hilal bin Khalid bin Nasser Al Ma'awali, civil service minister, Abdullah bin Abbas bin Ahmed, Muscat Municipality president, and OCCI president, ambassadors, other top Omani dignitaries and members of the business community here.

Also present were Anees Issa Zedjali, deputy editor-in-chief; Ahmed Issa, CEO; and Faiq Issa, COO.

Essa chronicled the growth of the *Times* and also promised to deliver in the future too.

He also recalled the story of how the idea of an English newspaper germinated in his mind. Taking a stroll down memory lane, Essa explained how it all began and how the *Times* continued on a steady path of progress and currently enjoying the peak status in the media market.

He also highlighted its many accomplishments, its many firsts, like being the first e-paper in the Middle East, how it has become the best companion to the Omani traveller by being available in almost every five-star hotel and also on the Norwegian cruise liners, thanks to its membership to NewsDirect.

The *Times*, said Essa, has made it a habit to climb newer and newer heights of excellence in journalism with a deep-seated desire and mission to help the nation in its relentless, glorious march to greater heights.

He requested continued support of the readers and well-wishers of the *Times* to realise "its vision and perform its mission in service to the Sultanate".

30 years on, 'Times' still a frontrunner



DOWN MEMORY LANE: George Thomas

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — He has seen *Times of Oman* all through its 30-year existence — from its birth to its 30th birthday. May not seem like an achievement, but George Thomas Kulathakal's long tenure in Oman does seem tremendous, especially as *Times* celebrates its 30th birthday today.

Kulathakal, presently the general manager of Westcoast Trading, arrived here in 1971.

He remembers landing at the old airport in the CBD area. He was then working for J&P Oman and was staying in Seeb, opposite the present airport.

He fondly remembers the inception of *Times* in 1975, bringing a refreshing change into the lives of the residents, who previously waited for papers from abroad, which would reach two or three days late.

In those days, he says, the population was small in the city and everybody knew each other, unlike today when most don't even know their neighbours.

Going back in time to those early days, he says, *Times* happened when Oman had initiated its rapid developmental strides.

Things were moving in the direction of progress in a hurry. "If you went out of the country for even a week you wouldn't recognize it when you returned. So much would have been changed…"

And with all the changes, infrastructural and others, that Oman witnessed, *Times* too changed. It grew in quantity and quality to become a leading daily, he notes.

In a message to *Times of Oman*, he says: "How quick 30 years have passed — I can't believe it! First of all I must congratulate Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, founder, chairman and editor-in-chief of the *Times of Oman*, because this newspaper was his brainchild. He worked so hard to develop it from weekly to daily newspaper. The special editorial comments every week are commendable — this gives the authorities concerned views of the public.

"I still remember when Mr Essa started *Times* as a weekly edition and then as a daily newspaper. The *Times* was the first English newspaper of Oman and I have never missed reading this paper. Even when I am out of the country I log on to the site and catch the news in *Times*. As I understand, this is the only newspaper which has more circulation than any other newspaper."

Interactive, mouthpiece of virtual reality

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Thirty years from now, when you read newspapers like *Times of Oman,* you will literally feel the wind in your hair and sea sprays on your face.

It will be that interactive and an experience in virtual reality, said Jan Wind, chairman of Oman Laser Association, yesterday in remarks made to the *Times* on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.

Excerpts:

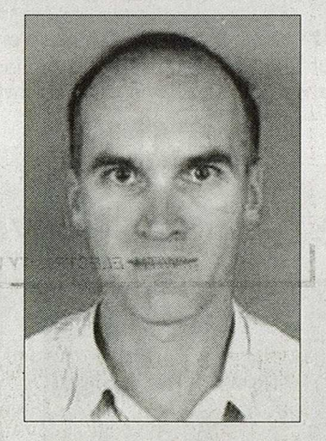
What do you like about *Times of Oman*?

Good newspaper for my articles on Laser sailing competition in Oman. The sports editors are very keen to cover and publish local sports events.

It gives the Oman Laser Association (OLA) committee a chance to share some of the excitement of sailing with the larger public.

And it is very gratifying to have the report on a sailing event organised by OLA next to an article on the latest Wimbledon championship. Gives it a certain standing...

Three decades of *Times* — as you have seen it (or, as much as you have seen it).



ALL PRAISE: Jan Wind

I've been in Oman for nearly seven years. In that time the sports section has grown, become more professional and is now routinely publishing articles on local sports events. They are helping to develop Oman's aspiration as a sporting nation.

Three more decades (of *Times*) from now — as you see it.

In 30 years, the newspaper will be an interactive experience in virtual reality. Subscribers will be able to experience first-hand the excitement of sports events. They will be able to choose the perspective from which they experience the action for example as a spectator. They could even feel the wind in the hairs and the spray in the face of the sailor of a Laser dinghy as it winds it way through the waves of the Gulf of Oman during the 2036 Oman Summer Olympics winning yet another gold medal for the proud Sultanate of Oman. The article will appear next to a story on tennis from a small local tennis tournament in London, whose name escapes me at the moment — Wimbledon I think ...

Princess Aiko is to be heir to Japan throne: Reports

TOKYO — Japan looks ready for a modern-day reigning empress after a panel set up to address the succession crisis indicated it could change the law to allow the daughter of Crown Prince Naruhito to be his heir, media said yesterday.

The question of who will succeed to the 2,600-year-old Chrysanthemum throne has sparked controversy because of a law that limits accession to males, and no son has been born into the imperial family for decades.

"It will go to Princess Aiko," the Kyodo news agency quoted an unidentified government source as saying on Monday of the issue of who would be next in line after the crown prince succeeds his father, Emperor Akihito, 71.

The three-year-old Aiko is the only child of Naruhito, who turns 45 today, and of Crown Princess Masako, 41.

No boys have been born into the imperial family since Prince Akishino, the crown prince's younger brother, in 1965.

The remarks by the government source were taken to mean the 1947 Imperial Household Law would be revised to allow women to succeed to the throne, Kyodo said.

An advisory panel to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on succession issues is discussing a proposal to revise the Imperial Household Law, which limits accession to the throne to males.

The 10 - member panel was set up after Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party issued a draft proposal saying it wanted legal revisions that would allow a woman to succeed to the throne.

The panel is to compile a report late this year.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Japan's top government spokesman, Hiroyuki Hosoda, was evasive.

"We will have full discussions from various angles," he said.

Experts have said a change in the law would herald a major symbolic change to Japan's male - dominated society and was inevitable given the lack of a male heir at present.

"Can Princess Aiko be Japan's empress? That's wonderful. At long last, our country will change in favour of women," said Atsuko Hirano, a 53-year-old Tokyo office worker.

However, doubts remain over whether the panel would recommend giving precedence to the imperial first born, regardless of gender, or follow the British model in which a woman only ascends the throne if no male is subsequently born.

Debate has mounted recently over the succession law, with proponents of change saying it should be brought into line with modern laws on gender equality and noting that most European monarchies allow succession by both sexes.

Conservatives oppose any change that would break what they believe is an unbroken male line stretching back some 2,600 years.

Japan has had eight reigning empresses — the last ruled from 1763 to 1770 — but they were viewed as "stop-gaps" and none passed on the throne to her own child.

The crown prince's younger brother, Akishino, is second in line to the throne under the current law. His children are both girls.

Masako, a Harvard-educated former diplomat, performed no official duties for about a year until last month because of depression that court officials have said was caused by the strain of adapting to royal life.

Many royal watchers have attributed her condition partly to the pressure to produce a male heir. — *Reuters*

At least 420 dead as quake hits remote Iran villages

● *From Page 1*

Karimi said 40 villages, which are home to more than 30,000 residents, were affected. Half of them, including Dahuyeh, which has a population of 820, were flattened, said the Iranian Red Crescent.

Villagers were buried alive in Dahuyeh's mosque when the quake struck during predawn prayers, natural disaster services official Mohammad Javad Fadaie told state media.

Only the green dome of the Sultan Seyed Ibrahim mausoleum was left standing.

Several hours later, men were seen desperately overturning rubble brick by brick to search for survivors.

Others who had miraculously escaped when their simple mud-brick homes collapsed sat among the debris, ankle deep in mud, wrapped in blankets handed out by dozens of rescue workers, soldiers and volunteers.

The governor said the rescue effort was completed by early afternoon in most of the affected area, apart from three or four remote villages where rescuers feared the worst.

"We think the death toll will climb to more than 500... once we have gained access to the villages" with the use of helicopters, Iraj Sharifi head of the Kerman University Hospitals said.

But hospitals in Zarand, even if overwhelmed by the number of injured, were not damaged and local infrastructure remained intact, he said.

Officials said the good fortune and lessons learned from the Bam temblor had made relief efforts more effective.

The US Geological Survey said the earthquake struck at 5:55am, with its epicentre located some 60km northwest of the city of Kerman.

An interior ministry spokesman, Jahanbakhsh Khanjani, said it took "just seconds" before emergency services were rushed to the scene.

Governor Karimi said the authorities had learnt from the Bam experience, when they came in for criticism, and that this time the Islamic republic would not need international aid.

Sharifi said that "compared to Bam's earthquake, Kerman's was completely different.

"Since we had that experience before, the relief and supports were sorted out by local teams, each taking action as small disaster committees only half an hour after the incident.

"If the main cities had been damaged, we might not be able to deal with the disaster so quickly," Sharifi added.

Neighbouring Turkey, which like Iran has long experience of deadly earthquakes, offered to provide aid but was turned down, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

President Pervez Musharraf of neighbouring Pakistan also offered aid.

Several helicopters were sent to the scene, and the government also mobilized two battalions of troops to help in the rescue effort, while residents were urged to stay outdoors amid some 20 aftershocks.

There were no reports of casualties in the city of Kerman, but the quake had knocked out electrical power in the provincial capital. Iran sits astride several major faults in the earth's crust, and is prone to violent earthquakes which killed some 170,000 people in about 20 quakes during the 20th century.

In 1981, 2,328 people were killed in two earthquakes in Kerman province.

In December 2003, more than 30,000 people were killed when a quake measuring 6.7 points practically razed the city of Bam. Iranian authorities blamed sloppy builders for the immense death toll.

They have also accused foreign governments of failing to deliver on aid pledges made in the immediate aftermath of the Bam quake. — *AFP*

Best-dressed S. Korean homeless in the world ...

SEOUL — Some South Korean homeless are dressing in style after the government gave away thousands of fake designer garments confiscated by customs agents. The Korea Customs Service distributed more than 3,500 fake pieces in the southern city of Pusan this month with the permission of the fashion houses whose designs had been pirated. A customs official declined to name the designers whose ripped-off creations are now being worn by the homeless but said both they and the state prosecutors had approved giving away the jackets, blouses, shirts and pants. "We hope this will be of some help to the poor who need practical assistance in such hard times," the official said. Customs agents removed the labels from the clothes before giving them to a welfare agency for distribution. South Korea (news-web sites) has a vibrant illegal market in pirated designer clothing and customs officials said there would be more handouts. "We will continue to look for useful ways to pass along the clothes — it saves us the cost of destroying what we have confiscated," the Customs Service said in a statement. One homeless man, who asked not to be identified, said he appreciated the fancy threads. "I don't care about the quality of the clothes, but these designs are quite trendy," the recipient said. — *Reuters*

Villagers battle to stop Club Med in Albania

TIRANA — Villagers in southern Albania blocked the path of developers of a Club Mediterranee resort for a second day yesterday after clashing with riot police who tried to beat local women off a bulldozer. Protesters spent the night outside to stop any work going ahead on widening the road to Kakome Beach, the approved Ionian Sea site of the future Club Med resort, Albania's first. By morning, around 300 villagers resumed a tense standoff with 100 police. "We spent the night outside to protect our land," protest leader Vladimir Kumi said by phone. "Our only aim is not to allow them to enter Kakome." In the capital, Tirana, about 250km northeast of the site, Interior Ministry spokesman Florion Serjani said that as far as he knew "the situation is still unresolved". The villagers claim they and not the government are the rightful owners of the land. But Tirana has already approved a long-term lease on the undeveloped valley for an Albanian company working in partnership with France's Club Med. Kumi said the villagers were receiving support from opposition parties but had been unable to get in touch with the Socialist-led government of Prime Minister Fatos Nano. Opposition Democratic Party leader Sali Berisha, a former president, said he "warned Prime Minister Fatos Nano not to create a conflict ahead of general elections" due in mid-2005. Paskal Milo, an MP allied to Nano said: "I call on MPs to examine and eliminate this brewing conflict. All sides should pay attention and come up with the right solution." It was at Kakome Bay in 1984 when Albania was a Stalinist dictatorship, that a Club Med manager on a snorkel fishing trip from the nearby Greek island of Corfu was shot dead on the beach by border guards. — *Reuters*

Britain gets tough on drug advertising

LONDON — Britain's medicines regulator is planning a crackdown on misleading drug advertising and will "name and shame" offending companies, it said yesterday. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will also in future vet the entire advertising portfolio of firms which regularly breach the guidelines. Launching the new campaign against unethical advertising, MHRA Chief Executive Professor Kent Woods said there had been a number of recent cases where advertising was confusing or misleading. "It is vital that we tackle this type of poor practice swiftly and effectively," he said. Britain does not allow advertising of prescription medicines direct to consumers, as happens in the United States, but patients are increasingly exposed to adverts because the government is allowing more products to be sold over the counter. Last year, Britain became the first country in the world to allow the sale of cholesterol-lowering statin drugs without prescription when a low-dose form of Merck & Co Inc's Zocor went on sale in pharmacies. Advertising of medicines — a boom business in recent years has become mired in controversy on both sides of the Atlantic recently, particularly in the light of the withdrawal of Merck's Vioxx pill last year. Most members of a US Food and Drug Administration advisory panel, which met last week to consider COX-2 products, said they opposed a return of adverts for the painkillers or wanted severe curbs on commercials. — *Reuters*

Toddler coveted by both Palestinian, Israeli parents

JERUSALEM — An Israeli Jewish woman and Muslim convert, who mothered a boy with her Palestinian husband, is engaged in a legal battle to gain back custody of her three-year-old son from his adoptive Jewish settler parents, media reported yesterday. The young woman,whose indentity was not revealed by the Israeli *Yediot Aharonot* daily, had her baby taken away at birth by Israel's social services on the ground that she was not apt to raise him due to past drug use and run-ins with the police. The child was subsequently placed in the care of an Orthodox Jewish family in the Gush Katif settlement bloc, in the occupied Gaza Strip. Jerusalem's district tribunal ruled last year that the child could be returned to his biological mother, who now lives in the southern West Bank town of Bethlehem where she had two more children with her husband. The young boy endured emotional distress, however, when he was reunited with his Palestinian family and even lost his ability to speak. Worried about his health, the biological mother decided to send her boy back to his adoptive family on the condition that she have visitation rights, which she said was not honoured. She then went back to court to obtain definite custody of her child whose security, she argues, is best guaranteed in Bethlehem than in Gush Katif which has been the frequent target of mortar attacks. Gush Katif and all other Gaza settlements will be evacuated by Israel this summer. — *AFP*

Thai doctors acquitted on murder-for-organ charges

BANGKOK — Three Thai doctors were acquitted yesterday on charges of conspiring to murder patients for their kidneys after a trial which spanned three years. The Bangkok criminal court ruled the doctors did not kill two female patients, both then in a coma, for their kidneys because they were brain dead before the organs were removed in 1997. However, the court said one of the doctors, then the director of the hospital, might have falsified letters from relatives consenting to kidney donations and ordered him detained pending any prosecution appeal which must be made within 30 days. Trade in human organs is illegal in Thailand, but some doctors say it has been known for hospitals to tiptoe around the law by transferring dying patients to other hospitals in return for money, some of which goes to relatives of the patients. — *Reuters*

Steps to promote economic ties with N. Ireland discussed

MUSCAT — Salim bin Said Al Ghattami, president of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, received at his office yesterday a member of the board of the invest in Northern Ireland Authority and his accompanying delegation who are on a Gulf tour.

Ghattami stressed the OCCI and Omani private sector's keenness on promoting economic cooperation with institutions and businessmen in Britain, saying such visits exchange help promote this cooperation.

He referred to the development achieved in the economic field during the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, thanks to adopting open market and liberalised economy policies.

He urged businessmen and investors in Britain to invest in the Sultanate and utilise the facilities and incentives which include customs exemptions on production inputs and the modern airports and ports and investor friendly laws and legislations, as well as the political stability and the Sultanate's strategic location.

The guest and his delegation praised the developmental renaissance witnessed by the Sultanate. He expressed delight at the excellent bilateral relations in various fields, particularly in the economic sphere.

The guests expressed their keenness on cooperating with Omani businessmen and private sector and said this visit comes within the context of promoting economic cooperation with the Gulf states in general and the Sultanate in particular. According to foreign trade statistics for 2003, Britain came fourth in the list of Oman's trade partners as the Sultanate imported goods worth RO142.83 million from Britain (5.65 per cent of its total imports), while Omani exports to Britain accounted for 20.3 per cent, RO30.1 million. — *ONA*

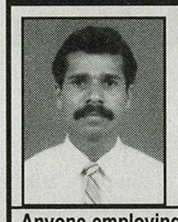


TRADE TALKS: Salim bin Said Al Ghattami, right, with the head of the Northern Ireland business delegation. — ONA

Yemeni official praises ties

MUSCAT — Mohammed Abdullah A'lamah, undersecretary of the Oil and Minerals Ministry in Yemen, praised the strong bilateral relations, citing them as brotherly, historical and ever developing in various fields. After signing the minutes of the third meeting of the joint technical committee with Nasser bin Khamis Al Jashmi, Oil and Gas Ministry undersecretary, here yesterday he said the two sides drafted a programme for future bilateral cooperation in various areas. — *ONA*

ABSCONDING



Name	:	Muhammed Haneefa Hashim
Nationality	:	Indian
Passport No	:	A 3378060
Absconding	:	19 February 2005
Profession	:	Road Vehicles Driver (General)
Sponsor : Khaiber Trading & Cont. LLC		

Anyone employing the above is liable for the legal Consequences. The absconding has the right to report the inaccuracy of this statement, to any of the labour offices within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Berlin University scholar visits SQU

MUSCAT — Prof. (Dr) Gudrun Kramer of the Chair of East Asia and Middle East Institute at the Department of History and Cultural Studies of Free University Berlin (Freie Universitat Berlin, Germany) visited Sultan Qaboos University yesterday.

Dr Saud Al Riyami received her in his office and they discussed topics of mutual interest.

Prof. Kramer said that one of the purposes of her visit was to meet academics in Oman in the areas of Islamic studies, Middle Eastern studies and history. During her meeting with SQU president, Prof. Kramer discussed possibilities of cooperation between SQU and Free University Berlin. She also explained the structure and programmes of the Department of History and Cultural Studies, and the East Asia and Middle East institute at the university.

"The institute offers a range of disciplines in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic and Semitic languages as well as disciplines in Islamic studies, Iranian studies, and Turkish studies," she said. "The institute is known for its research, focusing on two themes — history and society, and Islamic theology and philosophy — and a large number of students and faculty are pursuing research in these disciplines," said Prof. Kramer.

Dr Saud Al Riyami mentioned the existing collaborative agreements between SQU and German Universities and said that cooperation with Berlin varsity was welcome. He also explained to the visitor about the various programmes offered at SQU, particularly the Language Centre and the Colleges of Arts and Education.

Prof. Kramer is currently on a visit to Oman under an invitation from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs to give lectures and meet with academicians.

Dr Saud Al Riyami presented the visitor with a memento on departure.

The Free University Berlin was established in 1948 after the World War II by the state as a university advocating 'freedom.' Today it is the largest university in Germany's capital, and one of the largest in the nation with around 40,000 students — around 6,000 from abroad — in approximately 100 different programmes of study.



BILATERAL TALKS: Dr Saud Al Riyami with Prof. Gudrun Kramer yesterday.

Sultanate of Oman

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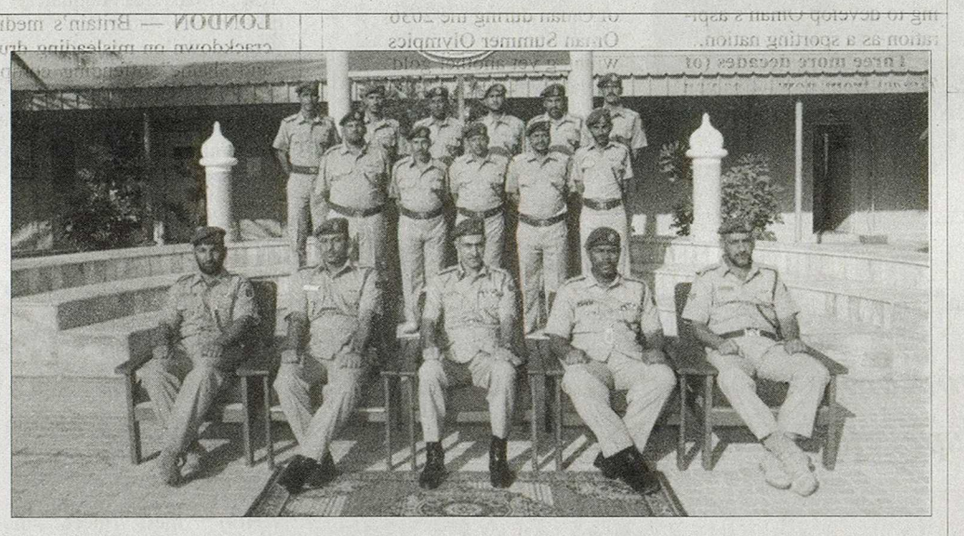
Sanad panel proposes Omanisation of many jobs

DIMA WAL TAIEEN — Sanad committee in the wilayat of Dima Wal Taieen yesterday proposed Omanising household items selling and textiles occupations mobile phones selling as from July 1.

The committee, in a meeting held under the chairmanship of Sheikh Fahd bin Sultan Al Yaqoubi, wali of Dima Wal Taieen and chairman of the committee, discussed various topics. The director-general of manpower in the region reviewed the achievements of the programme in Omanising foodstuff, readymade garments and accessories occupations.

He noted that Omanisation of these occupations provided a number of job opportunities for the youth of the wilayat of Dima Wal Taieen. It also helped to activate commercial movement in the wilayat.

The committee also discussed occupations proposed to be Omanised in the wilayat over the forthcoming period according to Sanad programme plan. The committee reviewed a plan for Omanising the driving occupation. — *ONA*



COURSES COMPLETED: The Engineering School of the Sultan's Armed Forces yesterday organised a ceremony to mark the conclusion of a number of training courses for the RAO's non-commissioned officers and personnel. The director of personnel and administration at the Engineering Services distributed prizes and certificates.

International book fair opens

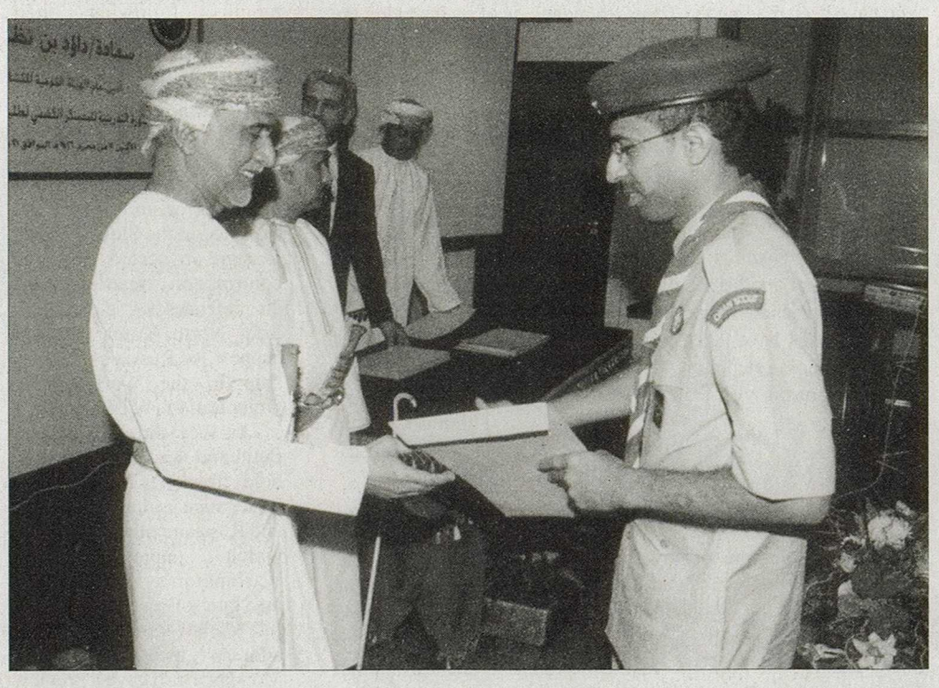
MUSCAT — The 10th edition of Muscat International Book Fair opened at the Oman International Exhibitions Centre under the patronage of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal Al Busaidi, secretary-general of the Council of Ministers.

The 10-day fair organisers are Ministry of Information, Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Sultan Qaboos University.

A total of 306 publishing houses including 24 new ones from 22 countries participate in the fair.

On display are 100,000 titles covering all spheres of knowledge including 25,000 new titles published in the last three years. Publishing houses will offer discounts of at least 25 per cent of book prices. — *ONA*

Over 60 SQU scouts honoured



FELICITATED: Dawood bin Nader Al Zedzali giving away the certificate.

MUSCAT — More than 60 scouts from Sultan Qaboos University, who took part in the second training workshop for scouts, were honoured during a ceremony held at SQU under the patronage of Dawood bin Nader Al Zedzali, general secretary of National Organisation for Scouts and Guides. Dr Saud Al Riyami, president of SQU; Dr Hamed Al Salmi, SQU vice-president, and many other dignitaries attended the function.

Dawood bin Nader Al Zedzali congratulated the participants and handed over letters of appreciation.

Earlier, Dr Hisham Muneeb, head of the department of physical education, welcomed the audience and highlighted the importance and benefits of such workshops to the participants.

Abdul Mohsin Al Zawhari, one of the SQU scouts, who took part in the workshop, thanked everyone for the arrangements and the successful completion of the workshop.

Organised in collaboration with the National Organisation for Scouts and Guides, the workshop was held at Mabelah School and at Al Hassan bin Hashim School.



OPINION

TIMES OF OMAN
ESTABLISHED: 1975

Roadblock still stands after Kim's climbdown

By Charles Whelan

TWELVE days after North Korea pulled out of six-party talks, leader Kim Jong-il staged a partial climbdown at China's request but left a key roadblock to dialogue still standing, analysts said. Kim said he would return to the talks aimed at ending the nuclear standoff if conditions were right during a four-day visit by a senior Chinese Communist Party official, Wang Jiaru, according to North Korea's official media. Wang's visit to Pyongyang ended yesterday. The promise extracted from Kim demonstrated that China was using its leverage in the interests of stability on the Korean peninsula. But it also showed the limits of outside influence on North Korea as well as Pyongyang's apparent bottom line — Kim's so far deal-breaking demand for concessions from the United States before it would return to dialogue.

Washington has ruled out rewarding North Korea for simply turning up at talks. In a joint statement on Saturday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Japanese counterpart Nobutaka Machimura said Pyongyang should drop all preconditions. "Kim Jong-il's latest comments contain no big difference from what North Korea already declared on February 10," when it pulled out of six-party talks and said it had nuclear weapons, said Nam Sung-wook, a North Korea expert at Korea University. "But North Korea put the ball back into the US court by reiterating its position." Peter Beck, of the International Crisis Group think-tank, said Kim's intervention may have nudged the standoff closer to talks without containing much of substance. "I think it is one more step in the direction back to the negotiating table. We are clearly not there yet," he said.

Koh Yu-hwan, of Dongguk University, said the North Korean statement of 12 days ago that boasted of nuclear weapons produced such a volley of criticism of North Korea from world capitals that Kim was trying to re-establish calm and rational dialogue. "He says North Korea does not want to overturn the negotiating table but wants it to be set up with new dishes palatable to its taste," he said. "Kim Jong-il is stating to the world that North Korea does not want the confrontation to spin out of control and urging changes on the US side first — to drop its hostile policy and pay rewards for abandoning nukes."

Since the stalemate began 28 months ago North Korea has maintained its demands while denying US charges that it is running a highly enriched uranium programme. At a third round of talks in Beijing in June that brought together the six parties — the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States — Washington softened its tone and offered aid and security guarantees in return for a step-by-step dismantling of North Korea's plutonium and uranium weapons programmes.

Washington says it has yet to receive a response from North Korea on that proposal, while North Korea rejects all charges relating to uranium and says it wants rewards before it will return to the negotiating table. "In the days ahead one of the challenges is going to be how the United States and North Korea are going to save face, because really they have been talking over and under each other and not to each other," said Beck.

Fixing campaign financing

THE system for public financing of presidential campaigns is like an old car that is broken down and needs costly repairs before it can run again: Before you get out your wallet, you ought to think hard about whether such an investment makes sense, whether you should try a new model or whether you might be able to get around without a car at all. Should the presidential campaign finance system be junked or fixed? We've previously argued that a fix is warranted and worth the cost, but in light of the 2004 campaign, which featured spending beyond anything imagined, it's at least prudent to consider alternatives.

The current regime, set up after the Watergate scandals, has two parts: During the primary campaign, candidates who agree to a set spending limit receive federal matching funds on the first $250 of every donation. For the general election, the two major-party candidates are eligible for a grant that is supposed to constitute full financing for their campaigns. The primary system is by far the more broken of the two, but neither is working as planned and, absent changes, the 2008 campaign is likely to witness further decay.

In 2004 the primary campaign spending limit was $45 million, but both major-party candidates, opting out of the system, raised multiples of that amount — President Bush about $270 million and Senator John Kerry about $235 million. While both candidates took the $75 million grant for general election financing, that represented just a fraction of general election spending; all of the president's supposed primary spending, and the vast majority of Kerry's, was in fact directed to the general election campaign, and their parties spent millions more. Whether this level of spending was an anomaly fuelled by the unusually heated nature of the 2004 race, or whether it augurs an even more frenzied pace next time around, is an important factor in considering any overhaul.

The post-Watergate reformers had a number of goals in mind in setting up the system: Limiting the money spent on campaigns, reducing the likelihood of corruption among candidates beholden to special interests, freeing candidates from having to spend time raising money, and giving lesser known candidates a competitive boost through matching funds. At this point, there's scant hope of keeping spending down, and the rules contribute little to reducing whatever corruption exists. It may be that getting rid of the general election grant would significantly increase the amount of time candidates spend raising money, to the detriment of political debate, but given the amount of private money for candidates and parties that in fact flows to the general election campaign, it's not clear that public financing is achieving its intended role — and in any event, it is likely that amount will have to grow considerably to attract candidates to stay in the system next time around. — *The Washington Post*

From Our Archives

February 1990

More Arab cabin crew for BA

MUSCAT — A second group of Arab cabin crew have received their wings and are entering services on British Airways' Middle East routes. This brings to 42 the number of regional crew based at British Airways' cabin centres in Bahrain and Cairo. The latest set of recruits included six Bahrainis and three Egyptians.

"Our aim this summer is to have two Arab crew members on all our Middle East flights," says Adel Ali, BA manager, Bahrain.

We have been down this route before, haven't we?



COMMENTARY

by Oommen Kuruvilla

THE release of some 500 Palestinian prisoners hot on the heels of the Sharm El Sheikh summit early this month is indeed a positive development. If this gesture emanates from a genuine desire for the resolution of the long-standing problems, it is all to the good.

It gives an impression that the Red Sea summit between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was a resounding success. The Cairo summit, it may be recalled, vowed to put the kibosh on the current run of violence. A ceasefire pact was signed by both the leaders at the end of the parleys. One only wishes such a black and white solution is possible at this juncture!

Does all this betoken that the peace process is firing on all cylinders? The fact is that the Cairo peace meet was, at best, an emollient success as both the leaders were keen to calm the ruffled feathers of each other. Nothing more, nothing less.

Experience has taught us that we should take all these gestures with dollops of salt. We have been down this road several times before. In 1996 when the Oslo peace process was at its zenith, some 800 Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli jails; we know how, before long, the process was torpedoed by the Israeli government.

It is pertinent to ask why there is a kind of rush on the peace front *tout a coup.* It's pretty obvious that there is a link between the Red Sea resort conference and the prisoner release. But there is also a camouflaged link: US President George Bush's desire to do something regarding the Palestinian track, so he can temper his 'cut-and-run' track record on this front when he tours Europe.

It's no coincidence that Bush is now shouting from the European rooftops the apparent positive developments in the Middle East. The Europeans, it may be noted, take a rather dim view of Bush's Middle East policies, not least his approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is pretty much totally weighed against the Arabs.

The visit by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Jerusalem and the West Bank early this month should be viewed in this light. Of course, both Bush and Rice are keen on lecturing the Palestinians ad nauseam about the need for reform rather than telling Sharon about the necessity of ending the occupation once and for all.

To the Palestinians, the incarceration of some 8,500 of their fellowmen is a highly emotive issue. They are considered not just ordinary Palestinians but heroes who were ready to sacrifice their lives for an independent Palestinian state. Sharon knows that the release of some prisoners would boost Abbas' standing among his people, which can then be parlayed into implementing the Red Sea ceasefire pact. Not that Sharon does not know Abbas' authority is hemmed in by a multiplicity of factors — the continuation of Israeli troops on the Palestinian land, blockades, prisoners, the wall building and a slew of other issues.

Sharon perhaps wants to finish his much tom-tomed unilateral agenda without much trouble from the Palestinian side. His so-called "disengagement plan" has now been given the go-ahead by not only the US but even the Europeans as well.

No doubt, Israeli pullout from any part of the Palestinian land is welcome. But it should not be a substitute for the withdrawal from every inch of the occupied territories. Without doubt, Sharon has been able to put a deceitful gloss over his Gaza pullout plan. In fact, this plan is a thin end of the wedge. There is more to this idea than a plain gesture of magnanimity.

It is now as clear as daylight that the motive of his unilateral disengagement plan — which is supposed to come into effect from July — is a massive land grab in the West Bank on behalf of the settlers. This, he thinks, will settle the whole issue of land dispute. It is for nothing that he started the construction of the wall along the West Bank. He reckons that the international community can be pacified to some extent by uprooting the Gaza settlements.

The question is will the world be able to cut through Sharon's dodgy designs, and if yes, will it be bold enough to bridle him. An Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*, was pretty candid when it prised open, the other day, Sharon's gambit. It said: "If the country were a chessboard, one could say that Sharon sacrificed a rook to protect the queen…Sharon has not become a dove. He has remained what he always was: A pragmatic hawk." Yes, perhaps that adequately describes the latter-day Sharon: He has become a practical hawk.

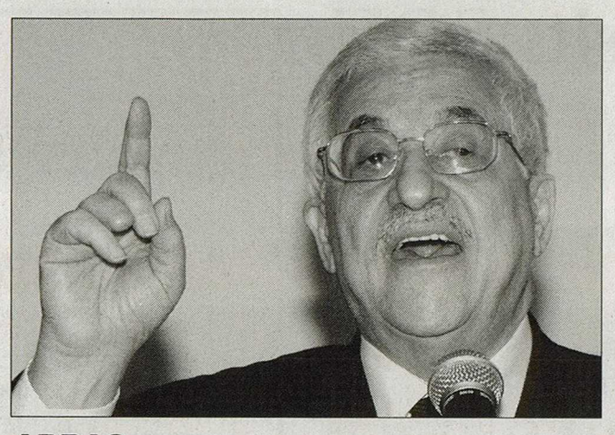
Of course, e is no numbskull to think that the Palestinians will remain acquiescent if he tries to end the dispute by gobbling up the West Bank territories. He should know more than anybody else that peace and security for the Israelis is simply not possible without a full withdrawal from the Palestinian territories. But then he should be seen to do something that will placate his constituency.

This is the reason we should not go cock-a-hoop over the Sharm El Sheikh summit or Monday's prisoner release. Of course, we should not be Cassandras, but it is better to see things as they are. If we look at the so-called sanguine statements of Sharon or Bush or Rice, we can detect one common factor: They don't touch the question of occupation even with a barge pole.

But the hub of the issue is occupation and most other apparently vexed issues are just spokes. America's didactic statements always point up the violence perpetrated by the Palestinians, but they conveniently forget that occupation itself is an acute form of violence. They keep banging on about reforms in the Palestinian Authority but skip the fact that whatever mess we see in the territories now is because of occupation.

And nobody is talking about the freeing of east Jerusalem from the Israelis so the Palestinians can make it their eternal capital. Everybody would like to skate over the question of the return of the Palestinian refugees to their land, much of which is under the Israeli occupation now.

These are a few basic issues crying for a solution. Sharon and all the international mediators want to postpone these fundamental issues to be discussed at a later stage. But when? Nobody knows. It might go on and on and on unless the international community decides to wade in and help shepherd the final-status talks.



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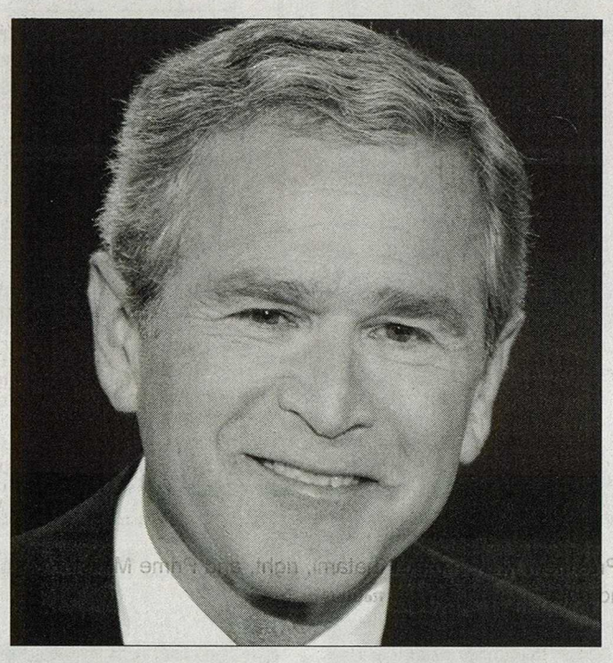

BUSH



SHARON



RICE

Dabur® Vatika
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"Quote of the day"

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret

READERS' FORUM

Read it on the net at www.timesofoman.com

Happy birthday, 'Times'

FIRST and foremost, let us wish the *Times of Oman*, which has turned 30 today, a very happy birthday. We fondly wish the paper the very best. Let it grow stronger and stronger in the years to come. Our birthday gift to the *Times* is our sincere wishes and blessings. Meanwhile, we wait eagerly for the 40-page supplement — the *Times'* gift to the readers.

Bhargavi Rahulan
Ruwi

The best English newspaper

LET me extend my best wishes to the *Times of Oman* on its 30th anniversary. The *Times* has grown to be the top English newspaper in town. It has always encouraged its readers by giving ample opportunity to display their skill in writing through the *Readers' Forum*. Keep up the good work. I hope you will shine even more in the future. Happy birthday to you. May God bless you.

Salih Thacher
Al Khoudh

'Times' at the top

I AM pleased to note that the *Times of Oman* is celebrating its 30th birthday. I take this opportunity to congratulate the founder of the newspaper and the entire staff on this momentous occasion. One must not forget the fact that no organisation can survive without a qualified and hard-working workforce. I am sure that the *Times* has a very sincere and dedicated team. I had once been a subscriber of another English daily but switched to the *Times* because of its good coverage of news from all spheres. Now I am a regular reader of the *Times* and intend to stick by it, despite the fact that there are several attractive offers from other English dailies. Needless to say, the *Times of Oman* is on top of all other English dailies in the region.

M.V. Sajeev
Ruwi

Congratulations

CONGRATULATIONS to the *Times of Oman* on its 30th birthday and may it have a glorious run in the years to come. It's a milestone to be proud of. To bring out a newspaper catering to all sections of the society is a task that requires great commitment. Those who have been reading the *Times* from day one of its inception are indeed lucky. The more recent readers like us are also lucky to have seen it grow and flourish. We are sure the *Times* will reach newer heights in the years to come.

Usha Santhosh
Al Khuwair

All the very best

THE *Times of Oman* is indeed flying high. Sometime back I was a subscriber of another English daily. But after reading the *Times* once at my friend's house I decided to subscribe to the *Times.* I now feel that I have taken a right decision. I am happy to know that the paper is celebrating its 30th anniversary today. My hearty congratulations. I wish the *Times* all the very best.

Thomas Cherian
Muscat

Indians have an edge

I HAVE great pleasure to know that the long-awaited Pakistan tour to India will be pretty much on schedule (*Times*, February 21). The cricket lovers of the subcontinent will get to see very exciting and entertaining cricket though the students who are appearing for board exams will miss the fun. Unfortunately, the Rawalpindi Express, the fiery Shoaib Akhtar, will miss the historic tour. There is no doubt about the greatness of this fast bowler. But the fact is that he has never posed any serious threat for the Indian batting line-up. The Indians have always faced him with great ease, and more often than not, managed to rein him in. Hence his availability for this tour would not have made a big difference. I hope that this series would be very entertaining. The Indians have a psychological advantage over their rivals as the sweet memories of their last Pakistan tour are still fresh in their minds.

Mohammed Osama Rawat
Ruwi

Letters, containing not more than 200 words with full name, address and telephone number, may be sent by mail (Times of Oman, P.O. Box 770, P.C. 112, Ruwi), by fax (24813153) or by e-mail (times@omantel.net.om)

A partnership put to the test

By Luc Perrot

WHEN they meet in Bratislava tomorrow, Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush will seek to reaffirm a Russo-US "strategic partnership" recently put sorely to the test by tensions on issues ranging from Ukraine's revolution to Russian arms sales to Syria, experts say.

But this second meeting of the two leaders in three months following their encounter at an Apec summit in Santiago in November is unlikely to settle differences in the partnership launched in 2001.

The two leaders are due to discuss issues such as combating terrorism — they are expected in the Slovak capital to sign an accord imposing controls on "man-portable" air defences — along with Iraq, North Korea and US support for Russia's membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

As they did in Santiago, Putin and Bush also intend to hold "frank" talks on thorny issues such as the Yukos affair and Russian political reforms, which have sparked Washington's concerns for the fate of democracy and rule of law in Russia. In an address in Brussels on Monday, Bush gave a preview of his message for Putin on this score, saying "the United States and all European countries should place democratic reform at the heart of their dialogue with Russia."

Recent statements from other senior US officials and Russia's deliberate choice to reassert privileged relations with Syria and Iran, both of which Washington eyes with high suspicion, point to a significant change in the tenor of bilateral relations.

Far from confirming a basic "eye-to-eye" confidence that Bush voiced for Putin at their first meeting in 2001, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently offered only the sparing assurance that Washington did not think effort to "isolate" Russia would provide a "solution."

Another high-ranking US diplomat offered equally faint praise, telling AFP only that for the time being there was "still more positive than negative" in US ties with Russia.

Apart from the Yukos affair, Washington's main concern in development of its relations with Russia lay in Moscow's increasingly close relations with Tehran and Damascus, both of which are accused by the United States of sponsoring terrorism.

In a meeting last Friday with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Hassan Rowhani, Putin said Russia was convinced that Iran had no intention of making a nuclear bomb and would therefore continue to cooperate with Tehran in "all spheres" including civil nuclear programmes. Two days earlier, Russia's defence ministry confirmed it was negotiating the sale of its Strelets air defence systems to Syria, prompting criticism from Israel and the United States.

"Moscow is reinforcing its ties with Washington's opponents ahead of the Bush-Putin meeting," without apparent regard for being accused of "supporting the forces destabilising Middle East," the Russian daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote on Friday.

"One cannot exclude the possibility that after Russian policies fell through in Ukraine, the Kremlin decided to deal an adequate response to Washington," the opposition daily continued.

PAKISTAN

Kashmir bus route to be de-mined

CHAKOTHI — The Pakistan Army is to clear anti-personnel mines that lie along the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus route within a week, once approval is accorded by Islamabad, an army official has informed.

"The day we are given the go-ahead signal, we will start the lifting of mines from the very next morning. The process is only subject to clearance by higher authorities," Chakothi Sector Commander Brigadier Naushad Ahmed said.

The commander spoke to reporters at a spot along the Line of Control in the Chakothi sector, some 61 kilometres south of the state capital Muzaffarabad.

The spot, at an altitude of 3,545 feet, overlooks the footbridge over the water channel that marks the dividing line in Kashmir.

Some Indian army bunkers and the road to Srinagar, which winds through the mountains on the other side of the Line of Control, were also visible to the naked eye from that spot.

"There are some modalities which remain to be finalised. As soon as they are finalised, the issue of mine lifting will be decided at the level of deputy general of military operations of both countries," Brig Ahmed said.

"Both the troops are facing each other and will start mine lifting simultaneously under the agreement," he added. He said mines were planted over a small patch and once they started the job they would be able to remove them within a week. The brigadier said that unless the mines were removed the equipment for installation of the bridge and construction or widening of the track could not be started. — *Internews*

Gas supply reaches all-time high

KARACHI — The supply of natural gas to the Sui Southern Gas Company has reached an all-time high level of 1.1b cubic feet of gas per day in February 2005, it has been announced.

The average quantum of gas, received from a total of 12 gas fields in Sindh and Balochistan and distributed through the SSGC network, has remained close to this level in the recent weeks.

This reflects an increase of over 100m cubic feet per day in the supply of gas to SSGC over the last year, thus enabling the company to maintain maximum distribution and off take.

Even during the recent shortage, resulting from the shutdown of Sui Gas Purification Plant, SSGC was able to manage the gas load and keep most of its industrial and domestic customers adequately serviced, says a press release. — *Internews*

Man accused of beheading niece

MULTAN — Police in central Pakistan said yesterday they had arrested a man for allegedly beheading his eight-year-old niece with a hatchet during an exorcism.

The suspect's wife delivered a stillborn boy two weeks ago and an "exorcist-cum-magician" told him that the victim's mother had performed black magic on them, police said. The exorcist said that to ward off the effects of the evil spell he had to kill his niece, said Mukhtar Tikka, police chief of Vehari, some 90 kilometres east of Multan. "We have arrested Mohammed Asghar for murdering his eight-year-old niece Ramsha," Tikka said.

Asghar murdered his niece on Sunday and dumped her body in a canal, police said.

He later told the family that she had been kidnapped and joined the search efforts, but the girl's mother and his wife knew about the crime and told investigators.

The girl's body was found on Monday, Tikka said.

"The accused has confessed his crime and police have recovered the hatchet," he added. Police did not say if they had caught the supposed exorcist. — *AFP*

Govt to discuss sale of Patriot missiles to India with US

WASHINGTON — The expected sales of American Patriot missiles to India is likely to be discussed between Islamabad and Washington, diplomatic sources have informed.

A US defence team began briefing Indian officials in New Delhi on Monday on the Patriot missiles. In Washington's diplomatic circles the visit is seen as a prelude to the sale of the advanced anti-ballistic missiles to India.

"It's a serious development and comes into conflict with the existing nuclear deterrence in the subcontinent," a South Asian defence expert familiar with the system was quoted as saying in a report in The Dawn on Monday.

Since the May 1998, when both India and Pakistan tested their nuclear devices, there existed an undeclared balance of power in the subcontinent based on the fear that a clash between the two nuclear-armed neighbours could lead to the destruction of both. But the Patriots, which could bring down an incoming missile, could seriously tip the balance in India's favour, making Pakistan vulnerable.

"If the Patriots are delivered to India, it will seriously imbalance Pakistan's strategic capabilities and can trigger an arms race in the subcontinent," said the defence expert.

"The Pakistanis will need to do some soul searching to determine what effect it will have on their strategic defence," he added.

When asked what Pakistan could do to meet the threat posed by the expected sale of Patriot missiles to India, the expert said: "Pakistan will have to acquire counter-capability. This new development will tip the balance in India's favour unless it is redressed."

"They will take up the issue with the Americans," said the expert when asked what could be Pakistan's immediate response.

Sources in Washington said that the Bush administration gave clearance for a classified technical presentation of the system to India as part of the 'Next Step in Strategic Partnership' agreement initiated by the two countries last year.

The sources said the decision to give a 'classified briefing' about the Patriot system to India was taken during the first phase of NSSP that concluded in October.

The NSSP envisages cooperation in what is known as the 'quartet issues' — civilian space and civilian nuclear fields, hi-tech trade and missile defence.

The conclusion of the first phase of the NSSP was marked by the US partially easing export controls on supply of equipment and technology for India's space and nuclear programmes.

The Patriot is a long-range, all altitude and all weather air defence system to counter tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and advanced aircraft. The missile's range is 70 km and it can climb to an altitude greater than 24km. The minimum flight time — time needed to arm a missile — is less than three seconds and maximum flight time — time needed to reach a target — is just three-and-half minutes. India will be the sixth country with which Washington has shared this technology after Israel, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan. — *Internews*

Govt steps up push for pipeline project with Iran, India

ISLAMABAD/NEW DELHI — Having persuaded India to join plans for a cross-border gas pipeline, Iran and Pakistan kept up diplomatic momentum yesterday to make the long talked about $4 billion project a reality.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz went to Tehran with high expectations of "substantial progress" on the scheme, while Iran's Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi was in New Delhi, expecting to sign a memorandum of understanding with India.

"We are convinced that the Iran-India pipeline through Pakistan will benefit all three countries and substantially improve political and economic relations between India and Pakistan," Kharrazi told a foreign policy think-tank in New Delhi.

A pipeline would earn Pakistan millions of dollars from transit fees, but more importantly it will create an economic bond with nuclear rival India, with which it has fought three wars.

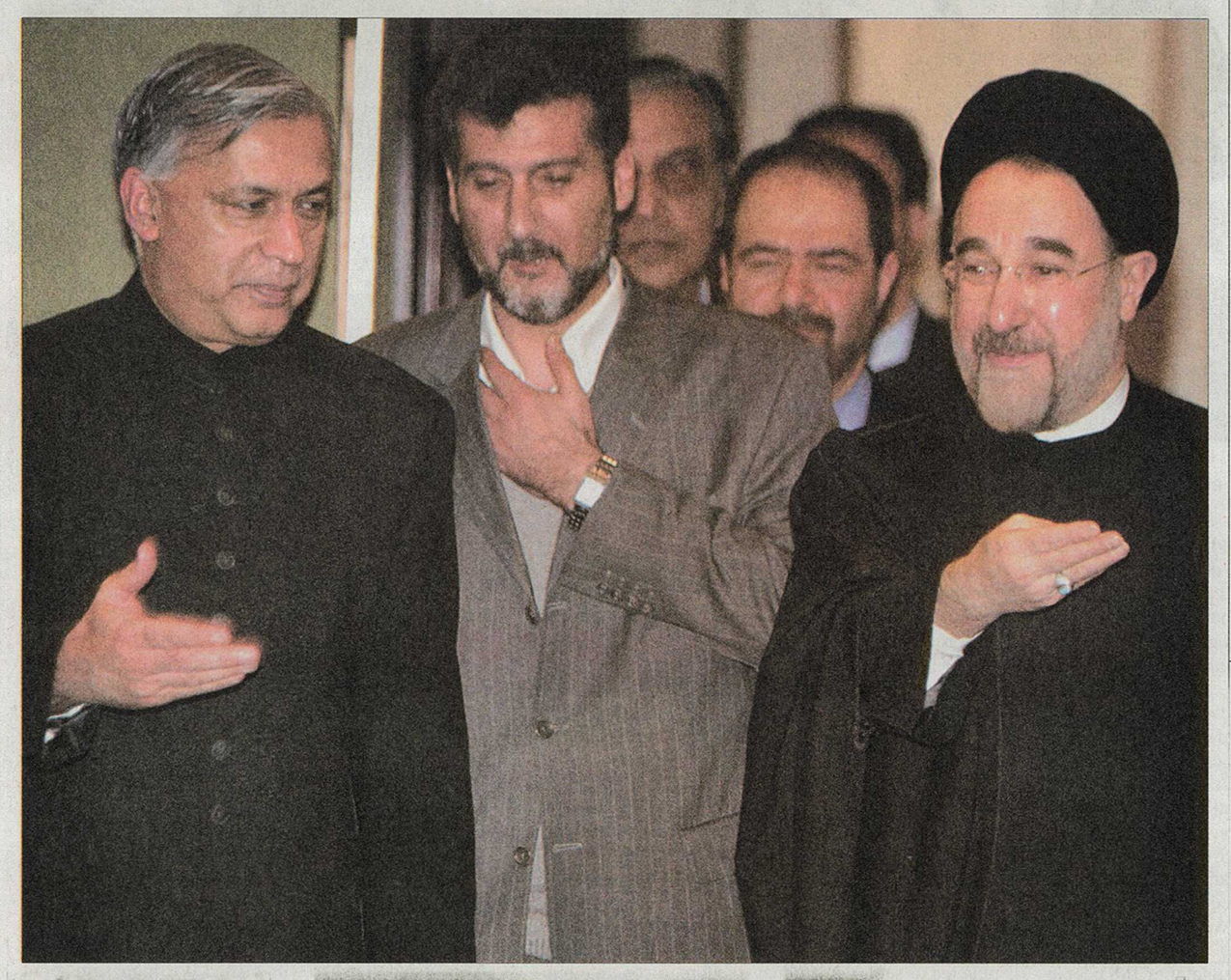
During talks in Islamabad last week to push along a year-old peace process, India signalled it was willing "to look at" the project, dubbed "the peace pipeline", subject to security considerations.

Pakistan's Aziz, who is also finance minister, has championed the need for stronger economic ties with India to normalise relations, and was upbeat as he headed to Iran.

"In my view, there will be substantial progress on the gas pipeline project during this trip," he told state television before leaving on a three-day visit.

"Our effort is that Iran, Pakistan and India should take this project forward. Our energy needs are increasing and if we get gas from abroad, it will benefit the economy," said Aziz.

India will want assurances from Islamabad that Pakistan will be a good neighbour in the future and that rebel tribesmen in Pakistan's south-western province of Balochistan will pose no threat to a pipeline running through their territory.



BOOSTING TIES: President Mohammed Khatami, right, and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, left, enter a salon for a meeting at Tehran's Saadabad palace yesterday. — Reuters

Baloch tribals attacked production facilities in Pakistan's biggest gas field last month, disrupting supplies to the rest of the country for several days.

"Naturally there are concerns and difficulties in a project like this, but all problems are surmountable," strategic analyst and retired Pakistani general Kamal Matinuddin said.

The other security issue that could play a role is the increasing tension between the United States and Iran over its alleged covert nuclear weapons programme.

Aziz made no reference to the row between Pakistan's main ally, Washington, and its fellow Islamic western neighbour, but analysts said the subject is bound to come up. Pakistan supports European efforts to reach a negotiated settlement.

Pakistan also says Iran should be allowed to develop nuclear capability for peaceful means although the scientist credited with building Pakistan's own nuclear bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan, last year admitted selling nuclear secrets to Iran as well as to Libya and North Korea.

— *Reuters*

British students due

KARACHI — Karachi is to host a group of 40 British students tomorrow under a programme of the British Council to promote cordial relations, wider interaction and understanding with Pakistani students, it has been learnt.

This was told to participants of the annual reunion of Chevening/British scholars at the residence of British Deputy High Commission the other day.

The British students, belonging to four UK universities, will visit Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta to have direct interaction with the Pakistani students at different seats of higher learning.

They will also visit other cultural, political and business institutions in these cities for getting greater familiarisation of Pakistan.

British Deputy High Commissioner Hamish St Clair Daniel said that some 10,000 students visas were issued to Pakistani students intending to study in the Britain in 2004.

He said the UK had always been the first preference of Pakistani students for studying mainly due to the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nature of its society.

The British envoy said that at present they were not considering to increase state-funded scholarship opportunities for the Pakistani students to study in the UK.

He said the Chevening scholarship programme had been adequately serving the purpose through which hundreds of Pakistanis had availed opportunity of getting accredited higher education in the Britain.

British Council Director Charlie Walker said that some 40 Pakistani students had gone to the UK this year under the Chevening scholarship scheme. — *Internews*

Omantel عمانتل

NOTICE

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) announces to the public that the company restricted the use of Jibreen Card from Mobile phones from 1st June 2004.

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Kasuri backs Security Council Japanese bid

TOKYO — Pakistani visiting Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri voiced support yesterday for Japan's goal of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council but had reservations about the bid of rival India, a diplomat said.

Kasuri held talks with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on the situation in Pakistan's neighbour Afghanistan and Japan's plans to resume yen loans to Islamabad among other issues, Pakistani ambassador to Japan Kamran Niaz said.

In a separate meeting Kasuri told Japan's main opposition leader Katsuya Okada that there should be "objective criteria" on choosing members of an enlarged UN Security Council.

"Japan would certainly qualify under whatever criteria. In the post-Second World War period Japan has been completely on the right side of all major issues," Niaz said, quoting the discussions.

"Our reservation is that India would not fit under those criteria," he said.

Niaz said Pakistan objected to India's permanent membership due to its past wars with Pakistan and China and violation of the UN Security Council resolution calling for a plebiscite for disputed Kashmir.

Japan, India, Germany and Brazil have launched a joint bid to win permanent seats on the Security Council. Veto-wielding power is currently in the hands of five powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — in a system rewarding the winners of World War II. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi at a September meeting said there was no need to expand the number of permanent seats. Italy has cast anxious glances at Germany's bid.



ALL SMILES: Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, left, with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during a meeting in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Of the four Security Council aspirants, Japan is the most strongly backed by the United States. But its bid is criticised by China, which says Tokyo has not fully repented its World War II militarism.

The ambassador said Kasuri expressed gratitude to Koizumi for Japan's 60 years of economic assistance and invited him to visit Pakistan.

Kyodo News reported yesterday that Koizumi was considering visiting India and Pakistan along with Luxembourg and the Netherlands from late April to early May.

Japan has agreed in principle to resume yen loans to Pakistan, which it cut off in 1998 after New Delhi and Islamabad carried out shock nuclear tests. — *AFP*



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TIMES OF OMAN

DDB OMAN

Bilkis Bano identifies 12 accused in court trial

MUMBAI — Bilkis Bano, prime witness in the Bilkis Bano gangrape-cum-murder case, was yesterday understood to have identified in the trial court 12 accused who had allegedly outraged her modesty and assaulted her and members of her family at Dahod in Gujarat on March 3, 2002, during communal riots.

She deposed before the court in-camera and named 12 of the total 20 accused who were in the dock.

The 12 accused identified by Bilkis are charged with rape and murder while eight others are charged with shielding the guilty. Of these eight, two are a doctor-couple who performed the post mortem of the victims while six others are police officers.

Special Public Prosecutor R. K. Shah told reporters Bilkis pointed at the accused, who had allegedly gangraped her and also those who had killed her three-year-old daughter and attributed roles to each of the accused in the crime.

Bilkis could not recognise the policemen but gave their names to the trial court. She also recognised the clothes she was wearing on the day.

On January 13, the court had framed charges against the accused for their alleged complicity in attacking a group of 17 members of the minority community, including Bilkis Bano, in Devgarh Baria village of Dahod district.

Of the 17 victims, eight were killed, six were reported missing and three — Bilkis Bano, master Hussain and Sadaam — survived the attack. — *PTI*

UN envoy urges to open retail sector to FDI

From Our Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — The US Ambassador David C. Mulford made a forceful plea to open up India's retail sector to foreign direct investment (FDI).

Talking to reporters here yesterday, Mulford said that the experience of China and several other countries had disproved the wrong conceptions on opening up the retail market for foreign direct investment. It had created more jobs in those countries. It had also proved that it would not affect the local community.

Mulford was in Kerala to spend the weekend in the state. He said that there were still teething problems even though there was economic reforms process in India that started more than ten years ago.

He said that it was not difficult to come to India but there had been problems. He cited the example of the Dabhol power plant and the problems faced by a few US companies in Tamil Nadu.

Drama singer Purushothaman dead at 56

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — Noted Malayalam playback singer Pattanakkad Purushothaman died at the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital following a cardiac arrest on Tuesday. He was 56.

The funeral will take place at the Thycaud electric crematorium in Thiruvananthapuram today. He is survived by his wife Ratnamma and four children Jayesh, Shyni, Janeesh and Sheeba.

Born in 1949 as the son of Ramakrishnan and Ambujakshi at Pattanakkad in Alappuzha district, Purushothaman had been living in Thiruvananthapuram for the last 18 years. He was admitted to the Medical College Hospital following chest pain.

He had given voice to more than 3,000 drama songs in Malayalam and had sung for 82 Malayalam films.

Army warns of fresh avalanches in J&K, toll hits 188



ALERT: People walk past stranded trucks outside Watlingo village, the worst-hit by avalanches and an important point on main highway, yesterday. — AFP

SRINAGAR — The army warned yesterday of fresh avalanches in Kashmir, where the death toll from massive snowslides hit 188, and urged people living in the most mountainous areas to flee their homes.

Dozens of people were missing in the Himalayan region in what Major-General Raj Mehta called "an unprecedented crisis."

"People living in higher reaches must vacate before they're overtaken by tragedy," Mehta told reporters in the snowbound main city of Srinagar.

The army, backed by police and paramilitary forces and civilian volunteers, battled high winds and poor visibility to search for survivors of avalanches that struck southern Kashmir over the past four days.

But a police officer in Srinagar said officials were losing hope for the missing buried under snow in six villages which were flattened by weekend avalanches, amid below-zero temperatures.

Police and army officials said a total of 188 people had died in the past four days, 185 of them in the weekend snowslides and three in an avalanche yesterday.

"We have found 73 bodies today" in addition to those found earlier, said a senior police officer in Qazigund, near the avalanche-hit area 80km south of Srinagar.

The air force searched for the missing and dropped food packages.

Air Force Group Captain Manavandera Singh said 1,700 people including 40 foreign tourists had been airlifted to safety.

A new avalanche yesterday morning struck the Rangamunda area, 80km south of Srinagar, killing three people and leaving six missing.

Mehta warned that warmer temperatures expected in the next few days could unleash fresh avalanches.

Dozens of hamlets at altitudes of 8,000 to 10,000 feet about 90km from Srinagar were at risk from new snowslides, he said.

The number of people affected by the army's call to leave was not immediately known. But authorities planned to set up emergency shelters in concrete public buildings for people to take refuge for the next 10 to 15 days.

"Each hill has become loaded with snow and just walking can trigger avalanches," Mehta said. Up to 17 feet of snow has blanketed the region since Thursday, weather officials said.

Kashmir has a massive army presence as the Indian government is seeking to suppress a bloody 15-year-old revolt against New Delhi's rule.

Mehta said only 78 were officially listed as missing. But government officials said it was impossible to give a firm figure for the number of dead and missing.

"It's an enormous tragedy. The number of dead may be higher as many areas are still inaccessible. We've mobilised all resources to rescue survivors," senior state government official Nayeem Akhtar said.

Mohammed Jabbar, village head of Panzad, told reporters in Qazigund locals had retrieved 150 bodies from nearby Watlingo village which was hardest hit by the avalanches.

"Some 250 people are missing in Watlingo and some other avalanche-hit regions," Jabbar said. Nazir Ahmed, a policeman who visited Watlingo, said about 100 houses had been swept away.

A police officer in Srinagar, who did not wish to be named, said the total number of people unaccounted for amounted to "several hundred." — *AFP*

All's not well with the young and restless, finds survey

NEW DELHI — Being part of the rat race is tough. And a bevy of Indian beauty queens, a booming fashion industry, and relationship pangs can only make it tougher for Generation Now.

In a survey carried out by the psychology department of Lady Shri Ram College, 53 per cent of the respondents talked of mental health as the foremost worry, 36 per cent talked of physical health concerns and 11 per cent were concerned about their reproductive health.

The survey was carried out on 1,180 students of the college. Based on the preliminary module devised by LSR, a larger survey was also conducted in 14 Delhi University colleges and three post-graduate departments in the university, under the aegis of the DU arm, World University Services.

Although the data of the larger survey is still being processed, the broad patterns that have emerged conform with the LSR findings.

Dr Kanika Khandelwal, lecturer, LSR's department of psychology, who devised the original module, said the prominent mental health problems that students talked about, included lack of concentration, irregular sleep patterns, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse. Most of the physical health concerns were related to weight, skin and hair. In fact, 38 per cent of the students felt that they were either underweight or overweight. The larger survey too has shown height and weight as prime concern among students, irrespective of the sex.

What bothers

Lack of concentration:	56%
Irregular sleep:	48%
Weight:	38%
Anxiety:	37%
Physical health:	36%
Reproductive health:	11%
Suicidal thoughts:	10%
Substance abuse:	8%

The most potent stressors as identified in the LSR survey, were making career choices, academic pressure coping with role expectations, physical appearance and relationships with the opposite sex. But, researchers feel that these students may be trying to "mask" some rent concerns.

"In my immediate friend circle, there are too many people bothered by their relationships. Many would not admit that; and this was probably their way of masking that botheration. It is so much easier to talk about these problems, rather than talking about problems with one's boyfriend," said Divya Malik, from LSR.

— By arrangement with The Indian Express

Dubai-India exchange aims to rank among world's top five

DUBAI — The Dubai Gold and Commodity Exchange (DGCX), a Dubai-India venture due to be operational later this year, could rank among the world's top exchanges within five years, an official said.

"Within three to five years, the DGCX can become among the first five exchanges in the world," Jignesh Shah, managing director of Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd (MCX), said.

"MCX was launched 15 months back and has become the third largest exchange in the world in bullion," said Shah, speaking on the sidelines of the Third Dubai City of Gold Conference.

The DGCX, to be up and running in the second half of 2005, is a joint venture between the Dubai Metals and Commodities Centre (DMCC), MCX and the Financial Technologies (India) Ltd (FTIL), of which Shah is chairman.

A memorandum of understanding was signed last year to create the exchange in Dubai, a significant player on the international gold market which provides a gateway to India, where 700 tonnes of physical gold are consumed annually. Officials have said that the first contract to be listed on the exchange will be the precious metal, to be followed by other contracts, including silver, steel, freight, cotton and energy.

The DGCX is "well on track. We have finalised a membership model and we have finalised detailed contract specifications," said Shah.

"Nothing can stop Dubai becoming like Hong Kong when China was becoming liberalised," he said, applauding the Gulf emirate for applying the "right strategies".

Dubai has what it takes to become an international hub, according to Shah.

"It has a free economy ... it's between Tokyo and London in terms of time zones, and its proximity to India" will all take the emirate beyond being a regional centre to one of world class.

Dubai, the self-styled "City of Gold", is a trading hub for 10 per cent of the world's gold, which the authorities are hoping to increase to 50 per cent.

DGCX is a 50 per cent investment by Dubai, 10 percent by MCX, an independent and de-mutualised multi-commodity exchange, and 40 per cent by FTIL, India's leading technology enterprise.

DMCC was set up in 2002 to establish a commodity market and promote the emirate as a centre for the trade of gold, diamonds and commodities. Resident companies are offered free zone benefits, including a 50-year guaranteed tax holiday, 100-per cent business ownership, full ownership of business premises and a regulated environment.

— AFP

Talks to strengthen trade ties begin

NEW DELHI — India and Pakistan started talks yesterday on ways to strengthen ailing trade links as the peace process between the neighbours gathers pace, officials said.

The commerce secretaries of both countries would discuss over two days a blueprint for eliminating trade barriers and forging closer business cooperation, which has suffered due to decades of political hostility.

Direct bilateral trade stood at $300 million in the 2003-2004 fiscal year but officials said unofficial trade was more than double that.

"It is our misfortune that political circumstances resulted in us having to limit and constrain the spirit. Fortunately, things are changing," Commerce Minister Kamal Nath told the first meeting of the joint study group on economic cooperation.

The joint study group is aiming to draft a comprehensive economic agreement spanning trade in goods and services, investments and a policy framework.

"We have come to India with great expectations and an open mind.

The trade between the two countries has not achieved its potential. We have to try and push this further under this process," said Pakistan's Commerce Secretary Taslim Noorani.

India and Pakistan have launched a series of matching steps to build people-to-people contacts, the latest of which was a decision to run a bus service across the two sides.

Nath said economic cooperation would give a push to peace and prosperity in the entire region.

"Today, we find that the mood amongst our business communities is positive, with a high degree of expectation that both the governments would create an environment which would facilitate economic growth," he added.

Businessmen from the two sides have been sourcing goods from third countries, even though they can buy goods from each other at much lower costs because of the geographical proximity.

"The first step is for us to exploit the complementarities between our economies. We must identify those goods which are sourced from third countries, but which we can source from each other," Nath said.

"If in any case we are importing these goods from third countries, then why should we hesitate to rather import them from each other?" he asked.

Industry officials said official trade could cross one billion dollars if businesses in both countries sourced goods from each other.

— AFP, PTI

Karunakaran's plea rejected

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — The Supreme Court of India rejected the plea submitted by senior Congress leader K. Karunakaran requesting to leave the palmolein case to the Contitution Bench of the apex court. In his plea, Karunakaran had stated that the earlier verdict of the court had stated that the permission of the speaker was necessary for the trial of the peoples' representatives.

He had sought to remove the vagueness of the verdict in this regard. He had also sought to transfer the Palmolein case to the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. The apex court rejected the plea.

17 killed in road mishap

BANGALORE — Seventeen persons were killed and more than 20 injured in a collision between a state-owned bus and a passenger van at Nidagatta in Mandya district on Monday, police said here.

Get your act fast



ON the sets of *Dil Jo Bhi Kahey*, actor Amitabh Bachchan threatens co-star Revathy in jest after she failed to get her shot right — even after 10 takes. Directed by former actor Romesh Sharma, the film stars his son Karan Sharma and American actor Annabelle Wallace. A major part of the film has been shot in Mauritius. — **By arrangement with The Indian Express**

Military aid to Nepal halted

KATHMANDU — India has suspended military aid to Nepal since King Gyanendra seized power at the start of this month, the Indian Embassy said yesterday.

"In view of current disturbed situation in Nepal it is a fact that no military supplies have been delivered since February 1, 2005," said embassy spokesman Sanjay Verma.

"The issue of military supply is under constant review of the Indian government by taking into account the evolving situation in Nepal," Verma said.

In New Delhi, Foreign Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna confirmed the decision — noting that India has asked the king to restore democracy and civil rights suspended after the takeover.

The Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shiv Shanker Mukherjee, returned to the Himalayan country on Sunday after a week-long visit to New Delhi.

He was recalled by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for consultations on India's response to Gyanendra's takeover in the face of a Maoist rebellion that has killed more than 11,000 people since 1996.

India supplied Nepal with Rs4.8 billion worth of military equipment such as helicopters, guns and artillery in the five years ending March 2005, according to an Indian Embassy source.

India is concerned that Maoist violence in Nepal could spill over into Indian states where radical leftist groups are powerful.

The United States and European Union also recalled their ambassadors from Nepal last week and called for Gyanendra to restore democratic rule. India also urged Nepal's royal government not to target its joint ventures in the kingdom under the garb of emergency and demanded lifting of all press curbs, including on Indian news channels.

— AFP, PTI

Apex court orders closure of 218 mines, industries

NEW DELHI — Supreme Court has directed the government to close down within 10 days 218 industrial and mining units across the country for having failed to take mandatory clean-environment clearance from authorities and held that industrialisation cannot allow to take a toll on ecology.

The order was passed on Monday on a petition filed by Goa Foundation alleging that hundreds of industrial units were operating in the country without the clearance under Environment Protection Act.

The 218 units — 70 in the industry sector and 148 in mining sector — were spread across the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Karnataka, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Chattishgarh, Goa and Himachal Pradesh.

7-8 pc growth doubtful: Fitch

NEW DELHI — A week before the government is to present its annual budget, global rating agency Fitch has warned that India's ability to log a sustained growth of 7-8 per cent will remain in doubt unless fiscal deficit comes down and public sector puts its financial house in order.

"India's ability to grow at 7-8 per cent on a sustained basis will remain in doubt for as long as public sector fails to put its financial house in order," Fitch Senior Director Shelly Shetty said in a statement on Monday.

"The weak state of public finances represents the single most important constraint on its sovereign ratings," she said.

"A weak revenue base lies at the root of India's fiscal woes. The tax structure is complicated, riddled with loop holes and heavily skewed towards the industrial sector, while other key sectors remain very lightly taxed," she said, adding "implementation of a credible fiscal consolidation process would hasten India's graduation to investment grade."

Services, which account for almost 50 per cent of GDP and are currently the fastest growing sector, generate less than five per cent of total tax revenue, she said.

Fitch currently rates both India's long-term foreign currency and local currency sovereign debt issues at 'BB+' with a Stable Outlook. Short-term rating is 'B'. — *PTI*

Chidambaram to unveil Robin Hood budget

NEW DELHI — The Congress-led government is likely to unveil fresh economic reforms and new privatisation targets in its annual budget on February 28 (next Monday) while striving to appease its communist backers by spending on the poor, analysts say.

The government, which came to power last May on a pro-poor ticket and with the key support of the communists, is under enormous pressure to funnel money into the health, education and social sectors.

It will probably resort to hiking taxes, improving tax compliance and cutting tax exemptions to contain the fiscal deficit, experts say.

Political and economic analyst Praful Bidwai noted that Harvard-educated Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram would in his second budget on February 28 have to deliver on "fundamental" promises made to the electorate.

"Chidambaram is politician enough to know that the government will be kicked out if the budget is not people-friendly. The government has a fundamental obligation to provide public services like health, education and infrastructure to the people," said Bidwai.

"He knows it's far more important than being investor-friendly. Many interest groups, including business and industry, are prepared for progressive left-leaning changes. They will accept radical changes and tax reforms to fund health and primary education," he added.

"No one can threaten the stability of the government or question its legitimacy for doing this."

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government wants to double annual health and education spending to roughly $50 billion, according to Finance Ministry officials.

Boosting tax revenues is essential for Congress to fund its ambitious spending plans under its Common Minimum Programme, the political blueprint it drafted in conjunction with its coalition partners and the communists, and meet its target of seven to eight per cent annual growth, say experts.

"Raising revenues through corporate and personal taxes is the only way to pay for India's growing education and health bill.

The government has to keep a grip on the fiscal deficit and borrowings to sort out the country's messy public finances," said tax expert Arun Arora at Delhi's Centre for Strategic Business Studies.

Out of India's billion-plus population only 20 million people or two per cent pay tax, experts say.

"The finance minister is committed to reforming the tax structure and making sure there is less evasion," noted Arora.

The Congress-led coalition has already made implementing Value Added Tax (VAT) one of its priorities and has prepared the ground to ensure that it comes into effect on April 1.

VAT, agreed at a meeting of state finance ministers in New Delhi in June last year, is designed to cut multiple layers of tax, boost revenues, reduce inter-state barriers to trade and make accounting more transparent.

The much-delayed tax reform has been put on hold several times because of loud opposition from the states, which fear they will lose revenues and are reluctant to cede their powers to set taxes on goods and services.

"The budget is likely to introduce other tax reforms to tackle the problem of evasion," said Arora.

"The finance minister might take up recommendations to scrap tax breaks on government pension funds."

Last July, a panel of experts led by former International Monetary Fund official Vijay Kelkar recommended scrapping tax breaks on government-run saving schemes for individuals.

The Kelkar report, which is likely to form the basis of tax measures in Chidambaram's budget, also suggested narrowing income tax to a two-rate structure from the current 10, 20 and 30 per cent tiers.

However, experts say that the left's protests will not sap the government's enthusiasm for reforms, particularly privatisation.

"The budget will contain ambitious privatisation targets ... The government has already identified 44 state-run companies where it wants to partially offload equity and the process will be kicked off after the budget," said analyst Swaraj Thapa in an article published in leading financial daily, the *Business Standard*.

"It has promised routing of a substantial chunk of the privatisation proceeds for education and health," added Thapa.

Prime Minister Manmohan's government has pledged to slow privatisation and has slashed privatisation targets to Rs40 billion for the fiscal year 2004-2005 from a better-than-expected Rs155.5 billion in the previous year.

But Manmohan, the architect of free-market reforms, recently upset his communist allies by saying his government had no "ideological aversion" to privatisation.

In a telling move Manmohan's government raised the limit on foreign company ownership of phone companies to 74 per cent from 49 per cent barely three weeks before the February 28 budget. — *AFP*

Industry, experts divided over amnesty scheme

NEW DELHI — India Inc and economic think-tanks are divided over whether the budget should come out with an amnesty scheme to tap black money, but are unanimous in emphasising that lower tax rates and expansion of tax base will improve compliance and augment revenue.

The Voluntary Disclosure of Income Scheme launched in 1997 was a success insofar as resource mobilisation was concerned, but the amnesty scheme cannot be relied upon on a frequent basis to augment resources, ICRA MD and CEO P. K. Chaudhury said in response to a PTI questionnaire on the budget.

"This might be a moral hazard and encourage tax evaders. The long-term goal may therefore be to continue with widening the tax base and bringing more people under the tax-net," Chaudhury said.

Bangalore-based economist R. S. Deshpande said: "No more declarations, it (black money) must be dealt with iron fist and that is politically difficult."

However, Bengal Ambuja Managing Director Harshavardhan Netia said with long term capital gains tax being nil, a lot of lack money is already turning white.

"Additionally, the government can think of introducing more amnesty schemes," he added.

S. Balakrishnan, chairman, Indirect Tax Committee of Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce, said one time voluntary disclosure scheme should be considered and the amount unearthed should be invested in long term debts which should be used for infrastructure.

Sanjay Kajaria of Muralidhar and Company said black money can be tapped by lowering tax rates and bringing in incentives for tax payers. In addition, the government can come out with amnesty scheme, he added.

National Institute of Public Finance and Policy Director M. Govinda Rao said tapping black money require low stamp duty and registration fee.

CII said measures should be taken to curb tax evasion in real estate sale and purchase transactions.

"Further, high stamp duty rates should also be reviewed," it said. Ficci said the issue of black money can be tackled by lowering tax rates and through simplification and rationalisation of tax laws and procedures.

"At times, a person willing to pay income tax avoids doing so owing to complexities and procedural hassles. It is important that our tax laws are simple, transparent and stable," Ficci president Onkar S. Kanwar said.

Assocham president K. Sanghi did not give a direct reply, stating that it is for the government to revise the means for unearthing black money if at all it is accumulated somewhere. Suggesting that the country needs to follow the concept of 'Laffer curve', Phdcci said to check tax evasion and avoidance the government should lower the tax rate and make compulsory the quoting of permanent account number in case of high-value transaction.

The chamber also called for improving the tax intelligence machinery and enhancing the credibility of the tax administration and reducing the contact between assesses and the tax department through e-governance. — *PTI*

Tehran favours pan-Asian organisation for cooperation



DEAL: Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, left, and Natwar Singh exchange documents after a signing ceremony for two agreements on India-Iran joint commission and agreement on cultural cooperation in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

NEW DELHI — Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi yesterday favoured formation of a pan-Asian organisation for cooperation between nations in the region.

"It is an interesting proposal to have an Asian body for regional cooperation. The Africans have done it, the Europeans have done so and are quite successful," Kharrazi, currently on an India visit, said during an interaction after delivering a lecture on Indo-Iranian relations at the Indian Council of World Affairs here.

Terming regional cooperation as a delicate issue, he said "we believe that in West Asia there should be such an economic body ... a move towards a West Asian Economic block would be great."

Kharrazi said the presence of American troops in West Asia is a matter of concern not only for Iran but for others in the region.

"Only regional co-operation can bring peace and tranquility to the region," he said. Observing that India plays an important role in developing countries, he said more co-operation was required between developing nations on the issues of UN reforms and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. — *PTI*

Karzai expected to discuss pipeline

KABUL — Afghan President Hamid Karzai is expected to discuss an ambitious project that would pipe gas through Afghanistan from Turkmenistan and on to south Asia when he visits India today.

The long-delayed project envisages building a $3.3 billion pipeline that would run 1,600km through Afghanistan to Pakistan, providing Kabul with vital transit revenue.

Experts say that to make the project feasible, gas would need to be piped on for sale to India, but the plan continues to be dogged by security concerns.

Karzai told Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh in Kabul last week he hoped New Delhi would look favourably on the project, which would have economic benefits to Afghanistan and the region.

Karzai's visit to New Delhi comes as neighbouring Pakistan's Prime Minster Shaukat Aziz will be in Iran to discuss another pipeline project that would take Iranian gas to Pakistan and on to India, a plan also threatened by insurgency in Pakistan.

Pakistan has said India was looking favourably at both the Turkmen and the Iranian projects following a thaw in relations between New Delhi and Islamabad, but analysts say a link from Myanmar via Bangladesh could prove more likely.

Earlier this month India's cabinet approved holding talks with producers Iran, Myanmar and Turkmenistan.

In New Delhi, Karzai will have extensive meetings with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Foreign Minister Natwar Singh and ministers for defence, civil aviation and information and broadcasting, an Afghan presidential official said. Sami Zaman, planning chief of Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Industries, told Reuters the pipeline was expected to be discussed by Karzai in Delhi.

"The president has invited India to participate in the project," he said. "Afghanistan is ready for the project as it would benefit Afghanistan. The rest of the issue depends on Turkmenistan, the seller, and consumers like Pakistan or India." Proposals to build a pipeline through Afghanistan were discussed in the 1990s when the Taleban ruled the country. US energy firm Unocal withdrew from such a plan in 1998, in which it was to lead an international consortium, because of fighting between the Taleban and Afghan opposition groups and concerns in the US Congress about Taleban's human rights record and its sheltering Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Zaman rejected security concerns stemming from a Taleban insurgency, which has kept an 18,000-strong US-led foreign military force in Afghanistan three years after the fundamentalists were drive from power. — *AFP*



Tsunami warning system to be set up by 2007: official

CHENNAI — India yesterday said that a tsunami warning system would be in place in the Indian Ocean by 2007, giving up to three hours notice to evacuate coastal areas.

The entire round-the-clock operation would cost around Rs1.25 billion, Harsh Gupta, secretary in the federal government's department of ocean development, told reporters.

"When the warning equipment is finally in place, it will give 45 minutes to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and three hours to Tamil Nadu for preparing against a tsunami following an earthquake in the region," Gupta said on board a ship off the coast of Chennai. The disaster exposed the need for a warning system in the region, similar to one already in place in the Pacific.

The tsunami watch system would also signal the advent of storm surges and cyclones, Gupta said.

"The programme will be personally monitored by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to ensure its quick implementation," the official said, adding the government hoped to put it in action by September 2007. The project will involve pressure transducers lowered to the seabed and the deployment of about a dozen ocean bottom recorders, strategically placed in the tsunami-prone areas, Gupta said.

Meawnhile, deliberately or inadvertently, the government may have seriously underestimated the tsunami death toll from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, local leaders as well as aid groups said. Government figures show 7,462 people either confirmed dead or missing and presumed dead. Independent estimates of the toll range from more than 10,000 up to 12,000.

The discrepancy may reflect the difficulties involved in counting the dead in the Indian Ocean islands, where whole villages were swept out to sea and most of the bodies will never be found.

But it may also reflect an embarrassing and sensitive fact for the Indian government, some experts say. Many of the victims were illegal settlers on islands supposedly reserved for indigenous tribes. — *AFP, Reuters*

Apex court to decide on US appeal in Oregon suicide law

WASHINGTON — The US Supreme Court said yesterday that it would decide whether the Bush administration can stop Oregon doctors from helping terminally ill patients commit suicide, despite a state law allowing such assistance.

Oregon is the only US state to allow physician-assisted suicide. Since the state law took effect in 1997, more than 170 people have ended their lives.

The high court agreed to hear a Bush administration appeal arguing that then-Attorney General John Ashcroft correctly construed federal law to prohibit distribution of controlled drugs to assist suicides, regardless of state law.

The administration appealed after a federal appeals court in San Francisco ruled that Ashcroft's 2001 directive was unlawful and unenforceable, and that he had overstepped his authority.

The directive threatened to revoke prescription-writing licences for physicians who write orders for life-ending drugs.

Under the Oregon law, called the Death with Dignity Act and twice approved by the state's voters, terminally ill patients must get a certification from two doctors stating they are of sound mind and have less than six months to live.

A prescription for lethal drugs is then written by the doctor, and the patients administer the drugs themselves.

Ashcroft's directive declared that assisting suicide was not a legitimate medical purpose under the Controlled Substances Act and that prescribing federally controlled drugs for that purpose was against the law.

He reversed the policy adopted by his predecessor, Attorney General Janet Reno, during the Clinton administration. Conservative lawmakers and groups opposed Reno's decision.

Administration lawyers told the Supreme Court that federal drug laws took precedence over the state's traditional control over the practice of medicine.

— *Reuters*

Bush wins token Nato pledge of Iraq aid

BRUSSELS — US President George W. Bush won a largely symbolic pledge from Nato allies, including Iraq war critics, to help train Iraqi security forces yesterday but France and Germany pressed him for reform of transatlantic ties.

On the second day of a fence-mending tour, Bush took his charm offensive to summits with Nato and European Union leaders, eager to mend fences after two years of bitter rifts over Iraq.

A Nato official trumpeted the agreement of all 26 allies to make some contribution to the Iraq training mission as a token of the alliance's rediscovered unity.

"We have the 26. As far as we are concerned, that is everyone working in the same direction," the official said.

But the boast masked wide divergence in the level of help on offer. France, the most virulent European critic of the war, agreed for just one of its officers at Nato headquarters to help coordinate offers of equipment to the Iraqi military.

The United States is to provide around 60 trainers out of a total close to 160. France, Germany and Belgium remain adamant that their personnel not serve inside Iraq.

French President Jacques Chirac endorsed a call by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, initially rebuffed by Washington, for a reform of the alliance to take account of new realities such as the rise of an enlarged and increasingly integrated EU.

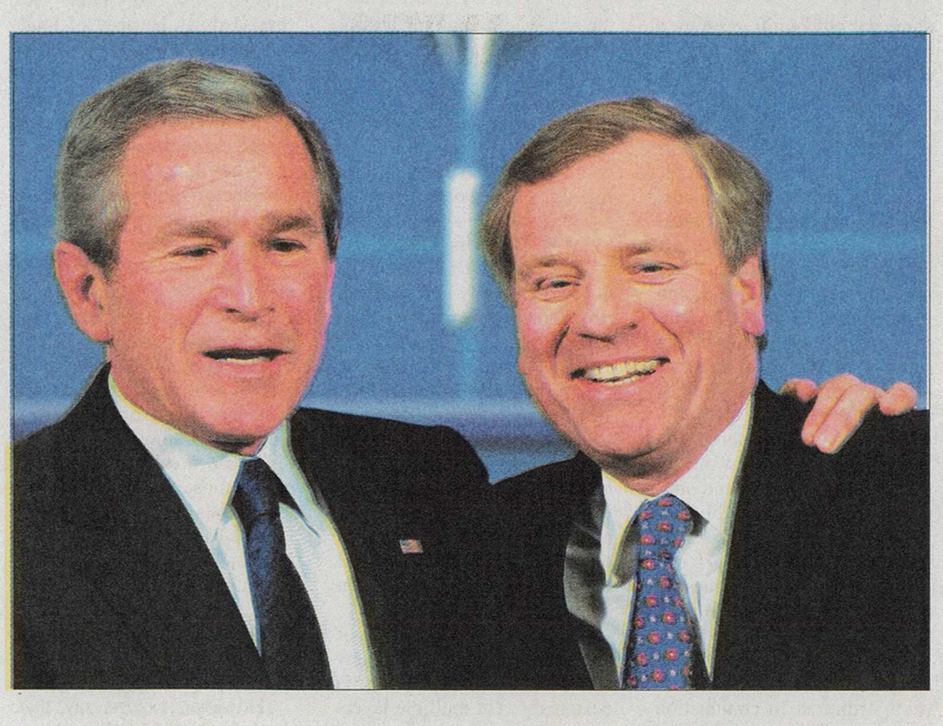
"Europe and the United States are real partners. So we need to dialogue and listen to each other more," Chirac told the Nato leaders, according to speaking notes released by his staff.

It was a reminder of widespread complaints during Bush's first term that Washington acted unilaterally without consulting or listening to its allies.

"We must also, as the German chancellor has underlined, continue to take account of the changes that have occurred on the European continent," Chirac said, referring explicitly to Europe's growing defence integration.

His comments implied the EU, rather than Nato, should become the main partner in transatlantic cooperation — a challenge to the US view of the primacy of the defence alliance which it founded in 1949 and still dominates.

Bush also planned talks with the 25-member EU on a tightly scripted day meant to showcase common purpose in rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan and spreading democracy in the Middle East.



ALL SMILES: US President George W. Bush poses with Nato Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer yesterday after a news conference following the summit at the Nato headquarters in Brussels. — APF

Earlier, he met Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, who told Nato leaders his newly democratic country's long-term aim was to join the alliance and the EU.

None of yesterday's diplomatic marathon was left to chance. Even the number of steps Bush would take to greet EU leaders was checked and re-enacted by Secret Service planners. "Nato is a vital relationship for the United States and for Europe. A strong Europe is very important to the United States, and I really meant that," Bush said after breakfast with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, his closest European ally.

The EU too was due to offer Bush limited support in Iraq. Foreign ministers agreed a support package for Baghdad's newly elected authorities on Monday that will include training police and judges and offering help to write a constitution.

And British officials said the EU and the United States would offer to host jointly a conference to coordinate assistance to Iraq's first democratically elected government.

Nato allies were also expected to pledge to extend their peacekeeping mission into western Afghanistan and eventually take over security responsibility for the entire country. Bush dined on Monday with Chirac, his chief critic in the run-up to the Iraq invasion, in a clear effort to put past divisions behind them and seek common ground.

They appeared to narrow differences over EU plans to lift an arms embargo on China which Washington fears could tip the strategic balance in the Taiwan Strait and endanger US forces in Asia.

A senior US official said European assurances that a code of conduct would ensure arms sales to Beijing grew neither in quantity or quality could resolve the issue if fleshed out.

Chirac and Bush also issued a joint call for a Lebanon "free of foreign domination", ratcheting up pressure on Syria to pull its troops out after last week's murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri, which critics blamed on Damascus.

"These guys are never going to be friends. But they are both pragmatists. They know they are going to have to work together — and they know how to make the right gestures," said Nicole Bacharan, a specialist in Franco-US relations at the National Foundation for Political Science.

"They brought out all the symbols — the French fries, the Californian wine, the joke about the cowboy. It was a message to say — look, we can cooperate. And that is about the best they can do," she said.

The mutual back-slapping may be necessary and welcome, but it cannot disguise the fact that the two leaders retain fundamentally different views of how the world should be run, other analysts said. "George W. Bush and Jacques Chirac are talking. That doesn't mean they understand each other," said Luc de Barochez of the conservative daily *Le Figaro*. — *Reuters, AFP*

Laura thanks US troops in Germany as protesters gear up for president

RAMSTEIN (Germany) — First Lady Laura Bush thanked US troops based in Germany for their work in the war on "terror" yesterday, as anti-war protesters across the country geared up for her husband's arrival.

Laura Bush told about 2,000 soldiers and their families at the sprawling Ramstein airbase in southwestern Germany that the troops' service was crucial to the defence of liberty.

"For more than 50 years the men and women of Ramstein have worked to secure peace and freedom throughout the world," Bush told the cheering crowd.

"Team Ramstein is on the front lines of the new war of the 21st century, to confront terror and to defeat it. On behalf of my husband and all Americans, we want you, and all the men and women who are serving around the world, to know we support you, we believe in you and we're proud of you."

As part of the goodwill visit, Laura Bush visited Landstuhl military hospital earlier yesterday for bedside talks with US soldiers wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq, many of them in the city of Fallujah. She later had lunch with 30 soldiers' wives and visited a school in the afternoon in the nearby city of Wiesbaden where many troops' children are enrolled.

More than 70,000 troops are based in Germany, most of whom are being rotated in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Ramstein is the largest US airbase outside the United States.

The day-trip paves the way for the arrival today in the western city of Mainz of President George W. Bush, who is due to hold talks with Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in an effort to finally end their rift over the Iraq war.

Schroeder insisted in an interview published yesterday in the daily *Mainzer Allgemeine* that Berlin and Washington had now moved beyond their disagreement over the US-led invasion.

"There were differences over the Iraq war in the past," Schroeder said. "These differences have been surmounted. We have a common interest in the stabilising and democratising development in Iraq."

Schroeder said Bush "accepted and respected" Germany's refusal to send troops to contribute to stabilising Iraq and said he aimed to advance the cause of environmental protection during his talks with Bush. — *AFP*



HAPPY SNAP: First Lady Laura Bush poses for a happy snap with airmen and family members of the 86th Air Lift Wing and 435th Air Base Wing at the Ramstein US airbase in western Germany yesterday. — Reuters

US senator says Afghan bases should be permanent

KABUL — A bipartisan group of US senators pledged long-term support for Afghanistan yesterday and influential Republican John McCain said he saw the need for permanent joint military bases in the country.

The five senators, including New York Democrat Hillary Clinton, said after talks with President Hamid Karzai that US support for Afghanistan was in the interests of both countries.

McCain said the senators had come to congratulate the Afghan people for the economic and political progress made since US-led forces overthrew the Taleban in late 2001, including presidential elections won by Karzai in October.

"We also want to declare our commitment and that of the people we represent to a long-term strategic partnership that we believe must endure for many, many years," he said.

McCain, who represents Arizona, said this was "not only for the good of the Afghan people, but also for the good of the American people, because of the long-term security interests we have in the region".

Asked about specific support, he replied: "We mean by that economic assistance, technical assistance, military partnership, including — and this is a personal view — joint military permanent bases." — *Reuters*

Thompson 'one of the great originals'

LONDON — Ralph Steadman, the longtime illustrator for Hunter S. Thompson, remembered his friend in articles published yesterday as "one of the great originals of Amerian literature".

Thompson, the legendary writer of 1970s' counter-culture fame who spawned the style of "gonzo journalism", died in an apparent suicide on Sunday, aged 67.

Steadman, an Englishman who began working with him in 1970, for an assignment to cover the Kentucky Derby horse race, said Thompson had spoken previously of suicide.

"Hunter said these words to me many years ago: 'I would feel real trapped in this life if I didn't know I could commit suicide at any time,'" Steadman wrote in *The Independent*.

"I knew he meant it. It wasn't a case of if, but when. He didn't reckon he would make it beyond 30 anyway, so he lived it all in the fast lane."

The two went on from that first assignment — where Thompson developed his highly personal form of journalism — to collaborate on *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and other works.

"I had the good fortune to meet one of the great originals of American literature," Steadman wrote. "Maybe he is the Mark Twain of the late 20th century. Time will sort it out. I have always known that one day I would know this journey, but yesterday, I did not know that it would be today." Speaking to the *Guardian* newspaper, he said that over the years he "knew all along he was pretty damned important."

"I was naive, an innocent abroad. He corrupted me in a very special way. I took his gleeful, demonic spirit on board and took out what I needed for my own work. But he was the original," Steadman said. He was considered one of the most important American authors of the 20th century. Thompson became a cult figure with his "gonzo journalism", written in the first person, which flirted with the border between fiction and journalism in which the writer engages himself and his personal views in the story.

The stories of his heady experiences earned him a popular reputation as a wild-living writer bent on self-destruction. — *AFP*



PREMIERE: US actor Will Smith arriving at the Printworks for the premiere of his new movie 'Hitch', in Manchester, northern England, yesterday. — Reuters

Jackson's return will jump-start jury selection

SANTA MARIA — Pop superstar Michael Jackson was due back in court yesterday after a stint in hospital with "flu-like symptoms" caused a week-long hiatus in his slow-moving, child-molestation trial.

Jackson's return will jump-start the stalled process of selecting the 12 men and women of the jury who will decide whether the fading pop legend should spend up to 20 years behind bars.

The two sides had started questioning prospective panelists on February 14, but proceedings were suspended the following day after the self-crowned "King of Pop" was rushed to hospital.

Jackson, overcome by vomiting, was put on an intravenous drip during his 33-hour stay at the Marian Medical Centre in the small Californian city of Santa Maria, a few kilometres from the courthouse where he is being tried.

Rodney Melville, the no-nonsense judge running the proceedings, agreed to suspend the trial for a week only after talking to a doctor who assured him Jackson would need several days to recover.

For the potential jurors, it has been an ominous start to a trial that has made little progress since opening on January 31 in a blaze of publicity.

One day later, it was adjourned for a week, and in week two, all but one hour of hearings were cancelled following a death in the family of Jackson's lead lawyer Thomas Mesereau.

Even barring further delays, it could be weeks before a jury is seated, and Melville has warned the trial could last another five months after that.

During jury selection, each side can dismiss 10 potential jurors without citing a reason and can challenge others they feel could be biased.

The defence has already unveiled a dazzling list of 370 possible witnesses that includes some of the world's most famous people, including Elizabeth Taylor, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Quincy Jones, Larry King, and 10 members of the star's family.

But before the witnesses are heard, Melville is expected to consider dozens of motions, including one calling for the litigation history of Jackson's accusers to be brought into evidence.

Jackson's legal team is moving to portray the family of his now-15-year-old accuser as "professional plaintiffs" who made a living from making "outrageous" sex assault charges in fraudulent lawsuits.

Another defence motion seeks to accuse Jackson's nemesis, lead prosecutor Tom Sneddon, who once referred to the defendant as "Wacko Jacko."

The defence argues that Sneddon, who unsuccessfully tried to prosecute Jackson when he was accused of child abuse in 1993, showed his bias by saying he would testify to what he knew about the star at trial if Jackson tried to "question his motives for prosecuting this case."

Jackson immortalised Sneddon with a slightly altered name in one of his songs that proclaims: "Dom Sheldon is a cold man."

Another motion before the judge is a prosecution bid to subpoena Jackson's financial records and use expert testimony on his wealth to show that Jackson's alleged financial woes could have prompted him to try to stop his accuser and the boy's family from making allegations against him. — *AFP*

UK

Charles, Camilla wedding process take farcical turn

LONDON — The wedding plans of Britain's Prince Charles and his long-time lover Camilla Parker Bowles are turning into a comedy of errors, royal-watchers agree.

As the two divorcees battle to gain public approval for their nuptials, the question of where and how the heir to the throne ties the knot is proving a legal nightmare.

"We are not amused," is very much the impression emanating from Queen Elizabeth over her eldest son's union with the matronly figure forever accused of destroying Charles' marriage to the glamorous but ill-fated princess Diana.

First of all, red-faced courtiers had to switch the venue for the April 8th civil ceremony after a mix-up over marriage licences.

The ceremony has had to be moved from the exclusive confines of Windsor Castle, west of London, to the local town hall just down the road, past the pubs and burger bars.

That was because one — overlooked — condition for granting a licence for the couple to marry at the castle would be to allow commoners to stage weddings there too.

No way, decreed the royals, who then faced another shock. By law, members of the public are entitled to attend town hall weddings.

Adding to the embarrassment for the House of Windsor, constitutional experts have been arguing that members of the royal family are not allowed to marry in a civil ceremony in England.

"If the Republican movement had been asked to write the screenplay, it could scarcely have come up with a better script," commented the *Daily Express* newspaper.

Constitutional expert David Starkey caustically said: "You really just wonder what has been the rush which has got everybody into this ill-researched and ill-planned marriage.

"Nothing seems to have been thought through and there has been no proper consultation of experts," he said.

Dr Stephen Cretney, a legal history specialist at Oxford University, started the arguments when he claimed there is no statutory procedure whereby members of the royal family can marry in an English register office.

Former Attorney-General Nicholas Lyell, once the government's chief law officer, said Prime Minister Tony Blair's government had failed to give Queen Elizabeth adequate advice over the union's legality under the 1949 Marriage Act.

He suggested emergency legislation may be needed to clarify the legal position before the wedding.

The happy couple could even end up having to get married in Scotland as Charles' sister, Princess Anne, did when she married for the second time in 1992.

But Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor who is head of the judiciary, insists the wedding is legal.

"The whole thing is turning into a huge embarrassing mess," said royal author Judy Wade.

"I think the queen is the one holding her hands in exasperation," she said. "It is really tasteless the way it has been conducted. This is another nail in the coffin of the monarchy."

Daily Mail royal correspondent Richard Kay could not help but agree.

"Considering they have had 33 years to plan this great event, they have made a hamfist of it," he said. "This certainly looks like a comedy of errors. They are looking flatfooted and caught out by events." — *Reuters*

Name and Surname (1)	Age (2)	Marital status (3)
His Royal Highness Prince Charles Philip Arthur George THE PRINCE OF WALES	56 years	Previous Marriage Dissolved
Camilla Rosemary PARKER BOWLES	57 years	Previous Marriage Dissolved

ANNOUNCEMENT: The wedding banns for Britain's Prince Charles and his fiancee Camilla Parker Bowles are seen on display at Cirencester Register office in Gloucestershire, western England yesterday. — Reuters

No plans for best man

LONDON — Prince Charles will not have a best man when he marries fellow divorcee Camilla Parker Bowles, his office said yesterday, dashing hopes in the media that his two sons, William and Harry, would fill the role.

According to British tradition, the heir to the throne is typically accompanied by two "supporters" when he takes his vows.

Charles's brothers Andrew and Edward were given the honour when he married his first wife, the late princess Diana. — *AFP*

PHILIPPINES

Anti-terror bills being opposed

MANILA — Philippine lawmakers allied with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo have revived two controversial measures to harden the country's defences against terror attacks after three deadly blasts on Valentine's Day.

The government is pushing Congress for quick passage of an anti-terror law and a national system of identification cards but, if history is any guide, the urgency will dissipate and the proposals will end up on the shelf.

Deep distrust of government power, a hangover from the country's experience under martial law during late dictator Ferdinand Marcos's 20-year rule, ensures stiff opposition to such moves.

The anti-terror bill is among several that have gathered dust in Congress since they were proposed in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States. The idea of a national ID system has been debated since the late 1990s.

"Malacanang (the presidential palace) should leave alone the people's civil liberties," Joker Arroyo, a senator and a former human rights lawyer, said in a statement.

"Is the executive saying it cannot solve the terrorist and dissident problems without infringing on the Bill of Rights?"

The bills were revived after 13 people were killed in coordinated bomb attacks in Manila and two southern cities on February 14.

The blasts were claimed by Abu Sayyaf, a small band of Islamic militants under siege by nearly 5,000 troops at its stronghold on the remote southern Jolo island.

"We must match the resolve of other nations on this score as the terrorists take advantage of the loopholes in the legal system that allow them anonymity and mobility," President Arroyo said after the attacks.

The anti-terror bill aims to tackle terrorist financing and would give security forces broader powers of search and arrest, extending the period that terror suspects are allowed to be held without court approval to 72 hours from 36. Most controversial is a proposal to relax restrictions on tapping telephones.

Political analyst Ramon Casiple said he doubted the government could push through the laws given the amount of opposition.

"This could just be a knee-jerk reaction to the Valentine's Day bombing," he said.

Since Arroyo's election victory last May, the legislative schedule has been log-jammed by a series of revenue-raising bills proposed by the government to fix the country's chronic finances.

"She wanted us to devote the first year of this Congress on measures that can resolve the economic problems of this country," said Franklin Drilon, the Senate president and an Arroyo ally.

He said there were too many contentious parts in the proposed anti-terror bills, making it difficult to craft legislation that would be consistent with the country's Bill of Rights. But others said Filipinos should not let their fears of government intrusion cloud the benefits that a national identity system could bring, such as improving citizens' access to government services.

"Unfortunately, the matter of developing a national identification system comes up during times when public security seems to be shaky," wrote political columnist Alex Magno.

"This creates the impression that the card is useful only to the police, forgetting that it is more importantly a facility for empowering citizens." — *Reuters*

2 suspects in Feb. 14 bombings held

MANILA — Philippine security forces have arrested two men suspected of carrying out last week's deadly Valentine's Day bombing in Manila, saying both were members of the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf group of rebels.

A military official said the men were arrested early yesterday at separate locations in the capital, where a bomb tore through a bus in the Makati financial district on February 14. Abu Sayyaf claimed the Manila bombing and two other attacks in the south on the same day that killed 13 people and wounded more than 150. The group said it was retaliating for a military offensive against its stronghold on the southern island of Jolo.

"The bombers were captured in their rented room in a squatters area," said Lieutenant-General Edilberto Adan, the military's deputy chief of staff.

"The duo revealed under interrogation that they were tasked by Abu Sayyaf commander Jainal Sali, alias Abu Solaiman, to perpetrate the bombing on February 14 in Makati City." Adan said the two men planted two kg of dynamite on the bus and set off the device with a mobile phone. One of the suspects, Abu Khalil Trinidad, was a convert to Islam in the mostly Roman Catholic country.

A police intelligence official said he was thought to have been trained in bomb-making by Indonesian militants on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao.

A senior military intelligence official said the other suspect, Gamal Baharan, alias Tapay, was involved in kidnapping cases and an October 2002 bomb attack outside an army training camp in Zamboanga City that killed a US soldier.

Philippine authorities have sometimes trumpeted the arrests of militants, only to release the suspects for lack of evidence.

Police took 17 into custody in January, saying they had foiled a plot to bomb a major Catholic festival in Manila.

Only two were charged and they were later released on bail.

The two suspects in the Manila bombing were paraded to media along with a witness, one of the injured bus passengers. He said one of the suspects sat behind the driver and the other went to the rear, where he left a backpack.

Superintendent Ericson Velasquez said police found three boxes of blasting caps, wires and a block of C-4 plastic explosive in a house where the Manila bomb was assembled. Adan said the suspects had rented the house since September 2004 after arriving from Maguindanao province in Mindanao. He said Abu Sayyaf gave the two a total of 19,000 pesos ($347) for expenses, remitting the money through Baharan's ATM account. The military said Abu Sayyaf was behind the blasts in the capital and two southern port cities on Mindanao, based on evidence investigators had gathered.

Last week's bombings came as 5,000 troops battled about 800 Abu Sayyaf militants and rogue members of the rebel Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) on Jolo island.

A group of congressmen visited Nur Misuari, the founder and leader of the MNLF, at a police camp south of Manila where he has been detained since 2002 as he stands trial for rebellion.

"He said he had nothing to do with the fighting," Satur Ocampo, told reporters. "He said he did not order it".

Members of the congressional panel said Misuari also denied any links between MNLF forces loyal to him and Abu Sayyaf. The military claimed victory in Jolo late last week and said it was scaling back operations after 11 days of clashes that killed about 30 soldiers and up to 100 rebels. The fighting, the bloodiest on the impoverished island since 2001, has displaced some 25,000 people. — *Reuters*



NABBED: Abu Khalil Trinidad, left, and Gamal Baharan, right, who are allegedly responsible for the Valentine's Day bus bombing. — AFP

IRA, Sinn Fein attacked for criminality

LONDON — Britain said yesterday that hopes of a political settlement in Northern Ireland have been "very seriously damaged" by accusations of IRA criminality that have put Republican politicians on the defensive.

Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army's political ally, has never been under so much pressure from both London and Dublin as the prospect of Belfast running its own affairs fades fast.

The linking of IRA guerrillas to bank heists, murder cover-ups and money laundering has besmirched the Republican cause.

Now mounting allegations that Sinn Fein is also involved have dealt a body blow to the restoration of local government by feuding Protestants and Catholics in the British province.

Echoing the tough line adopted by the Dublin government, Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Paul Murphy said the onus was now on Sinn Fein and the IRA to stop criminality.

Murphy, set to cut the London parliamentary allowances of Sinn Fein's four members of the House of Commons, said: "Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked."

Warning that the chances of peace had been "very seriously damaged," he told BBC Radio that any penalties he might impose would be symbolic because the Northern Ireland assembly was not sitting.

The assembly was set up as part of a 1998 peace agreement which largely ended 30 years of sectarian violence but it collapsed over two years ago in a row over an alleged IRA spy ring. London now runs the province direct.

Protestant Unionists, who fervently want to maintain Northern Ireland's links with Britain, are deeply mistrustful of Sinn Fein whose goal is a united Ireland.

"We have to move on without them," said Democratic Unionist parliamentarian Nigel Dodds.

"All democratic parties should be allowed to get on with governing this place without being held up by gangsters," he added.

But the pressure on Sinn Fein is not just coming from Belfast and London.

On Sunday, Irish Justice Minister Michael McDowell said Sinn Fein leaders, including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, sat on the IRA's ruling seven-man Army Council.

He was the first serving Irish minister to voice the allegation, which Adams and McGuinness have denied. — *Reuters*

Livingstone renews refusal to apologise to Jewish journalist

LONDON — Ken Livingstone, the controversial mayor of London, yesterday again refused to apologise to a Jewish journalist whom he compared to a Nazi concentration camp guard, saying he had not meant to offend the Jewish community. "My words were not intended to cause such offense," Livingstone told a packed press conference amid growing calls for him to say sorry to *Evening Standard* reporter Oliver Finegold.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, cabinet ministers, politicians from different parties and members of the Jewish community have urged the mayor to apologise for the remarks. The Labour mayor, long associated with left-wing politics, drew fury with comments made on February 8 to a reporter from the London *Evening Standard* newspaper, which he considers hostile to him.

When Finegold was identified as a *Standard* reporter, Livingstone asked him if he, Finegold, was a "German war criminal". After Finegold responded that he was Jewish, Livingstone said the reporter was "just like a concentration camp guard" by "just doing it because you are paid to" — a reference to working for the paper.

Finegold should not work for a daily with "a record of supporting fascism", Livingstone added, referring to support offered in the 1930s to the British Union of Fascists by the *Standard's* present-day sister paper, the *Daily Mail*.

In the face of mounting pressure, Livingstone had been expected yesterday to say he regretted the comments.

The row cast a shadow over London's campaign to host the 2012 Olympic Games, as it raged in the press last week while an International Olympic Committee evaluation commission formally inspected London's bid. — *AFP*



WINTER WARNING: Snow falling over British police officers guarding the Houses of Parliament in London, on February 21, 2005. Britons were warned on Monday to expect the coldest weather of the winter so far as snow-covered northern areas make driving treacherous. — Reuters

Standard and Poor's remains disappointed at tax reforms

MANILA — Credit ratings agency Standard and Poor's said yesterday it remains disappointed at the slow pace of tax reforms in the Philippines, suggesting an unlikely reverse of a ratings downgrade in January.

The agency last month lowered its credit ratings on the Philippines by one notch, citing concerns over a chronic budget deficit and delays in the government getting legislation to raise tax revenues through Congress.

In a report yesterday, Standard and Poor's said a "qualitative shift in revenue mobilisation capability remains absent" in the Philippines.

"Progress on proposed tax measures aimed at effecting such a shift (in revenue mobilisation) has been disappointing. Only two of eight laws proposed by the president in June 2004 had been passed and signed into law by January 2005," it said.

"As a result, the main revenue collecting organ, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (which accounts for 70 per cent of revenues) has underperformed its 2004 target by about 10 per cent and only the Customs and Treasury departments have exceeded their respective targets."

SP said a proposed increase in valued-added tax (VAT) to 12 per cent from 10 per cent recently approved by the House of Representatives could improve the government's revenues. — *AFP*

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FROM MUSCAT					TO MUSCAT				
Daily Services from Ruwi to Al Buraimi					Daily Services from Al Buraimi to Ruwi				
Rte	Dep. Time	Destinations	Arrive Time	Operating Days	Rte	Dep. Time	Destinations	Arrive Time	Operating Days
41	13:00	Sohar	15:45	Daily	41	13:00	Sohar	14:55	Daily
41	13:00	Al Buraimi	17:40	Daily	41	13:00	Ruwi	17:40	Daily
41	15:00	Sohar	18:55	Tue+Fri only	41	07:00	Sohar	08:55	Wed+Sat only
41	15:00	Al Buraimi	21:00	Tue+Fri only	41	07:00	Ruwi	11:40	Wed+Sat only
Daily Services from Ruwi to Sinaw					Daily Services from Sinaw to Muscat (Ruwi)				
52	17:30	Samad	19:50	Daily	52	07:00	Al Mudhaibi	07:20	Daily
52	17:30	Al Mudhaibi	20:30	Daily	52	07:00	Samad	08:00	Daily
52	17:30	Sinaw	20:50	Daily	52	07:00	Ruwi	10:25	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Yankul					Daily Services from Yankul to Muscat (Ruwi)				
54	14:30	Nizwa Souq	16:50	Daily	54	06:00	Ibri Souq	06:45	Daily
54	14:30	Ibri Souq	18:45	Daily	54	06:00	Nizwa Souq	08:40	Daily
54	14:30	Yanqul	19:30	Daily	54	06:00	Ruwi	11:00	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Ibri (Araqi)					Daily Services from Ibri (Araqi) to Muscat (Ruwi)				
54	08:00	Nizwa Souq	10:20	Daily	54	15:40	Ibri Souq	15:55	Daily
54	08:00	Ibri Souq	12:15	Daily	54	15:40	Nizwa Souq	17:50	Daily
54	08:00	Al Araqi	12:30	Daily	54	15:40	Ruwi	20:20	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Sur					Daily Services from Sur to Muscat (Ruwi)				
55	07:30	Ibra	09:45	Daily	55	06:00	Al Mintrib	07:20	Daily
55	07:30	Al Mintrib	10:25	Daily	55	06:00	Ibra	07:50	Daily
55	07:30	Sur	11:45	Daily	55	06:00	Ruwi	10:10	Daily
55	14:30	Ibra	16:45	Daily	55	14:30	Al Mintrib	15:50	Daily
55	14:30	Al Mintrib	17:25	Daily	55	14:30	Ibra	16:20	Daily
55	14:30	Sur	18:45	Daily	55	14:30	Ruwi	18:40	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Fahud-Yibal					Daily Services from Yibal-Fahud to Muscat (Ruwi)				
62	06:30	Firq	08:25	Daily	62	07:00	Firq	09:05	Daily from Fahud
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	Firq	14:55	Daily	62	12:30	Firq	15:35	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
Daily Services from Ruwi to Salalah					Daily Services from Salalah to Muscat (Ruwi)				
100	06:00	Salalah	19:00	Daily	100	06:30	Muscat	19:20	Daily
100	13:00	Salalah	02:00	Daily	100	11:00	Muscat	23:50	Daily
100	17:00	Salalah	05:40	Daily	100	17:00	Muscat	05:30	Daily
100	19:00	Salalah	07:40	Daily	100	19:00	Muscat	07:30	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Marmul					Daily Services from Marmul to Muscat (Ruwi)				
101	06:30	Marmul	17:20	Daily	101	07:00	Muscat	17:50	Daily Winter
					101	06:30	Muscat	17:20	Daily Summer
Services from Salalah to Dubai					Services from Dubai to Salalah				
102	15:00	Haima	21:00	Daily	102	15:00	Buraimi	16:30	Daily
102	15:00	Nizwa Firq	01:25	Daily	102	15:00	Ibri	19:10	Daily
102	15:00	Ibri	03:10	Daily	102	15:00	Nizwa Firq	20:40	Daily
102	15:00	Buraimi	05:45	Daily	102	15:00	Haima	01:20	Daily
102	15:00	Dubai	07:00	Daily	102	15:00	Salalah	07:00	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Dubai					Daily Services from Dubai to Muscat (Ruwi)				
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	16:30	Dubai	22:25	Daily	201	16:30	Muscat	22:35	Daily
Daily Services from Ruwi to Abu Dhabi					Daily Services from Abu Dhabi to Muscat (Ruwi)				
202	06:30	Abu Dhabi	13:00	Daily	202	15:00	Muscat	22:15	Daily

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SPORTS

Chelsea aim to take out FA Cup frustration on Barca

PARIS — The Nou Camp serves up arguably the main dish of today's Champions League action with Chelsea aiming to take out their FA Cup frustration on Barcelona.

The supporting menu for this second batch of first knockout round first leg games is hardly any less appetising with former European champions Manchester United and AC Milan facing off at Old Trafford.

Reigning titleholders Porto host Inter Milan while Lyon have a date with German giants Werder Bremen in the night's other two fixtures.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho, who knows his way around the Nou Camp having served as Barca's assistant coach, had his dream of an unprecedented four-trophy haul dashed at the weekend when his weakened side were knocked out of the FA Cup by Newcastle.

The chances of quick redemption in Spain have been hampered by the season-ending ankle fracture suffered by England defender Wayne Bridge on Sunday.

William Gallas (groin) and Damien Duff (knee) also had to come off early at St James's Park while star winger Arjen Robben is sidelined until next month. Midfielder Frank Lampard reckons Chelsea can prevail despite these setbacks.

"We've got to patch ourselves up but sometimes these situations work in your favour, as people dig even deeper to help the team.

"We're playing possibly the best team in Europe along with ourselves, Juventus and AC Milan, so it's a massive test that the whole world will be watching. We're confident we can go through."

Didier Drogba, who has missed five matches with a thigh strain, looks however to have won his fight to be fit to take on Frank Rijkaard's runaway Spanish League leaders.

Mourinho is relishing his return to the place where he honed his managerial skills first under Bobby Robson then Louis Van Gaal.

"I left as assistant and I go back as European champion and Chelsea boss so it is fantastic for me," the master tactician from Portugal said.

Barca, who have happy memories of Chelsea's last visit which ended 5-1 in favour of the hosts in the 1999/2000 quarterfinals, were buoyed by a 2-0 win over Mallorca at the weekend.

"That was an important result ahead of meeting Chelsea, as a win always makes you feel good," Rijkaard noted.

Barcelona boast in their midst Fifa's Footballer of the Year Ronaldhino, but the holder of that title in Europe, Andriy Shevchenko, is out of AC Milan's trip to Manchester United with a fractured cheekbone.

The Ukrainian's absence has forced manager Carlo Ancelotti to tinker with his tactics.

"We have several possible solutions but I will have to consider them," he said.

"Shevchenko is an important player for us but my only consolation is that without him we have still managed to play well."

Serie A leaders AC Milan are returning to the scene of their 2003 Champions League final victory over Juventus.

United manager Alex Ferguson has to decide whether to gamble on playing Ruud van Nistelrooy for the first time since the Dutch striker, who has scored 36 goals in 37 European appearances, suffered an Achilles problem in November.

"Ruud will certainly be involved but clearly I have some big decisions to make," said the Scot.

"We may be putting him in cold but he has been great in training and every time he plays in a European game, you just know he is going to score."

The 1999 champions go into the match in the best possible frame of mind after their 2-0 FA Cup win over Everton Saturday.

England international defender Rio Ferdinand is relishing taking on a side that has twice knocked United out of the competition at the semi-final stage.

"It is a massive game. There will be some great players on show and everyone at the club is looking forward to it," he said.

"We look to be in good shape just now. We are playing with great authority and confidence and it has done us no harm to lead into it with a good result."

Porto host Inter having appointed Jose Couceiro as their third coach since Mourinho's departure to Stamford Bridge.

Skipper Jorge Costa is a likely absentee but South African striker Benni McCarthy is back after a three-match suspension while for Inter a question mark hangs over the participation of their talismanic striker Christian Vieri.

Lyon travel to Bremen having to leave behind their captain, defender Claudio Cacapa, in-form striker Bryan Bergougnoux and Anthony Reveillere.

European Champions League last 16, 1st leg fixtures for today: Porto (Portugal) v Inter Milan (Italy); Barcelona (Spain) v Chelsea (England); Manchester United (England) v AC Milan (Italy); Werder Bremen (Germany) v Lyon (France). — *AFP*

Burgsmuller, Labadze win in Scottsdale

SCOTTSDALE (Arizona) — Sixth seed Irakli Labadze of Georgia reached the second round of the $355,000 ATP tennis tournament here on Monday, rallying to beat Alex Kuznetsov in three sets.

Labadze dropped the first set against the American wild card but bounced back to post a 3-6, 7-5, 6-1 victory. The only other seeded player in action the opening day of play was number eight Lars Burgsmuller of Germany, who struggled before emerging with a 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Lu Yen-hsun of Taiwan. Burgsmuller's fellow German Tommy Haas is the top seed here.

Coming off a loss to Max Mirnyi in the semifinals at Memphis on Saturday, Hass will open his campaign here against wild card Donald Young of the United States on Tuesday night.

The tournament also sees the 2005 ATP debut of 28-year-old Australian Mark Philippoussis, whose career nose-dived during a calamitous 2004 that included injury and personal problems.

Philippoussis, who has been recovering from a thigh muscle injury suffered in the Hopman Cup in January, was scheduled to take on Germany's Tomas Behrend yesterday.

American Vince Spadea, the defending champion, is the second seed, followed by Croatian Mario Ancic.

Kenneth Carlsen of Denmark, who defeated Mirnyi in Sunday's final at Memphis to claim his third career title, is seeded seventh.

Monday's night session, featuring American Jan-Michael Gambill against Serb Janko Tipsarevic, was washed out by rain. — *AFP*

Australia's Scott reigns supreme

LOS ANGELES — Australia's Adam Scott rolled home a three-footer on the first playoff hole to defeat Chad Campbell on Monday at the PGA Tour's rain-shortened Los Angeles event.

At 24, Scott has already claimed three victories on the US tour, but Monday's win won't add to that cache. Because inclement weather forced organisers to shorten the event to 36 holes, it won't count as an official victory, although Scott did earn the full first prize of $864,000.

"I don't feel like I played much golf this week," Scott said.

"I don't feel tired and drained like you normally do when you've been battling."

Officials had hoped to complete a third round on Monday, but more heavy rain overnight left parts of the Riviera Country Club course unplayable.

They reverted to the 36-hole scores, which saw Scott and Campbell tied at nine-under 133.

In the sudden-death playoff at 18, both players had three-foot putts for par, but Campbell's lipped out and Scott's fell.

"The putt was outside left, and I just hit it a little bit firm," said Campbell, who had finished his second round on Friday and hadn't hit a ball since until warming up for the playoff.

Scott didn't join him atop the leaderboard until Sunday. He was among those who couldn't finish the second round on Friday, all of whom were left hanging when play was washed out completely on Saturday.

The last time a PGA event went only 36 holes was the 1996 Buick Challenge, which was won by Michael Bradley in a five-way playoff.

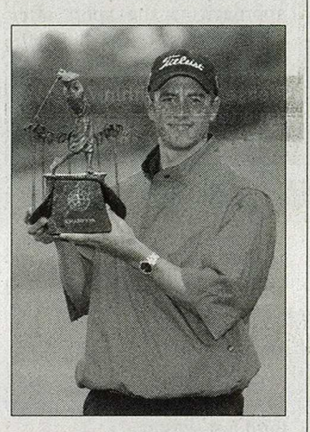
The decision on Monday morning not to try for a full third round ended the hopes of Northern Ireland's Darren Clarke and England's Brian Davis, who shared third on 134 after two rounds.

Scotland's Colin Montgomerie finished a further stroke back on 135, alongside American J.L. Lewis.

Despite the difficulties of the week, Montgomerie had the satisfaction of posting his best round score ever on US soil — a second-round 64. But Montgomerie didn't make as much headway as he might have hoped in improving his world ranking, since only 75 per cent of the normal world ranking points are awarded for a 36-hole event.

The rain also helped derail Tiger Woods' bid to regain the world number one ranking from Vijay Singh. Woods started the week with a chance to recapture the top spot, but finished tied for 13th.

— *AFP*



SO PROUD: Adam Scott. — AFP

Woods looks to go back to top of rankings

TORONTO — A possible return to the top of the rankings will provide added incentive for Tiger Woods when he defends his title at this week's World Golf Championships (WGC) Match Play event.

With the exception of number three Ernie Els of South Africa, 64 of the 65 top-ranked players will travel to the La Costa Resort and Spa in rainy southern California hoping to stop Woods going back to number one in the world.

That is a daunting task given the 29-year-old American's early-season form and complete mastery of the matchplay format.

A fearless competitor who thrives on head-to-head competition, Woods has dominated this event since it began six years ago, claiming back-to-back wins in 2003 and 2004 and finishing runner-up in 2000.

He has a sparkling 20-3 record in the tournament and will carry a 12-match unbeaten run into today's first-round tussle with Nick Price of Zimbabwe.

"Any time you play match play it is really tough on your mind," said world number two Woods.

"It's just an emotional rollercoaster you go through each and every match.

"It's just fun going head-to-head against somebody and always has been. Just look them eyeball-to-eyeball and say, 'let's go'."

For the first time, Woods will arrive in Carlsbad not seeded number one but will fully expect to leave with the title of the world's best player he surrendered to Vijay Singh last season. — *Reuters*

McLaren looking for Formula Fun

LONDON — Instead of being bitter rivals, McLaren's Kimi Raikkonen and Juan Pablo Montoya could be laughing all the way to the chequered flag this season.

Team boss Ron Dennis feels they can benefit from the sort of practical jokes that lit up the late Brazilian world champion Ayrton Senna's partnership with Austrian Gerhard Berger at McLaren in the early 1990s. "Humour used in the right way can be a great tension breaker," said the man whose team have won more Formula One titles than anyone except Ferrari. "It's going to be a deliberate weapon in our arsenal."

McLaren are revving up for the season starting in Australia on March 6 with fresh confidence resulting from quick times in testing and one of the strongest line-ups in the pit lane following Montoya's move from Williams. After some years with an ill-deserved reputation for corporate greyness, the Mercedes-backed team's new 'fire and ice' pairing promises plenty of thrills with the added spice of a full-on personality clash. Yet despite obviously different natures, the taciturn Finnish 'Ice Man' seems to be hitting it off with the volatile Colombian. "There is a lot of smiling going on and good humour between them and that is something that we will definitely be fostering," said Dennis. "We're not going to be putting it on public display but I will be reintroducing the concept of practical jokes into the team. I'm lining up a few."

Montoya has already shown that he is a natural prankster, demonstrating a playful streak at Williams, while Raikkonen has shown his wild side in recent well-chronicled nightclub excursions. They will have a job to match the often outrageous goings-on of Senna's day however.

Berger tossed the Brazilian's briefcase out of a helicopter over Monza, filled his hotel bed with frogs and replaced Senna's passport photograph with, in Dennis's words, "an equivalent-sized piece of male genitalia". — *Reuters*

Indians aim to match Pakistani hospitality

MUMBAI — Pramod Ojha went to Lahore last year hoping to see the Indian cricket team thrash Pakistan. By the end of his trip, he had lost his heart to a country he had been brought up to dislike.

"It was an overwhelming experience. We hear so many negative things about Pakistan but the love and affection we got there was touching," said the 36-year-old businessman from New Delhi.

"Everywhere we went, we were treated like royalty."

Indians now feel obliged to match Pakistan's hospitality in the Test and One-day tour starting on Monday, the first time Pakistan will play a full series in India since 1999.

The hosts, however, got off to a bad start, with the tour delayed by three days because of a dispute over one of the proposed venues.

Ojha was not the only Indian swept away by the warm welcome in Pakistan during last year's March-April cricket series, an emotive symbol of a thaw in relations between the hostile, nuclear-armed neighbours.

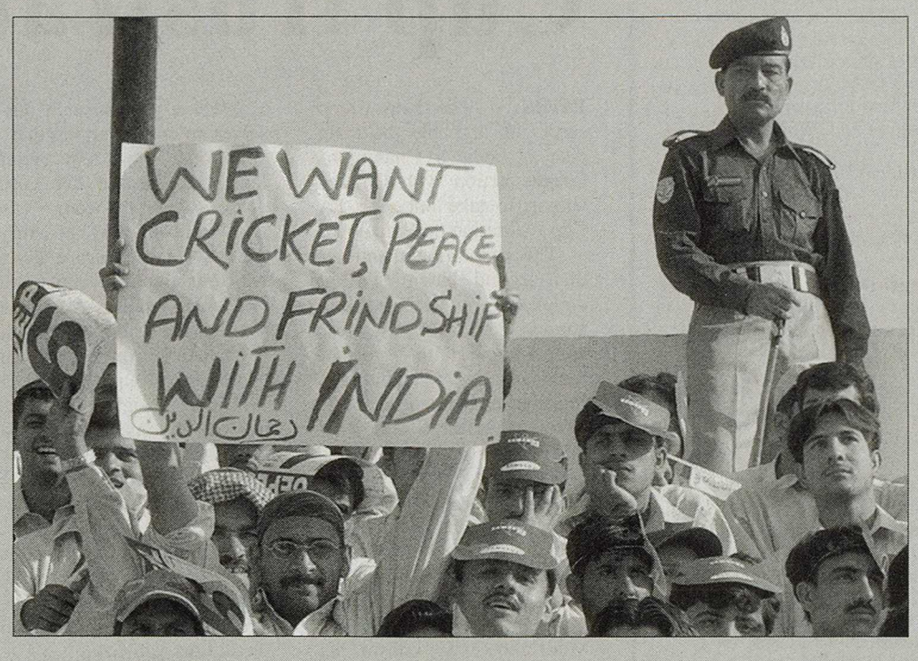
Apart from a common history and culture, the countries share a passion for cricket which is akin to a religion in south Asia.

There are countless tales from the tour of *bonhomie* between people of the two countries who hugged, exchanged flags and painted each other's faces in their national colours on the terraces of Karachi's National Stadium during the first match.

India won the Tests 2-1 and the One-dayers 3-2 on their first full series on Pakistani soil in 14 years.

Pakistan issued some 8,000 visas to Indian fans, many of whom used the rare opportunity to trace their roots and meet relatives they had left behind after partition in 1947.

"The tour gave us a chance to show how we're actually the same people," said Imran Butt, a Pakistani who works in the Pearl Continental Hotel in Lahore.



PUBLIC DEMAND: A Pakistani fan raises a banner during an India-Pakistan match in Peshawar last year.

"We have no hostility, no enmity, that is for the politicians. We, the people, share a bond that goes far beyond a line on a map."

For the return visit, the bone of contention was a Test in Ahmedabad, the main city of the western Gujarat state, which in 2002 witnessed the worst Hindu-Muslim riots for a decade.

Pakistan refused to play a Test there after a security review. The matter was resolved only when they agreed to play a sixth One-dayer in the city as a compromise, after persuasion by Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh. Some hardline Hindu groups demanded that the tour be scrapped if Pakistan did not play in Ahmedabad and members of the Hindu Shiv Sena party attempted to dig up the pitch at Mohali, venue of the first Test, as a protest.

"They gave us such a grand reception and here we are trying to make trouble. This is not on," said Samir Rai, another Indian fan who went to Multan last year to watch a Test.

India is expected to issue 10,000 visas for the series.

A year of peace talks between the countries bore fruit last week when the nuclear rivals agreed to start a bus service across a cease-fire line dividing disputed Kashmir.

Cricket has always been twinned with bilateral relations: The tours became possible only after India revoked a ban on all home and away cricket with Pakistan, imposed in 2000.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since being divided along religious lines when they were freed from British rule in 1947.

Work comes to a standstill when their teams play each other, with thousands of fans thronging roadside shops to watch the match on television or listen to radio commentary.

Gunfire increases across the restive frontier in Kashmir and the expectations of millions of volatile, cricket-crazy fans put tremendous pressure on the players.

Crowd trouble has been a major issue in the past.

Pakistan beat India in an Asian Test Championship match in Kolkata in 1999 before empty stands after rioting spectators were ejected from the Eden Gardens.

A One-dayer in Karachi in 1997 was marred by spectators throwing stones, before India returned after the interruption to complete their win. Captain Krishnamachari Srikkanth's shirt was torn by a spectator at the same venue in 1989.

Last year's tour, however, went off without a hitch. India's victories were graciously feted by Pakistanis, marking a watershed in relations between the people of the two countries.

"There were problems before, people had bitter memories of partition," said Lahore tour operator Imran Qadir. "But we're the new generation, we have no such issues with India. It's time to bury the hatchet." — *Reuters*

Top teams prepare for final season of rugby's Super 12

SYDNEY — The southern hemisphere's Super 12 competition kicks off for the 10th and final time this weekend with Australian and New Zealand teams again vying for favouritism.

The annual regional championship has been such a success in raising the profile of the game since the advent of professionalism that organisers have agreed to expand the competition to 14 teams from 2006.

The Western Australia capital Perth has been confirmed as the site for one of the two new franchises, with the other to come from South Africa.

The decision to expand the competition, which started with six sides in the days of amateurism, has added excitement to this year's series, with nine of the 12 teams still chasing their first titles.

"There is hardly a need for any extra motivation to win the Super 12 but the fact that it is the 10th and final year certainly gives it special meaning," said Elton Flatley, captain of Australia's Queensland Reds, who play the Wellington Hurricanes in Brisbane on Saturday.

"We are totally focused on getting Queensland engraved on that trophy before the competition expands to Super 14."

The spectacular ad-hoc nature of Super 12 has drawn thousands of new fans to the game although the top coaches from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were forced to re-evaluate their approach to the sport after England's victory at the 2003 World Cup.

The southern hemisphere's move to a more forward-orientated game was highlighted by South Africa's win in last year's Tri-nations although the republic's success has not yet transferred to Super 12.

The tournament has never been won by a South African team although the Sharks reached the final in 1996 and 2001. The Pretoria-based Bulls made the semifinals two years ago and the Stormers were third last season.

Politics has always played a big part in South African rugby and officials have announced that each of the four regional teams must have eight black players in their squads this year.

This weekend's opening round features two South African derbies, with the Stormers hosting the Natal Sharks in Cape Town on Friday and the Cats playing the Bulls in Pretoria on Saturday.

New Zealand, providing five of the 12 teams, has dominated the competition, winning seven of nine finals while Australia's ACT Brumbies have won the other two, including last year.

The Brumbies, who host the Canterbury Crusaders in Canberra on Saturday in a repeat of the 2000, 2002 and 2004 finals, boast a team packed with seasoned Wallabies including George Gregan, Stephen Larkham and captain Stirling Mortlock.

"There aren't many tougher tasks in the world of rugby than to win the Super 12," Mortlock said. "It is a big mountain to climb." — *Reuters*

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Adarsh, Rohan in U-14 final

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT — Adarsh Muthappa and Rohan Negi justified their top seeding by reaching the finals of the boys' under-14 singles event at the Annual Tennis Tournament of the Indian Social Club Muscat.

In the first semifinal, top seed and defending champion Adarsh Muthappa was in awesome touch and showed no signs of the effects from the marathon three-setter semifinal of the under-16 event he played the previous evening.

Adarsh took a step closer to defending his title with a perfect blend of determination and cool temperament that saw him demolish fourth seed Rutwik Vaidya 6-1, 6-0.

It was an off day for Rutwik whose attacking game was overshadowed by the consistency and accuracy of the top seed.

After a positive start and breaking Adarsh in the very first game, Rutwik was unable to force the pace against Adarsh's resolute vigil at the baseline.

Not only did Adarsh return everything, he did so with such uncanny accuracy that forced Rutwik into errors.

There was no respite for Rutwik in the second set too as Adarsh maintained the upper hand to sweep through the set and into the finals.

Second seed Rohan Negi set up yet another title clash against Adarsh. In the second semifinal, Rohan played exceedingly well to clinch a berth in the final with a confident 6-2, 6-2 victory over third seed Suneet Fernandes.

Barring a few lapses that allowed Suneet to break Rohan in the sixth game, Rohan grew in confidence with every game and handled Suneet's powerful groundstrokes with relative ease. Suneet hit back to break Rohan in the second and sixth game of the second set but Rohan remained focused and wrapped up the match to take a shot at the title.

Balkan director to make film on Maradona

BELGRADE — Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona has asked celebrated Balkan director Emir Kusturica to make a documentary about his colourful life, a report said yesterday.

"It's a film which will be quite complicated in conception ... the idea being shedding some light on Maradona's constant wish to establish harmony with his family," Kusturica told the *Vecernje Novosti* daily.

"My intention is to find and recreate over the next five months the real personality of Maradona," said Kusturica, who has won two Golden Palm awards at the Cannes film festival for *Underground* (1995) and *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985).

— *AFP*

Hayden back to best as Kangaroos thrash Kiwis

CHRISTCHURCH — Australian opener Matthew Hayden returned to his majestic best with a superb century as the world champions trounced New Zealand by 106 runs in the second One-day International yesterday.

After being sent in to bat on a placid Jade Stadium pitch, Hayden lashed 114 off 124 balls, including 12 fours and two sixes, as Australia cruised to 314 in their 50 overs and then humbled New Zealand for 208 with nine overs to spare.

Daniel Vettori staged a courageous resistance for New Zealand top scoring with 83 to equal the world record One-day score for a No.8 batsman, but his solo heroics were never going to be enough.

The win highlighted the stark difference between the first and second ranked One-day teams in the world.

Two big partnerships involving Hayden set up Australia's massive total, 99 for the second wicket with Ricky Ponting who scored 53, and 133 for the third wicket with Damien Martyn who scored 58.

New Zealand's rare high point was when they took three for 22 in three overs to reduce the tourists from 232 for two to 254 for five.

New Zealand started so well on the best batting surface in the country, with dangerman Adam Gilchrist caught behind down the leg-side without scoring off Daryl Tuffey's second ball.

But it was all Australia from there, and Ponting noted it was a big improvement from the 10-run win in the first game.

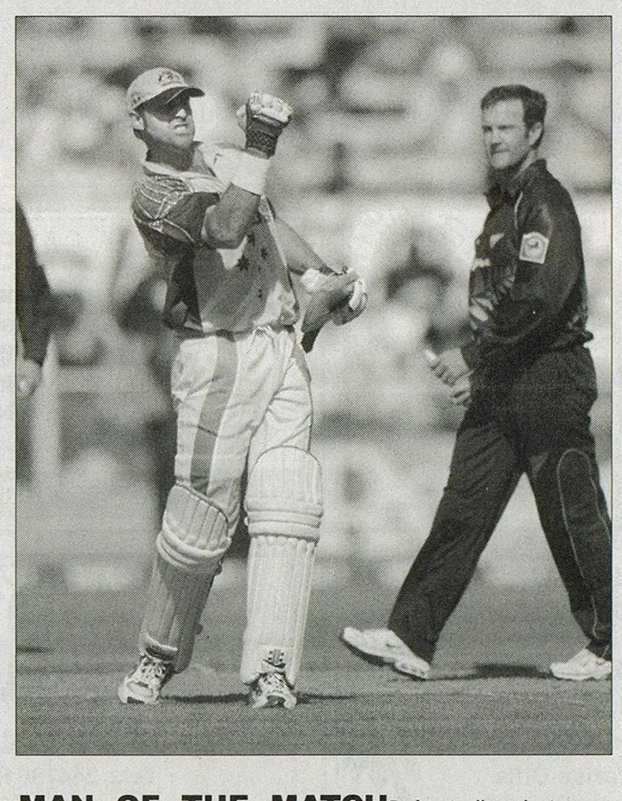
"Everyone, bar Gilly I guess, got off to a pretty good start and played pretty well which is pleasing, but more importantly the new ball bowling again was outstanding — the taking of wickets as we did it was always going to be hard for New Zealand to get back in the game," Ponting said.

Meanwhile a dejected New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming could find little satisfaction in his side's performance.

"We didn't bowl as well as we could've on a good wicket ...and they just got away, they got momentum with good partnerships which is something that was missing with our innings when we didn't get any until Dan and Brendon McCullum."

Ponting continued his hot run of form with 53 off 57 balls, including six fours and two sixes, before he was run out by a brilliant direct hit from Hamish Marshall at cover.

Martyn scored 58 off 70 before another top piece of fielding by Craig McMillan at long on saw a direct hit at the bowler's end.



MAN OF THE MATCH: Australian batsman Matthew Hayden shows his delight at his fifth One-day century as New Zealand's Nathan Astle looks on in Christchurch. — AFP

Hayden's fifth One-day century finally ended in the 42nd over when former New Zealand rugby international Jeff Wilson took his first of two catches off Kyle Mills on the deep square-leg boundary.

But, Wilson's return to One-day International bowling was not one for him to remember as he went for none for 54 off six overs.

New Zealand's pacemen were largely cannon fodder, with Tuffey taking one for 73 off eight overs, and Chris Cairns one for 62 off 10.

Spinner Vettori was again the pick with none for 31 off 10 while Mills had the most success with two for 62 off 10.

Fleming sent Australia in and must have wished he hadn't before the 15th over, when Australia reached 96.

In comparison New Zealand were five for 71 at the same mark with Fleming out for one and the rest of his top order following in quick succession, all caught behind by Gilchrist.

If the New Zealand game plan singled out one Australian bowler to attack it would have been Andrew Symonds, but he finished his first over with two wickets claiming the big hitting Craig McMillan (12) and Chris Cairns (22).

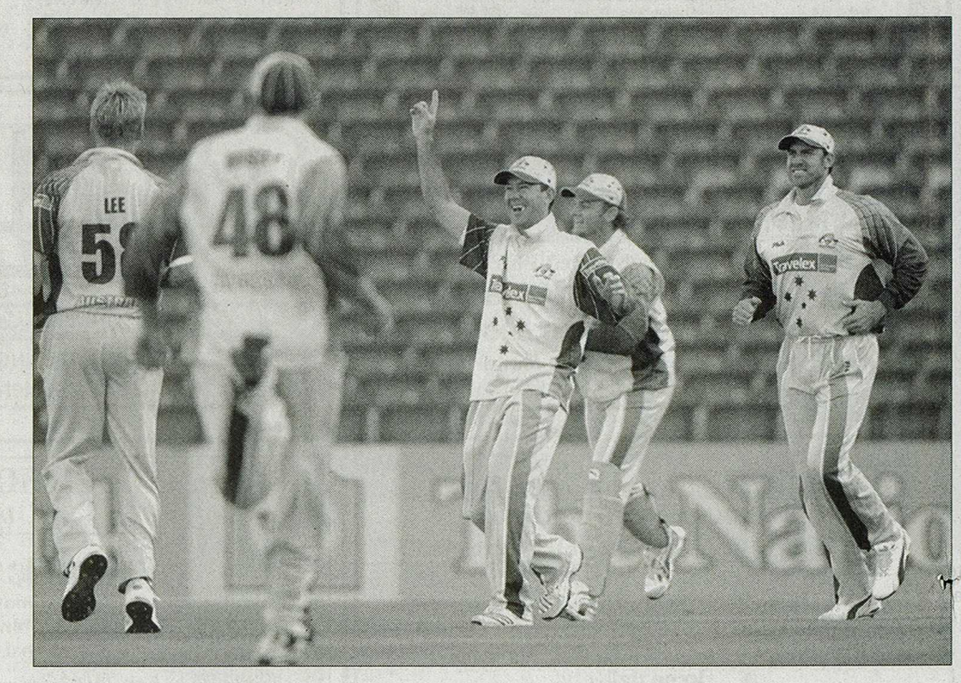
He later added the scalp of McCullum to have New Zealand at seven for 135 before Wilson helped bring some respectability to the New Zealand total by scoring 22 in a 62-run partnership with Vettori. Australia lead the five-match series 2-0 with the third game in Auckland on Saturday.

SCOREBOARD

Australia innings
A. Gilchrist c McCullum b Tuffey 0
M. Hayden c Wilson b Mills ... 114
R. Ponting run out (sub J. Marshall) 53
D. Martyn run out (McMillan) .. 58
A. Symonds c Wilson b Mills ... 13
M. Clarke c McCullum b Cairns 23
B. Hogg not out 9
M. Hussey not out 32
Extras (lb1, w6, nb5) 12
Total (6 wkts) 314
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-99, 3-232, 4-237, 5-254, 6-283
Bowling: Tuffey 8-1-73-1 (3nb, 3w), Mills 10-0-62-2 (2nb, 2w), Cairns 10-0-62-1, Vettori 10-0-31-0, Wilson 6-0-57-0 (1w), Astle 6-0-28-0

New Zealand innings
S. Fleming c Gilchrist b Lee 1
N. Astle c Gilchrist b McGrath ... 3
M. Sinclair c Gilchrist b Lee 15
H. Marshall c Gilchrist b McGrath 16
C. McMillan c Gilchrist b Symonds 12
C. Cairns c Hayden b Symonds 22
B. McCullum c and b Symonds 20
D. Vettori c sub Katich b Gillespie 83
J. Wilson c Ponting b Gillespie 22
K. Mills run out (Clarke) 4
D. Tuffey not out 0
Extras (lb3, w4, nb3) 10
Total (all out, 40.4 overs) 208
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-12), 3-28, 4-49, 5-72, 6-73, 7-135, 8-197, 9-208, 10-208
Bowling: Lee 6-2-26-2 (3nb, 2w), McGrath 7-0-42-2, Gillespie 9.4-1-45-2 (1w), Symonds 6-0-41-3, Hogg 10-0-49-0 (1w)
Result: Australia win by 106 runs, lead series 2-0.
Umpires: Aleem Dar (Pak) and Billy Bowden (NZ). Match Referee: Clive Lloyd (WI).

— *AFP*



FIRST BLOOD: Australian captain Ricky Ponting runs towards fast bowler Brett Lee after Lee dismissed New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming in the first over at Jade Stadium in Christchurch. — AFP

SPORTS



PRESS BRIEFING: Lt-Commander Abdullah Saif Al Khadoori, right, briefing mediamen as two crew members sit next to him. — **Photo by Mohammed Mahjoub**

Oman Sailing Team set for regatta

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT — The efforts from the Ministry of Sports Affairs have paved the way for the birth of the Oman Sailing Team. A development which has come at the right time, when everyone understands the need of promoting water sports in this country, which has a bountiful shoreline and a plenty of seafarers.

The need for active participation in many big time events was the need of the hour and the latest efforts to promote the discipline by the Sports Affairs Ministry need to be applauded.

With the annual feature — the Dubai-Muscat Passage Regatta — round the corner, a professional approach was the absolute need of the hour and thanks to sponsorship support, especially from the Oman International Bank and sportsoman.com, the dream of having a national team has turned into reality as it has happened with Hamed Al Wahaibi's Oman World Rally Team.

The need of the hour is of course more sponsorship support for the two yachts that will compete in the annual regatta.

Sportsoman.com have done their part to design the colours of the yachts and the flannels of the crew members and the management of the teams — eight members each — will be handled by the Royal Navy of Oman.

Speaking at a press briefing on the Ministry of Sports affairs premises, Lt-Commander Abdullah Said Al Khadoori, hailed the efforts of all and said: "We are proud to be associated with the Ministry of Sports Affairs and we hope to compete in many more events in the future."

"Our two yachts are *Al Bashiq* and *Al Uqab*, which have a good history to talk about in the history of regatta," said Abdullah, adding: "*Al Bashiq* (the crew to wear white flannels) will be skippered by Saleh Al Jabri and *Al Uqab* (red flannels) will be skippered by Michael Harris.

When queried why the Oman team did not take part in the other rounds of the series organised by the Dubai International Marine Club, he said: "Lack of financial support has forced us to take part only in the Dubai-Muscat regatta."

Two of the crew members Badr Salem (*Al Bashiq*) and Mahfoudh Mohammed (*Al Uqab*) were present during the conference, which was conducted by Ahmed Al Yahmadi, the director of private sports at the Ministry of Sports Affairs.

The 365-nautical mile Dubai-Muscat Race, the fourth of seven rounds making up the exciting new IRC handicap series, gets under way from Dubai International Marine Club on Thursday (March 3) and will finish in the Omani capital four days later.

The event is being organised by DIMC with the full backing of the Oman's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Sports Affairs, Directorate-General of Tourism, and Marina Bander Al Rowdha, where the race finishes on March 7.

In all eighteen yachts will compete in the race, which will pass through the most difficult Straits of Hormuz.

Following is the list of crew members of both the Omani yachts:

Al Bashiq: Saleh Al Jabri, Ali Al Hosni, Yaqub Al Ghadani, Abdullah Al Habsi, Adam Al Balushi, Mohammed Al Balushi, Ahmed Al Balushi and Mohsin Al Busaidi.

Al Uqab: Michael Harris, Suleiman Al Adawi, Hussain Al Balushi, Khamis Al Hamdani, Ahmed Al Balushi, Younis Al Balushi, Said Al Tarishi and Ahmed Al Balushi.

Anetco lift Al Sarmadi Cup

By Our Sports Reporter



THE CHAMPS: Jubilant players of Anetco.

MUSCAT — Anetco lifted the Al Sarmadi Cup beating Sabco by 30 runs in the final of the MRI-ball cricket tournament.

Sabco won the toss and elected to field first. Anetco opening with captain Samad and Rahman made a brisk start scoring 34 in three overs before Rahman departed after making 18 (12 balls, 1 four).

Samad top scored making 32 (20 balls, 2 fours, 1 six). He was well supported by Nazim who scored a quickfire 12 (7 balls, 1 four) and some cheeky running between the wickets. Anetco managed a good score of 87 for the loss of 6 wickets.

For Sabco, Sada bowled an incisive spell capturing three wickets and giving away 20 runs in the allotted three overs. He was well supported by Manohar who bowled his two overs giving away just 10 runs but failed to capture a wicket.

In reply Ashraf of Anetco struck very early capturing two wickets in his very first over. Thereafter, except Ahmed none of the other batsmen of Sabco could withstand the pressure and score. Ahmed was the top scorer with 20 (10 deliveries, 1 four).

Ashraf was the most successful bowler for Anetco capturing four wickets in three overs and giving away just 10 runs.

The tournament organisers thanked main sponsors Habib Bank and co-sponsors Asian Hut, without whose support the tournament would not have been possible.

Ashraf of Anetco was declared the bowler of the tournament for capturing 8 wickets in three matches.

Mohammed Taj of Sabco was declared the best batsman of the tournament for scoring 107 runs in four innings.

Mustafa of Bowshar Friends Club was declared the best fielder for some spectacular fielding efforts.

Samad of Anetco was declared the man of the tournament for contributing with bat and ball.

Brief scores: Anetco 87 for 6 in 10 overs (Samad 32, Rehman 18, Sada 3 for 20) beat Sabco CT 58 all out in 9.4 overs (Ahmed 20, Ashraf 4 for 10, Samad 1 for 3).

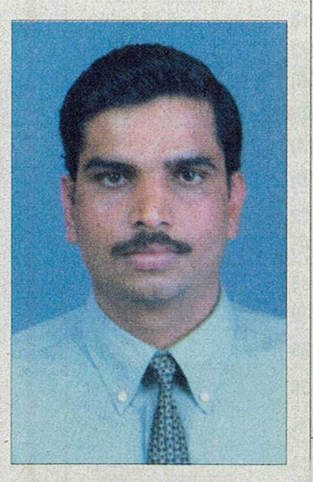


MAGICAL MOMENT: Anetco skipper Samad receiving the trophy from chief guest Damodar Shetty.

Oman Cricket League: Muscat Beach, STS and PDO register victories

By Our Sports Reporter





MATCH-WINNERS: Shahzad Majid, S.S. Nair

MUSCAT — Muscat Beach Trading (MBT), Special Technical Services (STS) and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) cricket teams registered wins in the Oman Cricket Club-organised His Highness Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal Memorial League at the OAC and PDO Grounds.

In the Al Ansari-sponsored C Division game, Carillion Alawi won the toss and put MBT into bat first. MBT scored 204 for the loss of 5 wickets, with useful contributions coming from Asif Ishaq (60), Mohammed Asad Malik (50), Naeem Shahid Mahmood (39 not out), Shahzad Majid (32). Nalinda Prasad picked up two wickets for Carillion.

In reply, Carillion were dismissed for 196 runs with four balls to spare. Nalinda (34), Irshad Shahid (65), Shahbaz Siddiq (38) were the main scorers. Shahzad Majid bowled an excellent spell to capture four wickets for only 21 runs while Abid Hussain returned with a wicket for MBT.

Brief scores: MBT 204 for 5 in 25 overs (Asif 60, Asad 50, Naeem 39no, Shahzad Majid 32, Nalinda 2/28) beat Carllion Alawi 196 all out in 24.2 overs (Irshad 65, Shahbaz Siddiq 38, Nalinda 34, Shahzad 4/21).

In the Omzest Mercedes-sponsored games played at the PDO ground, PDO beat Ibn Hamed CT in the morning session and STS beat Golden Speco CT in the afternoon session.

In the game played in the morning, Ibn Hamed winning the toss and deciding to bat first, put on 203 runs for the loss of 6 wickets in the allotted 25 overs. Openers Shekar and Ishrath Habibullah stood good for the first wicket partnership of 91 runs until the fall of the former for 57 scored in 47 balls with 8 fours. Ishrath was the next to be dismissed for 50 knocked in 36 balls with the score reading 128. After the fall of the next wicket on 152 wickets started to fall at regular intervals. One-drop bat Ananthakumar R. contributed useful 34 runs in his second wicket partnership with Ishrath. For PDO, Mark Little and George Joseph captured two wickets each.

In reply, PDO scored the required runs with four wickets in hand and 8 balls to spare. A 68 runs second wicket stand between Mufti Alam and Gopi enabled their side to raise the score from 42 for one to 110 for two. Opener Rajnish scored 34 runs in 23 balls while his partner, Mufti played just 39 balls to hit 46 runs with six fours. Gopi played a hard hitting knock of 42 runs in 26 balls with five hits to the boundary while later in the innings, George Joseph put on the all important 39 runs in 24 balls towards the end of the innings. Ishrath returned with two dismissals for Ibn Hamed.

Brief scores: Ibn Hamed 203 for 6 in 25 overs (Shekar 57, Ihsrath 50, Ananthakumar 34, George 2/37, Mark 2/43) lost to PDO 204 for 6 in 23.4 overs (Mufti 46, Gopi 42, George 39, Rajnish 34, Ishrath 2/48).

In the game played in the afternoon session, STS batted first to score 209 runs for the loss of 4 wickets in the allotted 25 overs and had their opponents bundled out for 178 runs to win the game by 31 runs.

With the fall of the first wicket on 32, the in-form opener Alex Clark put on a fine 95 runs partnership with S.S. Nair who eventually went to score one of his best centuries by playing only 64 balls for his 108 run that included 14 fours and a huge hit above the ropes. Alex scored 57 runs including four sixes. For Golden Speco, D. P. Mishra and Biju returned with two victims each.

In reply, chasing a total that looked to be possible, Golden Speco CT lost all their wickets for only 178 runs losing the game by 31 runs. Natraj with 37 runs and Steven with 35 runs were the only two batsmen to contribute any valuable runs as the rest of the batsmen lost control of the game. Vinu and Qayoom picked up two wickets each.

Brief scores: STS 209 for 4 in 25 overs (Nair 108, Alex 57, Mishra 2/30, Biju 2/37) beat Golden Speco CT 178 all out in 25 overs (Natraj 37, Biju 35, Vinu 2/22, Qayoom 2/26).

Toyota Land Cruiser excels in Dakar Rally

MUSCAT — This season's Dakar Rally may be over but the celebration has not ended at least for the Toyota Motor Corporation.

Three standard Toyota Land Cruiser Wagon (100 Series) models have conquered the world's most gruelling motorsport event taking the first three places in the production diesel class.

The factory-backed Team Land Cruiser took the 1-2-3 victory in an event in which less than half the 462 competitors reached the finish line. The Land Cruiser was the first production vehicle home, regardless of engine size or type.

Team Land Cruiser was run for the first time by Toyota Auto Body Company Ltd, a subsidiary of Toyota Motor Corporation. In fact there is no more arduous event in world motor sport than the Dakar Rally.



To get all three team vehicles to the finish line is a notable achievement in itself, but to score first, second and third in its class is a mighty effort for everyone involved.

The Land Cruiser diesels ran in the unmodified section underlining just how tough those 100 Series is, which is why Land Cruiser is known world over as 'The King' off the road.

Since its inception, the Land Cruiser has established a worldwide reputation of being a vehicle that never fails and certainly tough enough to survive the most trying road and driving conditions.

Thus, reliability became the key word, which has also become the very image of Toyota itself.

The same goes for its position in Oman, where the list of Toyota Land Cruiser loyalist has extended to such extents that this 'All Terrain Conqueror' has attained almost a titanic status.

Today it marches into the 21st century with its legendary strength, durability, reliability and will remain at the forefront as a 4WD that one would want to drive forever.

In the Sultanate, Toyota Land cruiser has established its mark as the most admired off-roader, which also enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty. The ever reliable, sales, service and parts network established by Saud Bahwan Automotive, which represent Toyota in Oman backs this automotive icon from Toyota.

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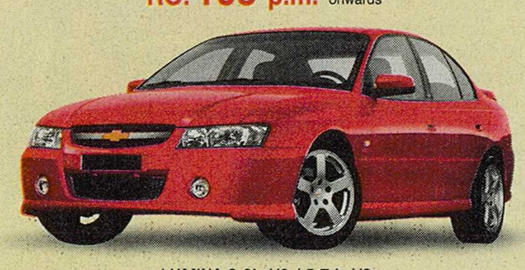

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TIMES SPORT

Wednesday, February 23, 2005

Pak tour in doubt over TV rights row

MUMBAI — Pakistan's tour of India is in doubt because of a long-running court battle over TV rights, the head of the Indian cricket board has said.

"The situation is grim since the International Cricket Council (ICC) rules say that a telecast is a must," Ranbir Mahendra, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said yesterday.

"TV is essential for the third umpire, and the ICC could refuse to post officials for the series. If the telecast issue is not decided by next week, they might step in."

The dispute involves India's largest listed media firm Zee Telefilms and the cricket board. The Madras High Court is hearing a case against the board's decision to abandon a $308 million, four-year deal that Zee won in an auction.

Pakistan are due to arrive on February 28 to play three Tests and six One-dayers on their first full tour of India in six years following political tensions over the disputed region of Kashmir. Before the board backed out of the deal last September, it had been challenged in court by unsuccessful bidder and rival ESPN Star Sports, owned by Walt Disney Co. and News Corp.

The dispute also put in doubt Australia's tour of India last October but the Supreme Court allowed the board to sell the series as a one-off to Sony Entertainment, with pictures produced by Dubai-based Ten Sports.

"We'll again request the court to allow us to make a stopgap arrangement to show the Pakistan series on TV," Mahendra said.

The tour has already been delayed by three days due to a dispute over venues. The Pakistan Cricket Board had threatened to pull out if India insisted on hosting a Test in Ahmedabad.

India scrapped the Ahmedabad Test while Pakistan agreed to play an additional One-dayer there. — *Reuters*

Bucknor set to be first umpire to hit century

LONDON — Steve Bucknor is set to become the first umpire to stand in 100 Tests when he officiates during next month's series between India and Pakistan.

The West Indian, known for his lengthy deliberation and distinctive nod of the head before giving a batsman out, will reach the landmark in the second Test at Kolkata which starts on March 16 where he will be alongside Australia's Darrell Hair. In recognition of his achievement, the International Cricket Council (ICC) will present Bucknor, also a qualified football referee, with its first Golden Bails Award.

This is part of the governing body's Umpire Recognition programme which also includes the Bronze Bails Award (for 100 ODI appearances) and Silver Bails Award (for 200 ODIs).

Most Tests for an umpire

99: Steve Bucknor (WI)
86: David Shepherd (ENG)
73: Srinivasaraghavan Venkataraghavan (IND)
66: Dickie Bird (ENG)
59: Rudi Koertzen (SA)
58: Darrell Hair (AUS)
48: Frank Chester (ENG)
48: Daryl Harper (AUS)
44: Dave Orchard (RSA)
42: Charlie Elliott (ENG).

— *AFP*

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SUMMARY OF THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

With the Grace and Mercy of Al-mighty, together with our far sighted vision, we have been able to complete yet another successful year, despite Oman Cables Industry (SAOG) [OCI] facing continuously different challenges, particularly those imposed by the market globalization process, which has now become an international phenomenon.

As conveyed by the OCI Management in the previous Annual General Meeting, that the major expansion project for the manufacture of Medium Voltage Cables (MV Cables) was completed by the end of 2003 and production was started in 2004. With that, the company has been able to launch the new product range of MV Cables viz 11/33 kV Power Cables (Underground Cables) successfully both in the Local and International Markets. This launching has been welcomed by the market and the institutions. The first consignment of MV Cables was exported to the European continent.

It is a significant achievement for an Omani Industry to produce excellent defect free cables and consistently high quality products, which OCI markets confidently and assures its customers peace of mind, because of these products are of unfailing reliability. The consistent quality and performance has helped OCI to get international approval in a very short span of about 2 months; in the normal situation such products approval has taken much longer for some other organizations.

With the completion of the MV Cable project OCI's production and productivity have increased enabling massive increase in total sales of the Company. The Management of OCI believes that continuing investment, not only extends OCI's production capacity and capability to meet its international market requirement, but also enables OCI to serve different customer groups and provides the society greater commitment including the employment opportunity for the young Omanis in our country.

Operation Results :

The company's sales have increased from RO 22.163 million in 2003 to RO 36.002 million in 2004, which is an increase of 62% compared to the previous year. This increase of 62% is due to the various factors like (i) increase in the raw material costs, (ii) increase in the production capacity for existing products and (iii) addition of the new MV Cables range.

Despite the stiff competition in the regional and international markets, the Company has been able to achieve excellent results; this was the result of the decision of the management not to depend on the regional market alone but to expand its market territories worldwide.

The net profit before tax is RO 1.555 million compared to RO 0.764 million in 2003, an increase of 103% compared to 2003.

Dividend :

In line with the guidance issued by the Capital Market Authority as well as the need for distributing fair dividend to the shareholders, the Board of Directors has reviewed this in their meeting of 1/2005 held on 5 February 2005 and have recommended a dividend @ 20% (RO.0.200) per share of par value RO 1/-, subject to the approval of the Annual General Meeting. Such dividend will be disbursed to all those Shareholders who are on the Company's records, till the time of commencement of the Annual General Meeting.

OCI acknowledges the great support extended to it, by His Majesty's Government, the Authorities in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, other Ministries and by National Organizations, for their continuous support. We pray to the Almighty to help our beloved Oman to develop even more under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.

Mustafa Bin Mukhtar Bin Ali Al Lawati
CHAIRMAN

New things keep happening all the time

The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder, within 7 days of receipt of written request .

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2004

	2004 RO	2003 RO
Revenue	**36,001,935**	22,162,841
Cost of sales	**(31,210,222)**	(19,228,433)
Gross profit	**4,791,713**	2,934,408
Other income	**47,973**	24,895
Administrative expenses	**(1,783,800)**	(1,276,232)
Selling and distribution expenses	**(653,030)**	(402,526)
Depreciation	**(379,674)**	(245,686)
Amortisation	**(54,360)**	(54,360)
Profit from operations	**1,968,822**	980,499
Net financing costs	**(414,237)**	(216,061)
Profit before income-tax	**1,554,585**	764,438
Income tax expenses	**(186,350)**	(86,102)
Net profit for the year	**1,368,235**	678,336
Basic earnings per share	**0.458**	0.227
Gross profit margin (%)	**13.31%**	13.24%
Net Profit margin (%)	**3.80%**	3.06%

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2004

	2004 RO	2003 RO
Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	**10,035,378**	9,530,279
Intangible assets	**101,842**	156,202
Long term deposit	**2,000,000**	-
Investments	**129,267**	116,752
Total non-current assets	**12,266,487**	9,803,233
Inventories	**7,789,730**	4,631,590
Trade and other receivables	**12,683,893**	8,237,030
Due from related parties	**348,394**	209,929
Cash and bank balances	**224,198**	2,259,736
Total current assets	**21,046,215**	15,338,285
Total assets	**33,312,702**	25,141,518
Equity and liabilities		
Share capital	**2,990,000**	2,990,000
Share premium`	**977,500**	977,500
Legal reserve	**649,173**	512,349
General reserves	**117,672**	117,672
Retained earnings	**3,097,620**	2,239,959
Cumulative charges in fair value	**573,476**	338,727
Total equity	**8,405,441**	7,176,207
Liabilities		
Term loans	**3,129,737**	2,921,560
Deferred government grant	**10,209**	14,370
Deferred tax liabilities	**365,718**	341,161
Total non-current liabilities	**3,505,664**	3,277,091
Bank loan against trust receipt	**1,289,866**	2,387,791
Short term loans from bank	**3,154,800**	2,000,000
Current maturities of term loans	**1,028,802**	592,978
Trade and other payables	**15,767,220**	9,616,109
Due to related parties	**700**	724
Dividend payable	**2,715**	1,911
Taxation	**157,494**	88,707
Total current liabilities	**21,401,597**	14,688,220
Total equity and Liabilities	**33,312,702**	25,141,518
Net assets	**8,405,441**	7,176,207
Net assets per share	**2.811**	2.400
Current ratio	**0.983**	1.044

Glue yourselves to the pitch, Zaheer tells Pakistan

KARACHI — Former master batsman Zaheer Abbas yesterday advised Pakistani players to stick to the crease at all costs if they want to put rival India under pressure in the opening Test at Mohali.

"Glue yourselves to the Indian pitches to the extent that they have to call police to budge you from there and score big in the first Test to gain a psychological advantage," he said.

Resolute batting would be vital in the outcome of the series, Pakistan's first on Indian soil for six years, said Abbas, whose 78 Tests for Pakistan yielded 5,062 runs.

"My advice is to use your skill and don't give away wickets. The team which wins the first Test in Mohali will gain the advantage," said Abbas, known locally as the Asian Bradman, after the legendary Australian batsman.

He said batsman Sachin Tendulkar was the key man for India.

"For me Tendulkar's appearance will be vital as he is the binding force of the Indian batting and we saw how disorganised they were when Tendulkar did not play last year" on India's tour of Pakistan, Abbas said.

India take on Pakistan in three Tests and six One-day Internationals in March-April with Tendulkar on a comeback trail after being troubled by a tennis elbow injury last season.

"Tendulkar's loss would be bigger than Pakistan's loss of Shoaib Akhtar," said Abbas, referring to the Pakistani fast bowler's decision to pull out from the Test series due to a hamstring injury.

He said Pakistan's batsmen faced a huge challenge from Indian spinners Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh and advised them to practise hard.



CANDID: Zaheer Abbas

India start the series as favourites but Pakistan must exploit the home pressure on Saurav Ganguly's team, Abbas said.

"Pakistan are a little weak but if they exploit the pressure of home expectations on India, our team can surprise India like they did here last year," he said referring to India's 3-2 One-day and 2-1 Test win in Pakistan in 2004.

Pakistan arrive in New Delhi on February 28 and after a three-day side game at Dharamsala March 3-5 they play the first Test in Mohali from March 8.

The second and third Tests will be played in Kolkata and Bangalore. — *AFP*

Bausher blank Oman club

By Our Sports Reporter

MUSCAT — A dominant Bausher Club carved out yet another victory in the ongoing National Hockey League beating Oman Club 3-0 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher yesterday. It was almost a one-sided match, though Oman Club showed some aggression in the second half which saw no goals being scored. The star of the day was Hussain Abdullah, who scored a brace for Bausher Club.

Hussain opened Bausher's account in the 14th minute and later added to the tally after six minutes.

Four minutes before the half time, Hossam Aiyad found the target to complete the tally. The session after the breather was mostly confined to the midfield, though there were some close calls on both ends. In the next match to be played on Sunday, Seeb Club will take on Quriyat Club.

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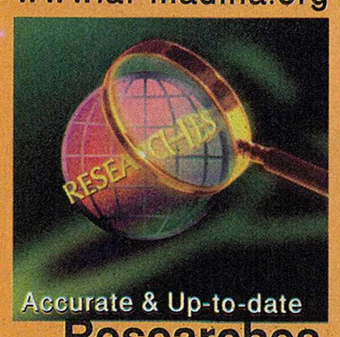

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TIMES BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 23, 2005

New Golf GTI wins 'What Car' award
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New Audi A6 wins Yellow Angel award
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MSM buoyant



MUSCAT — The share prices on Muscat Securities Market continued to move upwards as MSM 30 index advanced by 13.0 points, or 0.36 per cent, to close at 3574.56. The financials sector outperformed the General Index, gaining 24.3 points, or 0.51 per cent, to close at 4759.16. Service sector moved 2.2 points, or 0.13 per cent, up to close at 1687.08. Industrial sector inched up by a narrow 3.0 points, or 0.11 per cent, to close at 2884.92. A total of 44 equities participated in trading — 15 advanced, eight declined and 21 closed unchanged. Volumes recovered and crossed the one-million mark with a total value of RO3.9 million. Top five active stocks accounted for 54 per cent of the 1.3 million shares traded and 71 per cent of the gross value traded. Global Finance Investment topped the gainers list as the scrip advanced by 80 baisa to close at RO1.690 on 38,099 shares traded. Active stock, Oman and Emirates (Oman) recorded trading in 129,475 shares at a total value of RO543,400 as the scrip rallied to its new 52-week high of RO4.220 during mid session and closed 170 baisa higher at RO4.200. National Securities and Al Sharqiya Investment Holding gained 40 baisa each to close at RO1.300 and RO3.210, respectively. Al Sharqiya registered a healthy volume of 132,100 shares at a total value of RO424,300. Heavyweight, BankMuscat registered the highest levels of liquidity as 144,930 shares changed hands on its counter at a total value of RO998,200. The equity alone accounted for a fifth of the gross turnover. Oman Cables Industry posted the biggest drop as the equity declined by 130 baisa to close at RO4.720 on 9,000 shares traded. Oman Investment & Finance shed 50 baisa to close at RO2.010 on thin volumes. United Power slipped 20 baisa to close at RO1.210 on healthy volumes worth RO62,500. Topaz Energy & Marine and Al Khaleej Polypropylene shed 20 baisa each to close at RO1.880 and RO3.280, respectively. Amongst the top five active scrip was Onic Holding. The equity registered trading in 107,404 shares at a total value of RO514,800 as the scrip accumulated 50 baisa to close at RO4.790. AES Barka recorded trading in 168,085 shares at a total value of RO314,200 while its equity closed unchanged at its previous closing price of RO1.870. — ***BankMuscat***

Majan Glass to increase capital to RO3.3 million

By Our Special Correspondent

MUSCAT — Majan Glass is in the process of increasing its capital to RO3.322 million by way of fresh capital injection from the government and conversion of soft loans from the government and loans from two banks into equity. The restructuring process included an initial reduction of capital from RO3 million to RO600,000 to write off the accumulated losses. The restructuring includes conversion of RO1 million soft loan from the government and loans worth RO60,000 from Oman Development Bank and RO162,000 from the National Bank of Oman, into equity. The capital will thus be increased to RO3.322 million.

Around the market

The board of directors of **Oman Fiber Optic** has proposed to distribute a cash dividend of 12 per cent for the year ended December 31, 2004. The company has posted a sales turnover of RO2.9 million and a net profit of RO495,000 for the year.

National Hospitality Institute has reported a net loss of RO32,000 for the year ended December 31, 2004, as against a net profit of RO124,000 made in 2003. Revenues fell 21 per cent to RO513,000. The annual general meeting of shareholders will be held on April 6, 2005.

The board of directors of **Al Anwar Holdings** has proposed a rights issue of 2.5 million shares. United Securities has been appointed the lead-managers to the issue.

No need for output cut now: Opec

KUWAIT CITY — Opec president and Kuwait's Energy Minister Sheikh Ahmad Fahd Al Sabah said yesterday there was no need for the oil cartel to cut output at present, but that the market must be monitored carefully. "Until now, we don't have to cut. Until now, the price is very high and we have to respect this price and cooperate with others for the stability of the market," the minister told reporters in parliament. Oil prices rose this week, supported by fears that Opec could cut production at a meeting in Iran next month. Asked if he supported the idea of a production cut at the meeting in Isfahan on March 16, Sheikh Ahmad said that if prices remain at the current level, the same Opec ceiling will be maintained. — *AFP*

CMA forms insurance advisory panel

By Palazhi Ashok Kumar
Our Special Correspondent

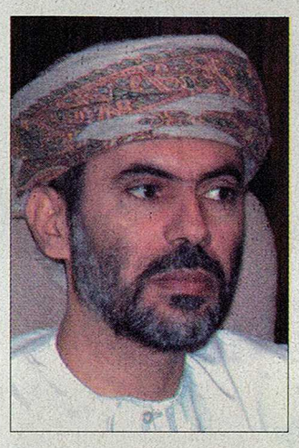
MUSCAT — Oman's stock market and insurance regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the formation of an insurance advisory committee to develop internationally competitive guidelines and standards for the country's insurance sector.

"The seven-member committee comprises two top senior officials from the CMA and five officials from insurance companies. The committee will work on developing insurance standards and to constructively address major issues relating to domestic insurance market," CMA's Executive Vice-President for Regulatory Affairs Abdullah bin Salem Al Salmi told *Times Business* yesterday.

Insurance Regulation Director-General Mohammed Taki Al Jammalani is the chairman of the advisory committee.

"As the insurance regulator, it's our endeavour to improve the effectiveness of supervision. We hope our efforts will help the market operate competitively, professionally and transparently," Al Salmi pointed out.

The domestic insurance market is on the threshold of major reforms, as a comprehensive insurance law is in the offing. A royal decree transferred the insurance department from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to the CMA on August 3, 2004. The proposed law, according to government sources, is aimed at strengthening the supervision and the structure of the local insurance market.



AL SALMI: 'Insurers and intermediaries must strive hard to uphold market integrity'

Al Salmi, who is also the chairman of Muscat Securities Market, said, the key objective of the CMA, as the insurance regulator is to develop an internationally competitive insurance sector, providing the insuring public with better products and services.

As the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS) underlines, the principal task of all insurance supervisory authorities is to establish a means of ensuring high standards of financial soundness and conduct of all insurers under their supervision.

The main objectives of all such measurers are to provide a high degree of security to the policyholders and to maintain the confidence in the industry.

"It's the responsibility of insurers and intermediaries, at all times act honestly, and should strive hard to uphold the market integrity. As we know, insurance firms have an obligation to avoid misleading and deceptive acts or representations," Al Salmi added.

IAIS principles underline that service providers should not seek to exclude or restrict any duty or liability to a customer, which it has under a legislative framework and/or accepted practices. In conducting their business activities, insurers and intermediaries should act with due skill, care and diligence.

The insurance company has a duty to act competently and diligently with regard to all transactions between itself and the customer.

In insurance confidence plays a crucial role. The right principles for the conduct of insurance business can improve insurer, intermediary and consumer relationships and thereby strengthen consumer confidence and protection. The exit of the once market leader, erstwhile Onic (Oman National Insurance Company with a market share of over 50 per cent) in February 2001, had profoundly affected the local insurance market by shaking the very faith and trust of the insuring public.

A set of common principles will provide basic standards of business conduct, wherever business is undertaken. It will also facilitate cross border business, encourage competition and significantly protect the integrity of the market.

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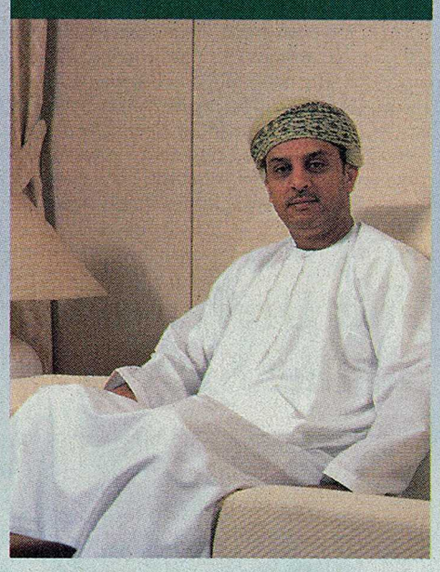
Chairman's report



It's my pleasure on behalf of the Board of Directors to present you with our financial statements for the year 2004, including all the achievements of the Bank during the year. I would also like to extend my greetings to the shareholders on the occasion of our 20th anniversary which we celebrated with our valued customers on 27th December 2004.

The practice of effective risk management is the central principle based on which the Board of Directors have maintained the Bank's position and financial status in the market. The bank has achieved its targets in spite of the challenging scenario faced by the banking sector over the past five years.

The financial statements of the year ended 31st December 2004 show that the Bank has achieved positive results in the major financial indicators. The total assets of the bank increased to RO 412 million from RO 368 million last year - an increase of RO 44 million or 12%. Deposits increased to RO 294 million from RO 281 million last year – an increase of RO 13 million or 5%. Loans increased to RO 258 million from RO 248 million last year – an increase of RO 10 million or 4%.

The profits increased by 22.74% to RO 10.350 million this year from RO 8.432 million last year. To ensure that this trend continues, the bank continued to increase Equity out of the reserves and retained earnings, whereby the Total Shareholders' Funds increased to RO 48.607 million from RO 45.257 million last year after making available the reserves required by the Central Bank of Oman. Our Bank is the only bank in Oman to provide fully for expected loan loss reserves on performing advances in the current year, which is required by the Central Bank of Oman by 2006.

Based on these results, the Board of Directors has decided to announce a dividend of 23.33%.

The detailed financial statements reflect the commitment of the Bank to the Corporate Governance rules and disclosure policy required by CBO and Capital Market Authority. The bank is publishing these statements in spite of the fact that we are a joint stock company.

To continue in our vital role of supporting development projects, the bank has financed and participated in financing of several vital projects underway in the Sultanate. These included the projects in the Sohar area such as the Port, Refinery, Petrochemical, Gas Pipeline and Fertilizer Plant as well as projects carried out in Sur area such as the LNG project, Urea Plant, and Gas Tankers and we are also taking part in financing the Bar Al Jassah Resort.

To face new developments in services, the Bank's Board of Directors, pledge to make available the required resources for developing the systems in order to offer better services to our customers, such as ATMs and cash deposit machines which offer services like payment of utility bills and the depositing of cash. The ATMs will be developed to recharge the SmartCard.

The Bank takes pride in its policy to develop and train human resources to handle senior positions. Omanisation in the bank reached 92%. Omanisation in the senior positions reached 78.86% and the required facilities for training and educational courses in banking have been approved to increase staff qualifications and efficiency.

On this occasion, we would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to our government for their support to the banking sector. We also record our appreciation to the Central Bank of Oman for its efforts in supporting and protecting banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

We also thank our customers for their support and confidence and assure them that we will not spare any efforts to increase our service levels for their convenience.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the executive management and all our employees for their efforts in supporting this organization and their active part in achieving this year's results.

May God the Almighty help us always to continue to serve our beloved country under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.

Rashad Bin Mohammad Al Zubair
Chairman

20th ANNIVERSARY
OMAN ARAB BANK

Striding forward

Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2004
(Approved by the Central Bank of Oman. Subject to approval of Ordinary General Meeting)

Income Statement for the year ended 31 December 2004

	2004 RO' 000	2003 RO' 000
Gross Interest Income	**21,123**	21,008
Interest expense	**(3,646)**	(4,391)
Net interest income	**17,477**	16,617
Interest Reserved	**(1,423)**	(1,390)
Other Operating Income:		
Dividend Income	**388**	298
Net fee and commission income	**3,580**	3,271
Net foreign exchange income	**1,406**	1,102
Net income / (loss) from dealing in securities	**1,664**	1,506
Net income from government securities	**683**	636
Other income	**1,148**	866
Gross Income	**24,923**	22,906
General and Administrative Expenses	**(10,135)**	(10,016)
Depreciation	**(887)**	(892)
Total operating cost	**(11,022)**	(10,908)
Net Operating Profit	**13,901**	11,998
Provision for credit losses	**(5,751)**	(2,536)
Release from provision for credit losses	**3,404**	-
Profit for the year after provisions	**11,554**	9,462
Taxation	**(1,204)**	(1,030)
Profit for the year after taxation	**10,350**	8,432

Balance sheet as at 31 December 2004

ASSETS	2004 RO' 000	2003 RO' 000
Cash	5,534	5,006
Balances with Central Bank of Oman	30,310	6,974
Capital deposit with CBO	392	386
Government and other securities	13,695	12,402
Treasury and other bills eligible for rediscounting	40,900	36,430
Due from:		
Branches	-	-
Principal shareholders	1,775	1,594
Affiliates abroad	-	-
Due from Banks:		
Placements	45,575	45,387
Loans and advances	-	-
Investment	5,347	5,354
Loans and advances (net of provision for doubtful debts and reserved interest)	257,771	247,633
Fixed assets	4,097	3,841
Other assets	7,102	2,892
Total Assets	**412,498**	**367,899**

Notes to the statement of assets and liabilities	2004 RO '000	2003 RO '000
Loans and advances	275,729	263,685
Less Provision for doubtful debts and reserved interest	(17,958)	(16,052)
	257,771	**247,633**

LIABILITIES & SHAREHOLDERS' FUNDS	2004 RO' 000	2003 RO' 000
Deposits (including Government):		
Demand	92,610	103,989
Savings	48,746	48,475
Time	153,098	128,274
Due to:		
Branches	-	-
Principal shareholders	4,368	29,695
Affiliates abroad	-	-
Due to banks:		
Placements	1226	780
Borrowings	-	-
Borrowings from CBO	-	-
Capital	30,000	22,000
Reserves	14,163	16,093
Profit carried forward	4,444	7,164
Other liabilities	63,843	11,429
Total Liabilities	**412,498**	**367,899**
Letters of credit, guarantees and acceptances	**431,938**	**283,515**

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OMAN ARAB BANK بنك عُمان العربي

SOLID. STABLE. COMMITTED.

Accession pact for Salalah methanol project signed

MUSCAT — Oman Oil Company (OOC) and the Abu Dhabi-based Mubadala Development Company have reached agreement to jointly develop a planned methanol project in the Salalah Port Free Zone.

The accession agreement for Mubadala Development Co.'s participation as a shareholder was signed yesterday on behalf of OOC by Ahmed bin Salim Al Wahaibi, its chief executive officer, and Maurizio La Noce, director of energy and utilities of Mubadala Development Company.

Subject to final sanction, the project will entail the development, construction and operation of a 3,000 metric tonnes per day state-of-the-art methanol plant, using natural gas, supplied by Ministry of Oil and Gas through Oman Gas Company, as feedstock.

"We are excited about the opportunity to support the development of such an important project for Salalah and to grow Mubadala's portfolio of energy investments in Oman," said Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak, Mubadala's chief operating officer and Abu Dhabi emirate's executive council member.

Wahaibi said they were pleased about Mubadala's participation in the project and they looked forward to a highly successful development and implementation. He further added: "We are looking forward to further cooperation between Oman Oil and Mubadala in the development of energy projects in Oman and the region".

OOC and Mubadala currently engage in laying down an ambitious development plan to achieve financial close by the middle of next year. Completion of the project is expected in late 2008. Methanol is used as fuel additive and in timber industries.

Oman Oil Company is a commercial company fully owned by the government of the Sultanate of Oman.

The company was created in 1992 to give the government another vehicle for pursuing investment opportunities in the energy sector both inside and outside Oman. Through participation in energy and energy related projects, OOC plays a role in the Sultanate's efforts to diversify the Omani economy and help generate Omani and foreign private sector investments.

In Oman, OOC has interest in numerous projects that are either in operation, under construction or under development. These include gas transmission, petroleum retailing, refining, petrochemicals and aluminium smelting.

Outside Oman, OOC has interests in oil exploration and production, crude oil pipelines and petroleum product logistics. Mubadala is a development and investment company wholly owned by the government of Abu Dhabi.

Its existing investments include a 51 per cent majority stake in Dolphin Energy, the developer of the Dolphin gas project, which involves the creation of the first cross-border gas network in the AGCC through the import of Qatari natural gas for the markets of the UAE and Oman, and interests in nine new exploration blocks in Libya.

It also has a 25 per cent stake in the Dutch fleet management giant Leas Plan Corporation and holds shares in many other companies, including Aldar Properties, National Central Cooling Company (Tabreed) and Abu Dhabi Ship Building. — *ONA*



Two strides to e-government

MUSCAT — Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, minister of commerce and industry, yesterday signed two agreements on implementation of one-stop shop (OSS) and office automation solutions projects with Gulf Business Machines, Oman, (GBM) in conjunction with International Business Machines (IBM).

The first agreement provides for implementation and management of one-stop shop information technology infrastructure and the second one is for the design and implementation of office automation solutions.

The minister said signing the agreements for the two projects, evolved in close coordination with the information technology technical secretariat, came as an advanced step from the ministry to contribute to establishing e-government infrastructure with the aim of facilitating transactions for citizens and investors.

Maqbool said the two IT projects were expected to feature the latest IBM hardware and software components involving implementation and integration with the ministry's front and back office operations.

The project's executing company will transfer skills to the ministry's staff, he said, adding that knowledge transfer would be provided over a four-year training period to ensure that all aspects of the complex project can be managed in-house.

The minister said once OSS IT project implementation is completed, the OSS will serve as an e-gate for transactions and related processes for registers, investment licensing and business practices.

The ministry's on-line facility will include e-filing for 42 applications of different services of the ministry.

Maqbool said the on-line facility will also include the ability for the ministry to submit and receive related approvals electronically from other government ministries and entities that are part of the OSS.

These are the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Manpower, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muscat Municipality and Royal Oman Police.

Maqbool said the regional offices of the ministry would also be connected through Wide Area Network (WAN).

He said e-payments would be made available besides cash payment, adding that the ministry will train Sanad kiosk operators on processing business transactions on-line.

He said the web-enabled services for approval and renewal of commercial registration will be completed in 12 months from the start of project implementation and the ministry will begin providing the full web-enabled on-line service after 18 months from now. He added that in the future, the solution will also offer flawless integration with the Government Nervous System (GNS) by enabling a single scalable entry point for citizens to access other government information and services on-line.

On office automation project, Maqbool said the front and back-end processes of the ministry will be computerised: Applications and file movements will be made digital. He stated that regional offices of the ministry would also be connected through WAN.

The minister concluded his statement by affirming that the web-based on-line facilities and electronic internal file movements by utilising the latest tools of it will provide speedy, transparent and efficient services to the citizen and businesses.

Ahmed bin Suleiman Al May'mani, undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for administrative and financial affairs, said the OSS project awarded to GBM Oman, includes installing, operating and developing the OSS system.

He said associated construction works have already started and about to be completed. They include a hall for the OSS facility and a transactions hall near the ministry premises. — *ONA*



SIGNING CEREMONY: Maqbool bin Ali Sultan signing one of the agreements on one-stop shop and office automation solutions projects yesterday. — ONA

Agreement for revamping Oman Refinery Company

MUSCAT — An agreement on engineering supply and construction works of Al Azmarah project and the upgrading of Oman Oil Refinery was signed between Oman Oil Refinery Company and Oman Contractors Union Company yesterday.

The $86.84 million worth agreement was signed by Nasser bin Khamis Al Jashmi, undersecretary of the Oil and Gas Ministry and chairman of Oman Oil Refinery Company and the regional general manager of the implementing company.

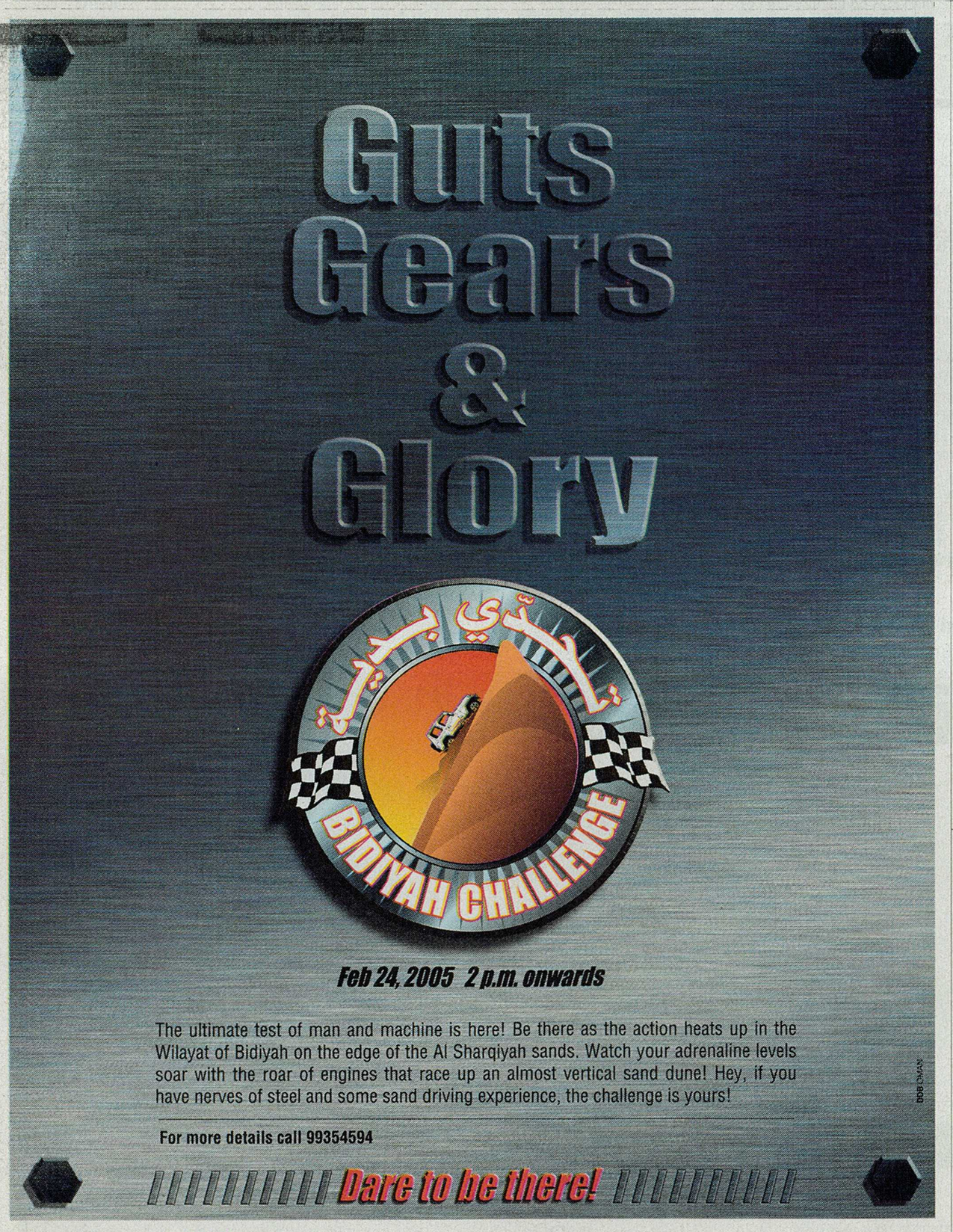
Dr Adel bin Abdul Aziz Al Kindi, executive president of Oman Oil Refinery Company, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the project is meant to improve condensates and convert them into benzene to cover deficiency in benzene production.

He added the project will increase refining capacity at Mina Al Fahal from 85,000 barrels per day to 106,000 barrels. The project will be completed by the end of 2006.

He said the company is proud that the project will be managed by a team from inside the company, saying the signing of this agreement will enhance the refinery work in the future. — *ONA*



ACCORD: Nasser bin Khamis Al Jashmi and Dr Adel bin Abdul Aziz Al Kindi exchanging the agreement. — Photo by Jun Estrada



BUSINESS DIGEST

New Audi A6 wins Yellow Angel award



READERS' CHOICE: Audi A6

IN a special distinction for the Audi A6, the readers of ADAC *Motorwelt* voted the sporty executive saloon with the four-ring emblem their Car of the Year 2005 and awarded it the "Yellow Angel 2005". The *ADAC's* "Yellow Angel" adds to the already lengthy list of awards captured by the A6. Dr Martin Winterkorn, chairman of the board of management of Audi AG, took receipt of the award which has been conferred for the very first time.

The achievement is all the more notable for the fact that the Audi A6 emerged with a clear lead over its 55 German and international competitors from all vehicle categories in this challenging poll. The success of the Audi A6 stemmed from the proverbial "Vorsprung durch Technik", the outstanding comfort, emotionally charged sporty design and superlative quality of this saloon. The A6 was voted top of this poll by the readers of *Motorwelt*, the magazine sent out by the ADAC to its 15 million members.

The A6 and the entire Audi range is available from Wattayah Motors, the sole distributors for Audi in Oman.

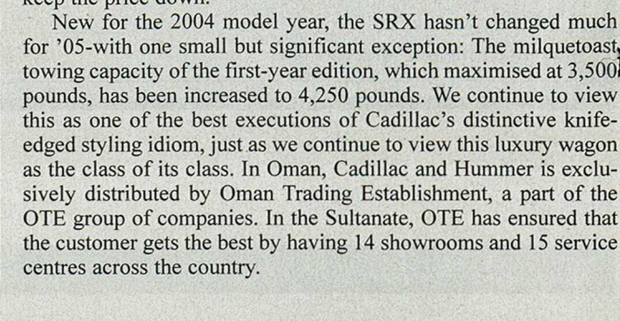
New Golf GTI wins 'What Car' award

BEST HOT HATCH: Golf GTI

THE new Golf GTI is still winning throughout Europe. The important British car magazine *What Car* voted the classic "hot hatch" best car in its class. The jury of the influential motoring magazine gave the new Golf GTI a clear victory as "Best Hot Hatch" despite fierce competition. The jury's report placed particular emphasis on the powerful 2.0-litre engine with 147 kW/200 PS, "What sets the Volkswagen apart from more frenzied rivals is the way it develops strong, usable power right across the rev range. There's little need for a heavy right foot or hectic gear-shifting to unleash the car's potential." The highly prized trophy was presented to Prof. Wilfried Bockelmann, member of the board of management of the Volkswagen brand, at a ceremony at the Grosvenor Hotel in London.

The new Golf GTI has been available in Great Britain since the beginning of 2005. In the last months, it has continued the success story of its predecessor. The new Golf GTI has won a further four British awards since its launch. The sporty Volkswagen has been awarded trophies by *BBC Top Gear*, *Fifth Gear*, *The Sun* and *The Mail*. In tests comparing it with its competitors, it came out clearly in the lead. The new Golf GTI was recently launched in Oman by Wattayah Motors, the sole distributor for Volkswagen in Oman.

'Car and Driver' award for Cadillac SRX



LUXURIOUS: SRX

FOR the second consecutive year, Cadillac SRX has won the prestigious Car and Driver award. There's no shortage of contenders in this category, and the category itself is a little schizophrenic. On one hand, you have body-on-frame truck-based traditionals, such as the Cadillac Escalade, and on the other, new-breed unibody offerings based on passenger-car architecture. Sharing underpinning elements with Cadillac's CTS and STS sedans, the SRX belongs to the latter group, part of an increasingly amorphous assemblage known as "crossovers."

What does this mean? Generally speaking, it means SUV styling and the availability of all-wheel drive, with livelier responses and lower curb weights, traits that apply to the SRX. And in the luxury category, it also means posh appointments and plenty of upscale comfort-and-convenience features, also applicable to the SRX.

The SRX is happy enough on dirt roads, but it's not designed for the roadless wastes. It's a modem luxury wagon with extra ground clearance, three rows of seats. What this yields are responses that are unusually athletic for this class, as well as excellent all-around road manners. The SRX is offered with two engine options, and it will come as no surprise that we prefer the 320 horsepower of the upgrade 4.6-litre Northstar V-8 (0 to 60 in 6.7 seconds). But the standard 3.6-litre V-6 is only a half-second slower and helps keep the price down.

New for the 2004 model year, the SRX hasn't changed much for '05-with one small but significant exception: The milquetoast towing capacity of the first-year edition, which maximised at 3,500 pounds, has been increased to 4,250 pounds. We continue to view this as one of the best executions of Cadillac's distinctive knife-edged styling idiom, just as we continue to view this luxury wagon as the class of its class. In Oman, Cadillac and Hummer is exclusively distributed by Oman Trading Establishment, a part of the OTE group of companies. In the Sultanate, OTE has ensured that the customer gets the best by having 14 showrooms and 15 service centres across the country.

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Muscat Securities Market share price bulletin for Tuesday, February 22

52 wk high	52 wk low	Company Name	Traded Shares	Turnover R.O	Trades	H Price	L Price	Closing Price	Last Closing	DIFF R.O.	DIFF. (%)	Last Bid	Last Offer
Regular Market													
1.7	1.25	GLOBAL FINANCE INVESTMENT CO	38,099	64,435	31	1.7	1.68	1.69	1.61	+0.08	4.97	1.67	1.69
7.1	5.1	BANK MUSCAT	144,930	998,227	52	6.9	6.83	6.89	6.8	+0.09	1.32	6.8	6.87
3.38	2.15	AL SHARQIA INV. HOLDING	132,100	424,332	166	3.28	3.19	3.21	3.17	+0.04	1.26	3.19	3.21
1.98	1.42	AL ANWAR HOLDING	1,000	1,820	1	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.8	+0.02	1.11	1.81	1.83
4.91	3.92	ONIC. HOLDING	107,404	514,876	74	4.84	4.75	4.79	4.74	+0.05	1.05	4.8	4.84
7	5.25	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	26,000	175,530	25	6.78	6.75	6.75	6.7	+0.05	0.75	6.75	6.77
1.9	1.17	OMAN FISHERIES	6,010	8,305	12	1.39	1.37	1.38	1.37	+0.01	0.73	1.37	1.39
2.11	1.42	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	1,500	2,215	3	1.49	1.47	1.48	1.47	+0.01	0.68	1.48	1.49
7.29	5	SHELL OMAN MARKETING	2,543	15,131	6	5.95	5.95	5.95	5.91	+0.04	0.68	5.91	5.95
3.87	2.73	DHOFAR INT. DEV. & INV. HOLDING	14,773	50,609	18	3.43	3.42	3.43	3.42	+0.01	0.29	3.42	3.45
2.5	1.6	DHOFAR CATTLE FEED	23,750	50,525	21	2.13	2.11	2.13	2.13	---	---	2.11	2.13
3.16	2.3	AL JAZEIRA SERVICES	12,597	33,587	17	2.68	2.65	2.67	2.67	---	---	2.63	2.65
11.88	3.1	AL JAZEERA TUBE MILLS	850	9,520	5	11.2	11.2	11.2	11.2	---	---	---	11.2
3.26	2.15	FINANCIAL SERVICES	7,144	19,512	12	2.74	2.73	2.73	2.73	---	---	2.73	2.74
4.65	3.99	OMINVEST	5,450	23,828	6	4.38	4.37	4.37	4.37	---	---	4.38	4.4
2.7	1.92	UNITED FINANCE	4,800	12,956	3	2.7	2.69	2.7	2.7	---	---	2.65	2.7
4.92	3.6	AI MAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING	26,055	121,156	46	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	---	---	4.65	4.7
4.7	3.35	OMAN OIL MARKETING	1,100	5,082	3	4.62	4.62	4.62	4.62	---	---	4.5	4.64
2.75	2.1	NAT. ALUMINIUM PRODUCTS	340	714	1	2.1	2.1	2.25	2.25	---	---	---	2.25
4.1	3	BANK DHOFAR	37,410	134,676	21	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	---	---	3.5	3.59
3.4	1.73	ALLIANCE HOUSING BANK	5	16	1	3.2	3.2	3.23	3.23	---	---	3.21	3.25
3.86	2.15	SALALAH MILLS	473	1,017	1	2.15	2.15	2.21	2.21	---	---	---	2.15
3.9	2.54	OMAN INTERNATIONAL BANK	25,302	88,588	35	3.51	3.5	3.5	3.51	-0.01	-0.28	3.5	3.51
2.91	2.4	AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SER.	1,000	2,500	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.51	-0.01	-0.4	2.4	2.5
2.4	1.77	GULF INVESTMENT SER.	3,500	6,475	3	1.85	1.85	1.85	1.86	-0.01	-0.54	1.83	1.85
3.35	2.22	AL KHALEEJ POLYPROPYLENE	4,700	15,416	8	3.28	3.28	3.28	3.3	-0.02	-0.61	3.25	3.29
2.05	1.36	TOPAZ ENERGY & MARINE	14,270	26,873	18	1.9	1.88	1.88	1.9	-0.02	-1.05	1.87	1.88
1.39	0.78	UNITED POWER	51,470	62,481	44	1.23	1.2	1.21	1.23	-0.02	-1.63	1.21	1.22
3.4	1.5	OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE	690	1,387	2	2.01	2.01	2.01	2.06	-0.05	-2.43	1.95	2.01
		... Totals ...	**695,265**	**2,871,789**	**636**							**Number of Traded Co.**	**29**

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Parallel Market

4.22	0.33	OMAN & EMIRATES INV. (OM)	129,475	543,405	126	4.22	4.05	4.2	4.03	+0.17	4.22	4.2	4.23
1.5	0.67	NATIONAL SECURITIES	747	971	2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.26	+0.04	3.17	1.2	1.38
1.52	0.8	OMAN AVIATION SERVICES	33,257	44409	24	1.34	1.32	1.34	1.33	+0.01	0.75	1.31	1.33
5.25	2.97	RAYSUT CEMENT	4,000	20,100	4	5.05	5	5.03	5	+0.03	0.6	5.05	5.1
3.04	2.37	NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN	17,530	45,573	15	2.6	2.59	2.6	2.6	---	---	2.57	2.6
2.7	1.7	OMAN FIBER OPTIC	117	316	1	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	---	---	---	2.97
2.5	1.24	OMAN CHROMITE 50%	200	310	1	2.05	2.05	2.09	2.09	---	---	2.02	2.09
1.49	1.06	THE FINANCIAL CORPORATION	157	191	2	1.22	1.2	1.24	1.24	---	---	1.22	1.23
1.94	1.76	AES BARKA	168,085	314,204	148	1.88	1.86	1.87	1.87	---	---	1.86	1.87
1.44	1.07	BAUSHER CHEMICALS	108	126	2	1.17	1.14	1.17	1.17	---	---	1.14	---
1.75	1.1	DHOFAR UNIVERSITY	3,000	4,680	3	1.56	1.56	1.56	1.56	---	---	1.5	1.57
1.5	0.9	GULF HOTELS (OMAN)	200	300	1	1.5	1.5	1.36	1.36	---	---	---	---
1.56	0.54	OMAN TEXTILE MILLS HOLDING	3,100	3,780	8	1.22	1.21	1.22	1.22	---	---	1.22	1.23
4.96	3	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	9,000	42,447	9	4.8	4.65	4.72	4.85	-0.13	-2.68	4.66	4.8
		... Totals ...	**368,976**	**1,020,812**	**346**							**Number of Traded Co.**	**14**

Third Market

0.57	0.02	SWEETS OF OMAN	11,000	3,960	6	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.34	+0.02	5.88	0.35	0.38
0.59	0.25	OMAN CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	14,200	5,080	8	0.36	0.35	0.36	0.35	+0.01	2.86	0.35	0.36
0.58	0.2	ABRASIVES MANUFACTURING	1,000	350	1	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35	---	---	0.34	0.35
1.4	0.4	CEMENT & GYPSUM PRO.	277	147	1	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	---	---	0.53	0.65
0.9	0.62	AI AHLIA CONVERTING IND. 50%	11,109	3,019	8	0.78	0.77	0.77	0.78	-0.01	-1.28	0.76	0.77
0.5	0.21	MAJAN GLASS	155,068	47,257	49	0.33	0.28	0.3	0.34	-0.04	-11.76	0.3	0.32
		... Totals ...	**192,654**	**59,813**	**73**							**Number of Traded Co.**	**6**

Shares Total	Traded Volume	Turnover R.O	Trades	No. of Traded Co.
	1,256,895	3,952,414	1,055	49

Mutual Funds

52 wk high	52 wk low	Fund Name	Traded Units	Turnover R.O	Trades	H Price	L Price	Closing Price	Last Closing	DIFF R.O.	DIFF. (%)	Last Bid	Last Offer
1	0.8	ORYX FUND 2004	10,448	9,612	11	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.91	0.01	1.1	0.92	0.93
		... Funds Total ...	**10,448**	**9,612**	**11**							**Number of Traded Funds**	**1**

Market Total	Traded volume	Turnover R.O	Trades	Up	Down	Equal	Total
	1,267,343	3,962,026	1,066	17	10	23	50

Indices

52 wk high	52 wk low	Index Name	Index Points	Pre. Index Points	Diff. (point)	Diff. (%)
4922.98	3923.34	Banks and Investment Index	4759.16	4734.84	24.32	0.51%
1687.89	1426.54	Service and Insurance Index	1687.08	1684.91	2.17	0.13%
2965.27	2172.91	Industry Index	2884.92	2881.89	3.03	0.11%
3587.35	2928.29	MSM 30	3574.56	3561.59	12.97	0.36%

Shipping schedule at Port Sultan Qaboos

ANCHORAGE

Flag	Vessel	Arrived	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Geo	Havdroen	25.01	-	Bunker	SSM
Twn	Yu Feng	15.02	60	Tons Fish	MS
Twn	Shin Shun	20.02	20	Tons Fish + Bunker	MS
Pan	MSC Ilaria	22.02	315	Containers	SHS

CONFIRMED ARRIVALS

Sgp	Tapiola	22.02	270	Vegetable	TBL
Rus	STK-1029	22.02	-	Containers	SSS
Sgp	Tiger Ocean	22.02	91	Containers	MS

FORWARD ARRIVALS

Flag	Vessel	Arrv. date	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Usa	SL Performance	23.02	-	Containers	MSK
Pan	Princes Highway	24.02	601	Vehicles	HB
Pan	MSC Aurora	24.02	-	Containers	SHS
Cyp	Tarpon Clipper	25.02	159	Marine Hoses	HB
Tha	Thor Captain	26.02	-	Containers	KR
Pan	MSC Emilia	26.02	-	Containers	SHS
Kwt	Al Shuwaikh	26.02	-	Live Sheep	ISS
Bhs	Hual Asia	26.02	164	Vehicles	KN
Nis	Dyvi Pampalona	26.02	697	Vehicles	HB
Pan	Mosel Ace	26.02	248	Vehicles	KN
Pan	Sima Karoon	26.02	-	Containers	UFS
Deu	Al Shamiah	27.02	-	Containers	HB

FISHING TRAWLERS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE

Flag	Vessel	Date	Time	Cargo	Agent
Kor	Ocean	23.02		Tons Fish Bunker	MS
Syc	Shuenn Ying 232	23.02		Clearance	TBL
Kor	Ixthus No. 7	26.02		Tons Fish + Bunker	MS

Studies differ on efficacy of development aid

THERE are some important questions raised by those who are concerned with effects of development aid as well as by development aid donors. Among these questions are the following: Does aid promotes development in recipient countries, and what are the conditions required to be fulfilled to realise the benefits of development aid? These questions are the major concern of development studies nowadays. The latter reached inconclusive assessment on the efficacy of aids so far. While some studies found that aids fostered development in aids-recipient countries, other studies reached rather different conclusions.

Recent studies by the World Bank and other independent researchers assessing the effects of development aids on poverty and development reached a conclusion that the effects of aids on development depend on the better policies and institutions of recipient countries. These studies also found that the deployment of aid from major intended sectors to marginalised ones by recipient countries undermine the intent of the donor.

The World Bank studies also recognise that successful development assistance requires a conducive political economy in the recipient country. That is the importance of ownership of reform agenda by recipient country and the required strict commitments to these agenda. Moreover, for a successful development aid, it is necessary that the whole public expenditure programmes (not only a single project) be consistent with development aims.

Investment HORIZONS

These studies also see conditionality for development assistance offered in the past such as promises to do future reforms by recipient countries, as was the case in the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank, were less reliable for reform commitments by the borrowers. While conditionality is essential for policy changes, recipient countries are often reluctant to meet them. As a result, development thinkers as well as donors stop using the unreliable excessive conditionality in recent years. Instead they began to use less, and more target-focussed conditions. Moreover, donor countries also emphasised more directed approach of aid depending on the quality of economic policies adopted by recipient countries, their strong institutions, and the high degree of poverty. That is to say development aid in recent years was shifted away from countries with poor policies and institutions to those with strong ones. Moreover, recent years also witnessed joint coordination among donors in providing development aid and reducing donor fragmentation.

With regard to principles of provision of development assistance, the World Bank had recently announced what was called the Comprehensive Development Framework, (CDF). This framework determines how the bank should do business with recipient countries and other development partners regarding financial assistance. The framework addresses the weaknesses in providing development assistance in the past. The major principles of this framework focussed on results, based on countries-owned strategies, are rooted in social and structural vision, and on fostered partnership in supporting country's-owned strategy.

● *The views expressed in this article are provided by the Omani Centre for Investment Promotion & Export Development (Ociped)*

IPO of new Saudi bank collects $253 million

RIYADH — Subscription to the initial public offering of newly established bank Albilad exceeded SR950 million ($253.3 million) — almost two-thirds of the IPO — in the first day of trading, newspapers reported yesterday.

Total subscription reached SR950 million in Monday morning's session, while it was expected to have exceeded one billion riyals in the following evening session, the *Al-Eqtissadiah* newspaper said.

Thirty million shares priced at SR50 ($13.3) per share — a total of SR1.5 billion ($400 million) — representing 50 per cent of Albilad's capital, are on offer, the *Al-Jazirah* daily said.

A minimum limit of subscription was set at 10 shares per investor, reaching a ceiling of 5,000 shares per subscriber, *Al-Jazirah* added. — *AFP*

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AirAsia hopeful Malaysian govt will pick Subang Airport as new low-cost hub

KUALA LUMPUR — Southeast Asia's biggest low-cost carrier AirAsia said yesterday it remains hopeful the Malaysian government will decide in favour of Subang Airport, the former main airport, for a planned low-cost terminal rather than the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

"It looks tough but we are hopeful," a senior AirAsia official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The government was expected to make a decision on the issue during a regular cabinet meeting on last Wednesday amid increasing speculation it will opt for the newly built KLIA about 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of the capital.

AirAsia began operations at Subang Airport but moved to KLIA in July 2002 in line with the government's plan to make KLIA the main gateway for Malaysia. AirAsia had since been in talks with the government to allow it to return to Subang Airport and turn it into a dedicated hub for low cost carriers. — *AFP*



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BUSINESS

Share prices cut short 5-day losing string, gain 55 points

MUMBAI — Riding high on a major move towards banking reforms, the market yesterday snapped five-session long losing string and rallied smartly to end 55 points up on heavy buying support as also fairly good amount of roll-over in the futures segment.

Bank shares hogged the limelight after the mid-session on announcement of new bank managerial autonomy policy including allowing the banking sector to acquire business and to set up subsidiaries without government's permission, brokers said.

Overcoming initial weakness, the BSE Benchmark 30-share index gradually moved upwards to the intra-day high of 6,603.14 before ending the day at 6,589.41 as against Monday's close of 6,534.68, a net rise of 54.73 points or 0.84 per cent.

The move towards banking reforms once again turned the market strongly optimistic about the forthcoming budget with domestic investors making fairly heavy buying in the cash segment for a smooth roll-over in futures ahead of the expiry of February contract on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), which reported a hefty net investments of Rs2,304.60 crore during last week, were believed to be heavy buyers in bank shares and some key blue chip counters.

Operators reportedly were keen buyers in response to the positive development coupled with sustained FII inflows in the current month.

Heavyweighted counters like SBI, Tata Motors, Bajaj Auto, Infosys Tech, L&T, RIL, Tata Steel, Maruti Udyog, ITC, GACL, REL and HLL recorded handsome gains on fresh buying support.

However, HPCL, Ranbaxy, Hindalco and Hero Honda showed moderate losses.

The Bankex spurted by 59.69 points or 1.60 per cent to 3,792.87 from yesterday's close of 3,733.18.

The broad-based BSE-100 index recovered sharply by 30.04 points to 3550.88 from the previous close of 3520.84.

The volume of business fell sharply to Rs1,698.47 crore from Rs2,114.34 crore last Friday. SBI clocked the highest turnover of Rs145.44 crore followed by RIL (Rs73.31 crore), Tata Steel (Rs70.82 crore), Maruti Udyog (Rs 46.64 crore) and Satyam Computers (Rs40.52 crore).

The BSE-200 index and the Dollex-200 were quoted sharply up at 881.18 and 335.56 at close compared to previous close of 875.62 and 332.68 respectively. The BSE-500 index firmed up by 17.01 points to 2,776.82 from yesterday's close of 2,759.81 and the Dollex-30 ended higher at 1,237.40 from 1224.32. — *PTI*

BOMBAY STOCKS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2005

BSE SENSITIVE INDEX:.....6589.41
BSE NATIONAL INDEX:.....3550.88

BPL ENGG.LTD 9.21
BPL LTD. 36.90
BSEL INFRAST 33.95
BSL LTD. 56.30
CANFIN HOMES ..49.30
CARBORUNDUM ..115.65
CAROL INFO 40.25
CCL PRODUCTS ...214.90
CEAT LIMITED 68.45
CENTURION BN 17.20
CHEMPLAST SA ...40.00
CHETTINAD(PS ...129.55
CHOLA.INV&FI 72.65
CHOWGULE ST 21.90
CINEVISTAAS 38.40
CITY UNION 89.90
CLARIANT (I) 270.25
CLASS.DIAM. 105.05
COLOUR CHEM ...260.60
COMPUTECH IN 10.40
CORE HEALTH. 15.25
COROMA.FERT. ...198.70
COSMO FILMS 63.00
CREATIVE EYE 11.87
CREST ANIM 81.35
CREW BOS 62.25
CRISIL LTD 665.00
DABUR PHARMA ..54.45
DALMIA CEMEN ..344.45
DATAM TECH 124.90
DCM LTD. 39.40
DCM SHR.CON 468.70
DCW LTD. 40.45
DECCAN CHR 136.25
DEEPAK FERT. 54.85
DEWAN H.FIN. 36.15
DHAMPUR SUGA ..142.70
DHANALAK.BNK ..29.35
DHARAMSI CHM ...14.10
DIC INDIA 154.40
DIL LTD 190.50
DISHMAN PHAR ..589.55
DIVI'S LAB. 1074.20
DSP MERRILL 706.45
DWAR SUGAR 165.20
E.I.D.PAR 484.60
EICHER LTD. 178.90
EICHER MOTOR ..342.95
EIMCO ELECON ...180.00
ELDER PHARMA ..176.85
ELEC.CASTING ...347.90
ELGI EQUIP 47.40
ELGI TRAD(PS 39.50
ESAB INDIA 146.85
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EUROTEX IND 43.25
EVEREADY (I) 70.25
EVEREST INDS ...146.70
EXCEL CROP. 184.25
EXCEL INDUST 66.85
FAG BEARINGS ...183.95
FCI OEN CONN ...267.25
FCL TECHNO. 30.50
FIRST LEASIN 35.25
FLEX ENGINER 27.20
FLEX INDUS 48.05
FOSECO INDIA 321.75
FOUR SOFT 43.15
FUTURA POLY. 24.80
G.T.C.IND. 42.80
GAMMON INDIA ..855.60
GARDEN SILK 58.25
GARWARE POLY ...49.75
GENESYS INT. 21.95
GEODESIC INF 120.40
GHCL LTD 39.45
GIC HOUSING 41.50
GLENMARK PHA ..513.25
GMR INDUS LT 73.85
GODAV FE(PS 69.80
GODFREY PH 552.10
GODREJ IND 107.45
GOETZE INDIA ...215.65
GOLDSTONE EN ...22.65
GOODLAS NE 452.70
GOODRICKE 64.95
GOODYEAR (I) 64.00
GRABAL AL(PS 45.00
GRAPHITE IN. 174.05
GREAVES COTT ...115.50
GRUH FINANCE 47.45
GTN TEXTILES 62.60
GUFIC BIO SC 30.50
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GUJ.NRE COKE ...133.75
GUJ.SIDH.CEM 14.03
GUJ.ST.FERT 120.40
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HARR.MALAYAL ...69.75
HAVELL'S IND 274.90
HEG LTD. 118.00
HENKEL SPI 22.50
HERITAGE FOO 74.20
HI-TECH GEAR ...280.05
HIKAL LTD. 425.55
HIMACHAL FUT ...21.85
HIMAT.SEIDE 386.00
HIND.CONSTN. ...415.00
HIND.MOTORS 31.60
HIND.OIL EXP 91.95
HIND.ORG.CHM 24.20
HIND.POWER 68.10
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IND.GLYCOLS 130.65
IND.HUME PIP 315.75
IND.SEAM STL 29.55
INDIA NIPPON 262.40
INDIA POLYFI 8.78
INDIABULLS 112.15
INDIAN SEAML 41.45
INDO NATIONL ...370.00
INDOCO REM 327.40
INDORAMTEX 35.35
INDRA GAS 100.65
INDRAPRAST 35.05
INFOMEDIA 164.00
INFOTECH EN. 222.50
INSILCO LTD. 21.85
IT & T LTD. 17.60
ITC HOTELS 148.50
ITI LTD. 26.70
IVP LTD 45.35
IVRCL INFRAS 355.15
J.K.INDUSTRI 82.10
JAGATJIT IND 42.60
JAGSON PHAR 32.05
JAI CORP LTD 94.30
JAIN IRRIG 125.10
JAIN STUDIOS 31.45
JAYANT AGRO 135.80
JAYBH.MARUTI ...127.00
JAYPEE HO(PS 42.55
JAYSHREE TEA 98.55
JBF IND.LTD 43.00
JCT LTD 10.83
JENSON &NICH 10.32
JINDAL DRILL 136.05
JINDAL POLYS 520.00
JINDAL STRIP 293.15
JK CORPN.LTD 48.70
JK SYNTHETIC 9.46
JL MORISON 163.00
JUBILANT ORG 805.00
JYOTI STRUCT 173.75
KABRA EXTR 59.65
KAKATIYA CEM ...104.15
KALE CONSUL. 85.85
KALPA.POWER 278.55
KALYANI BRAK ...625.25
KALYANI STEL ...133.70
KANORIA CHEM ...105.65
KARNA BK(PS 80.60
KARUR VY(PS 432.95
KDL BIOTECH 22.80
KEC INTER. 148.05
KESORAM IND 120.55
KINETIC MOTO 43.95
KIRL.FERROUS 31.85
KIRL.OIL ENG 405.15
KIT-PLY IND. 9.93
KLG SYSTEL 86.30
KOPRAN LTD. 73.10
KOTHARI PROD ...249.50
KPIT INFOSYS 637.25
KSB PUMPS 216.60
L.G.BALKRISH 30.30
LAKSHMI ELEC ...150.15
LAKSHMI MACH 7593.95
LIBERTY SHOE ...149.55
LML LTD. 45.75
LUMAX IND 128.70
LYKA LABS 63.15
MAARS SOFT. 6.26
MACMILLAN IN ..408.00
MADRAS ALUM ...193.85
MADRAS CEM. ...1031.60
MADRAS FERT. 15.70
MAH.SCOOTER ...174.90
MAHAVIR SPG 279.30
MAHINDRA GE ...127.85
MALWA COTTON ...82.80
MANGALAM CEM ...79.30
MANGLR.CHEM 14.75
MARAL OVERS 43.20
MARICO IND. 250.65
MASCON GLOB. ...26.10
MATRIX LABOR ..182.65
MAX INDIA 393.35
MCDOWELL C 156.90
MELSTAR INFO 15.85
MID-DAY MULT 75.25
MIRZA TANNER ...204.40
MOBILE TELE 10.72
MONNET ISPAT ...210.35
MONSANTO (I) 1763.00
MORARJE REAL ...74.05
MOREPEN LAB. 11.58
MORGAN STANL ...20.99
MOSCHIP SEMI 50.45
MOTHERSON SS ..101.75
MRF LTD. 2685.50
MRO-TEK LTD. 34.10
MSK PROJECTS 45.30
MUKAND ENGG. ...32.55
MUKAND LTD. 69.45
MUKTA ARTS 47.45
MUNAUTO 130.95
MUNJAL SHOWA ..192.65
MURD.CERAM 39.45
MYS CEMENTS 25.20
NAGAR.CONST. ...464.55
NAGARJ.FERT. 15.82
NAHAR EXPORT ...77.40
NAHAR INTER. 15.50
NAHAR SPG. 219.40
NARMADA C.PE 23.25
NAT STL AGRO 25.80
NATCO PHARMA ..138.05
NAVA BH.FERR ...390.90
NAVNEET PUBL ...237.60
NDTV 176.05
NELCO LTD. 44.10
NIIT LTD. 199.45
NIITTECH 136.90
NILKAMAL PLS 70.05
NOCIL 25.05
NOIDA-TOLL B 20.10
NOVA PETRO. 40.30
NOVAPAN IND. 42.00
NRB BEARINGS ...216.45
NRC LTD. 31.60
NUCLE.SOFT E ...193.35
OCL INDIA 445.40
OIL COUNTRY 20.55
OMAX AUTOS. 94.55
ONWARD TECHN ...71.70
OPTO CIRCUIT 176.70
ORIENT INFO. 35.60
RAMA NEWSPRI ...15.71
RAMCO INDS. 693.55
RANA SUGARS 24.70
RANE BRAKE 179.65
RANE ENGINEE ...365.00
RANE MADRAS ...206.85
RAYBAN SUN 53.75
REG.CERAMIC 30.70
REI AGRO LTD 138.15
REL.I.INFRAS 76.95
RELIANCE 539.65
RELIANCE ENR ...558.35
ROLTA (I) 83.80
SATYAM COM 404.55
SHIPP.CORPN 160.35
SIEMENS LTD. ...1584.20
SKF INDIA 185.70
SPICE-SEN-PR 70.00
STATE BANK 680.75
STEEL AUTH. 63.70
STERL.BIOTEC 157.50
STERLITE IND 714.75
STERLITE OPT 75.80
SUN PHARMA. 470.90
SYNDICATE BN 57.50
SYNGENTA (I) 415.00
TAMIL.NEWSPR 65.80
TATA CHEM. 160.95
TATA ELXSI 168.70
TATA INFOTEC 392.45
TATA MOTORS 482.90
TATA POWER 409.65
TATA STEEL 412.75
TATA TEA 541.30
TCS LTD. 1363.00
THERMAX 577.00
TITAN IND. 212.90
TORRENT PHAR ..473.90
TVS MOTOR L 71.90
UNION BANK L 113.05
UNITED PHOSH ...673.90
UTI BANK 230.60
VIDEOCON INT 61.95
VIDESH SANCH ...222.70
VIJAYA BANK 64.45
VISUAL.(I) 123.60
WELSPUN GUJ. 43.00
WIPRO LTD. 683.30
WOCKHARDT 362.65
WYETH LTD. 488.10
ZEE TELE. 150.20

NON-SPECIFIED SCRIPS: GROUP B1

3M INDIA LTD 562.70
AARTI DRUGS 149.05
AARTI INDUST 113.90
ABAN LOYD 1578.15
ADLABS FILMS ...122.50
ADORWELDING 91.60
AFTEK INFOS. 74.30
AGRO DUTCH I 41.80
AGRO TECH FO 77.55
AHMDABAD ELE ..148.75
AHMED.FORG 184.90
AJANTA PHARM 59.35
ALEMBIC LTD. 318.50
ALPS INDS. 98.85
ALSTOM LTD. 80.10
AMBICA AGAR. 27.05
ANDHRA PAPER ...123.10
ANDREW YULE 24.45
APAR INDUS. 122.20
APCOTEX LAT. 46.85
APTECH LTD 40.90
ARCHIES LTD 79.85
ASHAPURA LTD ...347.55
ASHIMA LTD. 27.30
ASIAN ELECTR 83.25
ASIAN HOTELS ...330.00
ASSAM CO.LTD 59.00
ASTRA MICRO 831.00
ASTRAZEN.PH. ..1598.80
ATCOM TECHNO ...10.48
ATLAS CYCLES ...137.20
ATUL LTD. 80.00
AUTO AXLES 328.10
AVAYA GLOBAL ...399.60
AZTEC SOFT 87.05
BAG FILMS 12.18
BAJAJ AUTO F 152.00
BAJAJHIND.LT 158.40
BALMER LA.IN 55.10
BALMER LAWRI ..196.70
BALRAM.CHINI ...632.35
BANK MAHA 33.95
BANK OF PUNJ 38.90
BANK OF RAJ. 70.85
BANNARI AMAN ...535.05
BATA INDIA 74.85
BAYER ABS 129.85
BAYER CROP 259.30
BAYER DIAGNO ...355.45
BERGER PAINT 41.85
BHARSHIP 151.75
BHARTIYA INT 51.95
BHUSHAN ST. 164.10
BINANI IND. 33.25
BIOCON LTD. 452.10
BIRLA ERIC. 28.25
BIRLA GLOBAL 75.85
BLUE DART EX ...335.05
BLUE STAR 265.40
BLUE STAR IN 144.45
BOC (I) LTD. 95.70
BOM.BURMAH 116.85
BRELS INFO. 7.00
BRESCON CORP ...39.40
CALIFORN.SOF 43.95
CATVISION PR 6.50
CENLUB INDUS 25.80
CENTRAL POLY 9.13
CENTRAL RLY 25.40
CENTURY EXT 8.50
CERA SANITAR 30.00
CEREBRA INTE 9.10
CG-VAK SOFTW 6.94
CHAMPDANY I. 62.00
CHANDNI ENGG 7.25
CHANNEL GUID ...10.75
CHESLIND TEX 27.45
CHORDIA FOOD ...16.65
CHROMATIC IN 14.28
CIL SECURITS 8.60
CITI PORT FN 10.14
CLC GLOBAL 27.95
COMPACT DISC 6.32
COMPUAGE INF 7.50
COMPUTER PNT ...15.00
CONSOL.FIBRE 5.81
CORE EMBALL. 6.42
CRANES SOFTW ..531.20
CRAVATEX 72.40
DAIKAFFIL CH 6.58
DAURALA ORG 15.03
DAWN MILLS 949.95
DECCAN BEAR. ...136.30
DECCAN POLYP 8.40
DENISON HYD. ...159.75
DHANDAPANI F 21.20
DHARANI SUG 28.85
DHOOT I.FIN. 5.90
DHP INDIA LT 10.94
DIANA TEA CO 75.25
DIGITAL MULT 7.41
DISA INDIA 277.50
DPIL LTD. 36.20
DS.KULKARNI 26.90
DSQ SOFTWARE ...10.00
DUJODW.PROD. 8.90
EMA INDIA 66.45
ENERGY DEV. 28.90
ERA FIN.(I) 7.07
ESCORT FINAN 13.32
ESSAR OIL 35.90
ESSKAY TELE. 6.03
EXCEL GLASSS 11.47
EXPO GAS CON 7.05
FEDDER.LLYOD 20.35
FIN.EYES(I) 10.26
FLEXO FILM 6.00
FLUIDOMAT 7.10
FORTIS FIN. 20.05
FRESHTROP FR 11.73
G.M.BREWERI 22.75
G.P.ELECTRON 17.25
G.R.CABLES 8.55
GALADA TELE. 9.24
GANGOTRI IRO 16.65
GARNET CONST 12.83
GARWA.MARINE 7.80
GE CAP.TRANS 42.25
GENIUS COMMU 7.72
GESTETNER IN ...182.05
GINNI FIL(PS 24.80
GOPALA POLY. 11.08
GREAVES MORG 89.25
GREENPLY IND 62.35
GSB FINANCE 7.79
GUJ.BOROSIL 14.66
H.K.FINECHEM 26.95
H.S.(I) LTD. 17.50
HANJER FIBRE 8.36
HAR.SHEET GL 12.19
HB STOCKHOL. 10.00
HIGH ENERGY 280.00
HIMADRI CHEM 11.77
HINAFIL (I) 6.24
HIND.COMPOSI 61.70
HIND.EVEREST 25.75
HIND.HARDY 84.70
HIND.SYNTEX 13.50
HINDUSTN BIO 19.55
HYD.INDUS 164.45
I-POWER SOLS 7.26
I.G.PETRO 15.03
IAG CO.LTD. 10.01
IEC SOFT. 7.11
IFB IND.LTD. 13.57
IKAB SEC. 7.93
IKF FINANCE 11.67
INANI MARBLE 14.00
INANI SEC. 7.35
IND.ACRYLICS 16.74
IND.LEAS.DEV 5.99
IND.SECURITY 9.79
IND.STEAM. 16.58
INDIAN EXTR. 6.50
INDO ASN.FIN 13.38
INDO COUNT 16.45
INDO-PACIFIC 18.10
INDUJ ENERT. 7.21
INFOTREK SYS 7.05
INFRA INDUS. 6.85
INNOSOFT TEC 22.17
INTEG.FINANC 6.11
INVEST &PREC ...438.65
IQ INFOTECH 5.94
IT MICROSYS 44.00
J.K.DAIRY &F 6.23
J.K.INVESTO 60.75
JAIMATA GLAS 8.30
JAIPAN INDUS 7.10
JASCH INDUST 7.75
JAY USHIN 53.05
JBMAUTO 81.35
JCT ELECTRON 11.35
JETINFOTRAN 80.90
JK PAPER 51.00
JOINDRE CAPI 8.57
JOLLY BOARDS ...200.00
KAIRA CAN CO ...177.40
KAMANWALA IN ...21.20
KAMAT HOTELS ...49.60
KEYNOTE CORP ...11.49
KHAITAN CHEM 42.40
KHAITAN ELEC 33.40
KILBURN OFFI 8.05
KIRTI FINVES 25.15
KJMC GLOBAL 10.00
KONARK SYN. 20.80
KOTAWALA (I) 7.14
KOVIL.L.MILL 57.85
KRYPTON IND 21.65
KTKBAKLR 60.54
KULK-POWER 42.35
KWALITY DAIR 16.00
LAKSHMI OVER ..172.80
LANCO GLOBAL ...10.90
LINEAR POLY 10.88
LIVINGROOM L 17.70
LKP MER.FIN. 8.71
LLOYD ELECT. 42.65
LOTUS CHOC 7.52
LUMAX AUTO 50.80
M.B.PARIKH 8.00
M.P.GLYCHEM 34.95
M.P.TELELINK 7.08
MADHUS.IND. 8.50
MAGMA LEASIN ...70.80
MAHA.POLYBUT ...12.65
MALABAR BLDG ..60.00
MANALI PETRO 12.74
MANAPPURAM G 14.34
MANGALAM TIM ...16.15
MATHEW EASOW ...7.29
MAWANPP 79.95
MAXWEL 64.55
MCS LTD 10.15
MEDIA MATRIX 29.00
MEDIA VIDEO 23.25
MODERN DAIRI 7.00
MORGAN IND 6.55
MOTOR&GEN.FI ...11.36
MOUNT EVERES ...23.35
MULLER & PHI 65.05
NARMADA GEL 35.40
NATRAJ PROTE 6.10
NAVIN PP 125.10
NDA SECURIT. 7.60
NETLINK SOLU 64.65
NETVIS 44.75
NETVISTA INF 7.96
NETWORTH STK ...29.20
NIRAV COMMER ..575.00
NOUVEAU MUL. 7.45
NPR FINANCE 9.28
NUCENT FIN. 8.04
OASIS SECUR. 11.79
ONIDA SAVAK 6.15
ONTRACK 22.65
ORG INFORMAT ...28.55
ORIENT BEVER 8.71
OUDH SUGAR 143.50
OXFORD INDUS 7.43
PAN PACKAGIN 7.22
PARAGON FIN. 10.19
PARAL 124.90
PARSOLI CORP 15.90
PAS.ACRYLON 9.98
PATEL AIRTEM 21.70
PAUSHAK LTD. 36.10
PEARL ENG.PO 8.13
PEARL GLOBAL 41.55
PEE CEE COSM 37.10
PETRON ENGG. ...104.05
PHOENIX MILL ..4597.00
PHOTOQUIP(I) 9.44
PICCADILY SU 10.56
POLAR INDUS. 9.01
POLYCHEM 46.00
PONNI SUG(ER 35.00
PONNI SUGARS 6.76
PRAJAY ENGS. 12.85
PREM.AU.ELEC 17.68
PRIMA PLASTI 7.71
PRIME SECUR. 18.26
PRINCIPAL CA 80.00
PROMACT PLAS ...13.65
PRUDENTL.PHA 7.47
PUNEET RESIN 7.19
PVD PLAST MO 8.55
RADHE DEVLOP ...21.10
RAGHUNATH IN 6.49
RAISAHEB RCK 40.00
RAJ AGRO MIL 7.66
RAJES FOUND 12.93
RAJESH EXPO. 384.05
RAM INFORMAT ...10.29
RASI ELECTRO 6.00
RASOI LTD. 59.20
RATHI GRAPH. 9.83
RATNABALI CA 40.00
RAVALGAON 4099.75
RDB INDUSTRI 8.31
RECRON SYN 10.92
REMI METALS 6.97
SMIFS CAPITA 23.01
SMZS CHEM. 18.80
SNOWCEM (I) 17.00
SOFTPRO SYS. 42.00
SOFTWARE TEC 18.89
SOMA TEXTILE 32.60
SOUTH ASIA P 10.97
SOUTH.IRON 32.40
SPECIALITY P 21.00
SPECTRA IND. 7.32
SPENTA INT. 9.78
SPENTEX INDS 18.50
SRE.RAY.HI-S 6.51
STEELCO GUJ. 15.06
STELCO STRIP 21.75
STOVAC IND. 121.40
SUPER BAKERS 6.96
SURANA CORPO ...11.35
SURANA INDS 34.00
SUZLON FIBRE 8.25
SWASTI VINYK 48.90
SWIL LTD. 20.84
SWITCH.TECH. 21.00
SYSTAMATIX C 6.73
SYSTEL INFO 25.20
T & I GLOBAL 9.87
T C M LTD. 5.90
TANU HEALTH. 5.88
TCFC FINANCE 14.81
TCI FINANCE 14.68
TCI INDUS. 367.75
TECHNO ELEC 134.95
TECHTRN.POLY 15.00
TEEM LABS. 9.51
TERASOFT(PS 28.95
TIMES GUARAN ...16.20
TRANSCORP IN 23.70
TRITON VALVE ..799.50
TVS FINANCE 11.99
UNI ABEX 41.30
UNITED CRED. 13.50
UNITED TEXT. 6.32
UPSURGE INV. 6.00
USHA INTE(PS 119.50
USHDEV INTNL 40.00
VADILAL ENT 31.00
VAIBHAV GEMS ...86.30
VAPI PAPER 18.88
VBC IND. 10.02
VERTEX SEC. 11.10
VICTORY PAPR 5.76
VINTAGE CARD 15.62
VIPPY SPIN. 9.31
VISISTH TRAD 45.30
VLS FINANCE 11.95
VMF SOFTEC 10.38
VOGUE TEXTIL 7.40
VULCAN ENG. 10.70
W.H.BRADY 34.85
WALCHAND CAP ..395.45
WALL ST.FIN. 5.97
WALLFORT FIN 21.85
WANBURY LTD ...167.85
WELCAST 155.00
WELSPUN SYNT 10.65
WILLARD IND 14.73
WINSOME YARN ...15.00
WISEC GLOBAL 7.12
XO INFOTECH 6.00
XPRO INDI(PS 36.85
YARN SYNDICA 6.35
YASH MANAGE. ...18.07
YOKOGAWA IND ..184.05

SPECIFIED SCRIPS:

A.C.C. 363.70
ABB LTD. 1231.75
ABBOTT (I) 664.55
ADANI EXPORT 75.45
ALFA LAVAL 731.75
ALLAHABAD BK ...69.90
ALOK INDS. 64.25
ALSTOM POWER ..156.05
ANDHRA BANK 87.70
APOLLO HOSP. 304.70
APOLLO TYRES ...275.10
ARVIND MILLS ...123.95
ASAHI IN.GLA 165.00
ASHOK LEYL. 24.90
ASIAN PAINTS 360.45
AUROB.PHARMA ..292.60
AVENTIS PH. 1227.05
BAJAJ AUTO 1048.95
BALAJI TELE. 97.70
BALARPUR IND ...103.65
BASF INDIA 196.80
BH.EARTH MOV ..351.95
BHARAT ELECT ...705.40
BHARAT FORGE 1304.95
BHARAT PET. 424.00
BHARTI TELE 214.70
BHEL 841.15
BHELSL 847.50
BIRLA CORPN. 176.30
BNK OF BA(FI 206.00
BNK OF BAROD 207.20
BNK OF INDIA 86.45
BOM DYEING 229.90
BONGAIGAON R ...86.00
BRITANIA IND 924.65
CADILA HEALT ...519.90
CANARA BANK 209.95
CASTROL 209.05
CENTURY ENKA ..147.30
CENTURY TEXT ...212.90
CESC LTD. 173.75
CHAMBAL FERT 32.45
CHENNAI PET. 210.60
CIPLA LTD. 267.70
CMC LTD. 666.50
COLGATE PALM ...188.00
CONTAIN.CORP ...900.00
CORPN.BANK 353.70
CROMPT.GREAV ..334.20
CUMMINS (I) 125.65
D-LINK INDIA 137.20
DABUR (I) 105.90
DENA BANK 32.95
DR.REDDY'S 723.05
DREDGING COR ..464.85
EIH LTD. 310.00
ENGINRS.(I) 341.35
ESCORTS LTD. 82.50
ESSEL PROP 280.00
EXIDE IND. 146.75
FDC LTD. 51.55
FEDERAL BANK ..158.20
FERT CHE(PS 30.85
FINOL. CABLE 175.15
FINOLEX IND. 69.00
G.E.SHIPPING 166.00
GAIL (I) LTD 238.50
GEOMET SOFSO ..463.70
GILLETTE (I) 634.50
GLAXO LTD 728.35
GLAXOSMITHKL ..343.15
GODREJ CONSU ..277.90
GRASIM IND. 1347.50
GTL LTD. 111.00
GUJ.AMB.CEM 443.65
GUJ.GAS COMP ...806.55
GUJ.IND.POW. 75.55
GUJ.MINERAL 341.30
GUJ.NARMADA 71.45
HCL INFOSYS 852.85
HCL TECHNO 336.00
HDFC 778.20
HDFC BANK 560.70
HERO HONDA 539.75
HEXAWARE TEC ..792.20
HIND.LEVER 145.25
HIND.PETRO 347.85
HINDALCO 1358.00
HINDALCOSL 1370.00
HINDUJA FI 308.35
HINDUS.ZI 169.05
HMT LTD. 47.20
HUGHES SOFT. 520.80
I-FLEX SOLUT 612.00
I.B.P CO. 563.30
ICI INDIA 232.80
ICIBK 388.40
ICICI BANK 374.75
IDBI BANK 68.80
IDBI LTD. 98.10
IGATEGLOBAL 251.30
INDIA CEM. 63.30
INDIAN HOTEL ...602.25
INDIAN OIL 465.20
INDIAN OVER. 67.25
INDIAN RAYON ...434.50
INDO GULF FE 130.70
INDO RAMA 72.10
INDUSIND BNK 55.75
INFOSYS TECH ..2161.85
ING VYSYA BN 197.35
INGERSOLL 247.75
IPCA LAB.LTD 367.50
IPCL 176.05
ISPAT INDS. 26.50
ITC LTD. 1284.45
J & K BANK 370.50
J.B.CHEMICAL 443.15
JAIPRA 186.15
JINDAL SAW 275.45
JINDAL STAIN 103.80
JINDAL STE 1024.80
KOCHI REFINE 182.10
KOTAK MAH.BK ..312.05
LARSEN & TOU ..1067.35
LIC HOUS.FIN 249.60
LUPIN LTD. 557.90
MAH & MAH 542.25
MAH.SEAMLESS ..346.40
MAHA.TELE 135.30
MARUTIUDYOG ..473.40
MASTEK LTD 399.40
MERCK LTD 490.90
MICO LTD. 1961.80
MICRO INKS L 562.00
MIRC ELECT 22.40
MOSER BEAR 234.05
MPHASIS BFL 254.45
MRPL 50.60
NAT.ALUM 174.95
NATIONAL FER 38.50
NESTLE (I) 610.05
NEYVELI LIGN 70.35
NICHOLAS PIR 246.70
NIRMA LTD 340.20
NOVARTIS 545.50
NTPC LTD 92.60
ONGC CORPN 809.75
ORCHID CHEM ...326.60
ORINTAL BANK ...313.70
PFIZER LTD. 658.00
PIDILITE 411.25
POLARIS SOFT 133.80
PROCTER &GAM ..598.65
PUNJAB NATIO 427.95
PUNJAB TRACT ...186.35
RAMCO SYSTM ..463.20
RANBAXY LAB. ..1013.10
RASHTR.CHEM. 38.90
RAYMOND 311.25
REL.CAP. 164.15
RELIANCE 539.65
RELIANCE ENR ...558.35
ROLTA (I) 83.80
SATYAM COM 404.55
SHIPP.CORPN 160.35
SIEMENS LTD. ...1584.20
SKF INDIA 185.70
SPICE-SEN-PR 70.00
STATE BANK 680.75
STEEL AUTH. 63.70
STERL.BIOTEC 157.50
STERLITE IND 714.75
STERLITE OPT 75.80
SUN PHARMA. 470.90
SYNDICATE BN 57.50
SYNGENTA (I) 415.00
TAMIL.NEWSPR 65.80
TATA CHEM. 160.95
TATA ELXSI 168.70
TATA INFOTEC 392.45
TATA MOTORS 482.90
TATA POWER 409.65
TATA STEEL 412.75
TATA TEA 541.30
TCS LTD. 1363.00
THERMAX 577.00
TITAN IND. 212.90
TORRENT PHAR ..473.90
TVS MOTOR L 71.90
UNION BANK L 113.05
UNITED PHOSH ...673.90
UTI BANK 230.60
VIDEOCON INT 61.95
VIDESH SANCH ...222.70
VIJAYA BANK 64.45
VISUAL.(I) 123.60
WELSPUN GUJ. 43.00
WIPRO LTD. 683.30
WOCKHARDT 362.65
WYETH LTD. 488.10
ZEE TELE. 150.20

NON-SPECIFIED SCRIPS: GROUP B2

ABM KNOWLEDG ...8.05
ACKNIT KNIT. 44.00
ACRYCIL LTD. 15.25
AD-MANUM FIN ...15.87
ADARSH DERI. 7.79
ADITYA ISPAT 7.70
ADVANCE TECH ...11.74
AEONIAN PUB ...1700.00
AJANTA SOYA 6.78
ALFA ICA (I) 9.05
ALFRED HERB 65.45
ALLIANZ SEC. 11.90
AMB.CEM.EAST 68.35
AMIT SPIN. 8.00
ANCENT SOFT. 6.22
ANDHRA CEMEN ...25.05
ANDHRA PETRO ...14.18
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Brunei beckons



TRADITION: Bruneians in Oman in religious observance

ALL that we know about Brunei Darussalam is that its Sultan is one of the richest men in the world, that the diminutive Islamic country on the big island of Borneo is rich in oil. Nestled between the South China Sea and North Borneo's rainforest, the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam exudes colour and mystique. Today the country celebrates its 21st National Day. **AFTAB H. KOLA** meets Nor Huda Ahmad, second secretary at the Embassy of Brunei Darussalam in Oman, to get a view of the cultural spectrum of this country of invaluable treasures

THE tourist brochure describes Brunei Darussalam as 'Asia's best kept secrets'. Little wonder then most of us hardly know anything about this hidden gem. Offering a taste of modern monarchy, Brunei is full of colour and mystique. Just 443km north of the equator, Brunei's land area is wedged between the Malaysian Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak.

The country is ruled according to Islamic values and traditions by the present monarch, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, the 29th ascendant of the world's oldest continuously reigning royal line.

References from 1521 described Brunei as a powerful maritime province, the heart of a trading and tributary empire that dominated the South Asian region.

Brunei was recently in the news because of the crown prince's royal wedding bash. The country has a colourful history and its own brand of traditional knowledge in utilising the natural resources.

In spite of its rich and colourful traditions hardly anything is known about the country. Agrees Nor Huda, second secretary at the Embassy of Brunei Darussalam in Oman: "I do admit that Brunei is little known. But we are making inroads in to the tourism sector to attract culturally-inclined people to visit Brunei and see its vibrant culture."

Among the unique heritage is the Kampong Iyer or the water village where a whole city is housed supported on stilts on saltwater. Over 30,000 people still live in wooden houses replete with all modern amenities linked by water taxis to the mainland.

Nor Huda, her first posting as a diplomat, says: "For at least 600 years, Bruneians harvested the bounty of the seas, forging a way of life that is still strongly evident in the lives of the inhabitants of this water village.

"Here, the villager's century-old web of homes, markets, mosques, schools, clinics, police and fire stations hovers on stilts over the shallows of the Brunei River. It is a place where old traditions are so successfully combined with the conveniences of modern life."

Beautiful mosques dot Brunei. One of them, the Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque, is even called the second Taj Mahal; it has gold-plated domes and is made of rich marble.

Even the fence and the gate are made of gold. The Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque in the bustling town of Bander Seri Begawan, the capital city, is one of the national mosques with its soaring minarets and golden dome.

Built with Italian marble, gold mosaic and English stained glass, its craftsmanship reflects classical Islamic architecture. The mosque is named after the sultan's late father, Sultan Sir Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin, who is regarded as the architect of modern Brunei.

Another compelling reason to visit Brunei is its unspoiled rainforest.

Another heritage of Brunei is the weaving of elegant cloths using traditional tools. The designs used in these clothes have survived many centuries. Nor Huda, the young and pleasant diplomat, is eager to share the traditions of her country with the others: "The most famous is the *jong sarat*, a cloth worn on royal occasions and all festivals, including the weddings. *jong sarat* is among the gifts given to the bride by the groom."

Talking of marriages in Bruneian society she narrates: "Marriages in Brunei are ritualistic and an elaborate affair.

There are many components, some of which are necessary while others are followed by some or skipped by others. You have the *berian* ceremony where the bride-groom sends representatives carrying a wedding trousseau to the bride.

This ceremony indicates the official engagement and an occasion to formalise the marriage arrangements. *Akad nikah* is the formal religious ceremony where the marriage gets formalised.

The groom declares his acceptance of the marriage contract in accordance with the Islamic law in the presence of a *kazi* and other witnesses.

The bride and her relatives are also present in a separate room during the ceremony. The ceremony is followed by high tea."

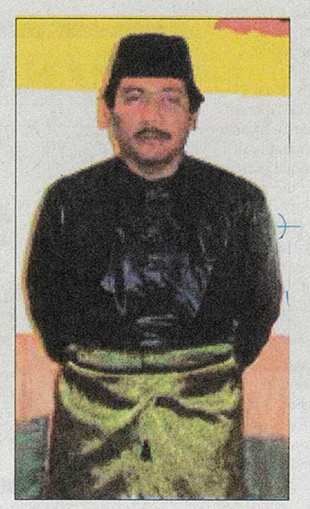
Nor Huda further elaborates: "*Berbedak* is a function held separately in bride's as well as groom's residences. During the occasion, people gather to bless the bride and groom, apply wet perfumed multi-coloured powder on their foreheads and hands.



FESTIVE: Bruneian women savouring food at last year's Brunei National Day celebration



NOR HUDA AHMAD: Representing Brunei in Oman



CULTURAL FACE: Mohammed Husni Bakar

On the occasion of *berinai* which takes place on the night before the actual wedding ceremony takes place, fingers and toes of bride and the groom are sketched with *henna*. And *berambil ambilan* is a ceremony which takes place in the evening of *bersanding* whereby the bride and the groom will again appear seated together on a decorated dais called *pelaminan*.

The occasion is attended by relatives. The wedding is an occasion for the relatives and friends to get together and have fun."

Nor Huda after her schooling in Brunei graduated in Islamic theology from the renowned seat of Islamic learning, Al Azhar University in Egypt. In Oman for the last 19 months Nor Huda is excited to be in Oman. She gushes: "The people of Oman are very friendly. I have visited some of the places and am keen to visit other places including Salalah. Muscat Festival provided us an opportunity to know the local culture and heritage."

When asked how do women in Brunei contribute to the society, Nor Huda says: "In Brunei, no discrimination is meted out on gender terms, women in fairly good numbers are participating in nation building. Their presence is seen in quite good numbers in the government sector. They are slowly penetrating into the private sector as well."

She, like every diplomat, wants people to visit her fascinating country. She says: "Brunei is an interesting country, people are very friendly. Our unique culture is any sociologists' delight. I take this opportunity to invite tourists to our country to explore our dignified culture."

Nor Huda, because of her educational background, knows Arabic. She has taken classes here to learn the Omani dialect. About the local cuisine, she says: Omani food is an interesting mix of flavours. I enjoy eating them. Once I tasted *shuwa* and it tasted heavenly."

Speaking to a Bruneian Mohammed Husni Bakar, a legal adviser to the PDO, about his country's culture and tradition, he avers: "Among the unique tradition of Brunei is the conferment of title by His Majesty to people of certain class.

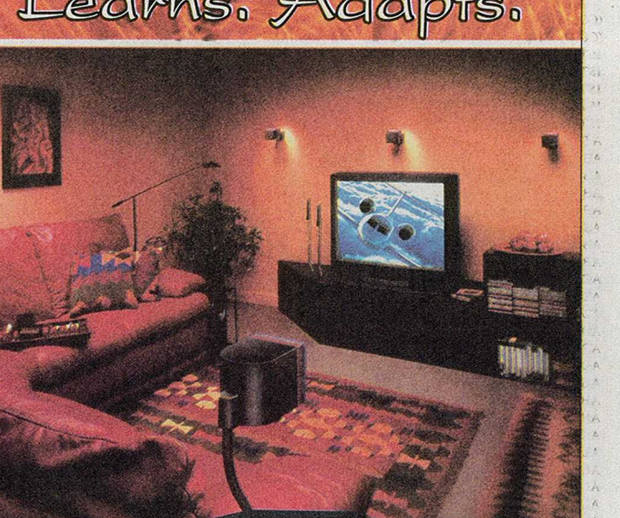
"After the title is conferred, it is necessary to address the person with the title. It is a form of respect accorded to people and we are proud of this unique element."

Another unique thing about our culture is that we have public holidays for many important Islamic events in history. For instance, we observe the day on which the first revelation of the Holy Quran was revealed." Bakar is proud to state that Brunei is still untouched by superficial changes. He says: "Brunei has been able to retain the natural beauty so far and everything is eco-friendly here."

He advises people to visit Brunei in July when His Majesty's birthday is celebrated with much fanfare and pageantry."

Bakar is also impressed about Oman which he describes as a 'people-friendly country.'

There are a little more than 75 Bruneians in Oman, mostly working in the PDO. Today the Bruneians in Oman will be meeting at the Grand Hyatt Muscat for celebrating their country's 21st anniversary.



GRANDEUR: The Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque

INFORMATION

Aces on bridge

Phillip Alder

Try to give them only losing options

THERE have been many comments about losers and losing. Here is another one, from Paul Newman: "Show me a good loser and I will show you a loser."

However, at the bridge table, that isn't always correct. Losing a trick at the right moment can turn defeat into victory — as in this deal. You reach four spades. West leads the heart king. What would be your plan?

South's rebid looks natural, but I have a sneaking admiration for three no-trump. If North can take one trick before the opponents have captured five, the contract will roll home.

There seem to be 10 tricks via six spades, one heart, one diamond and two clubs. So, the original South won the first trick with dummy's heart ace and played a diamond to his queen. Unfortunately, West won with the ace, cashed the heart queen, and exited with a trump. Since declarer couldn't reach the dummy, he had to lose two hearts, one diamond and one club.

Now let's go back to trick one. Suppose South concedes that trick. What can West do next?

If he shifts to a trump, declarer takes three rounds, then leads the diamond queen. The heart ace is still on the board to give access to the diamond king. Alternatively, if West plays another heart to dummy's ace, South crosses to hand with a club and ruffs his last heart on the board.

Rumour has it that Newman — probably unwittingly — was paraphrasing football coach Knute Rockne, who said in the 1920s: "Show me a good and gracious loser and I'll show you a failure."

North
♠ 5
♥ A 4
♦ K 7 5 3 2
♣ 8 6 5 3 2

West
♠ 7 6 2
♥ K Q 9 2
♦ A 9 4
♣ 10 9 7

East
♠ 8 4 3
♥ J 7 6 3
♦ J 10 8 6
♣ Q J

South
♠ A K Q J 10 9
♥ 10 8 5
♦ Q
♣ A K 4

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: Both

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♥ K

MOVIES IN TOWN

Al Shatti Plaza

For More Information: 24692656 (after 2pm)

PLAZA - 1

Film Information: Call 24692656
New Police Story (Action/Comedy) 5:30pm
Cast: Jackie Chan; Censor Permit No: 39

PLAZA - 2

The Aviator (Drama) 3:30pm
Cast: Leonardo Di Caprio and Cate Blanchett
Censor Permit No: 43
Ghabee Menno Feeh (Arabic) 6:15pm
Cast: Hani Ramzy and Hassan Hosny
Censor Permit No: 46
Flight of the Phoenix (Action/Adv.) 8:00, 10:00 & 11:45pm
Cast: Dennis Quaid and Bob Brown
Censor Permit No: 37

PLAZA - 3

In The Cut (Thriller) 3:30, 5:30 & 10:30pm
Cast: Meg Ryan and Kevin Bacon
Censor Permit No: 52
The Aviator (Drama) 7:30pm
Cast: Leonardo Di Caprio and Alec Baldwin
Censor Permit No: 43

AL NASR CINEMA

Film Information - 24831358
For More Information - 24831809
Fax No: 24835751

AL NASR 1

Jurm (Hindi) 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Bobby Deol, Lara Dutta and Gul Panag
Censor Permit No: 53

AL NASR 2

Padmashree Laloo Prasad Yadav (Hindi) 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Suneil Shetty, Masumeh and Kim Sharma
Censor Permit No: 45

AL NASR 3

Kal Ho Naa Ho (Hindi) 3:15, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta
Censor Permit No: 278

FILM CITY

Today's Release
Viswa Thulasi (Tamil) VHS (Mammootty)
Naach (Hindi) VHS/VCD/DVD
Vaastu Sastra (Hindi) VHS/VCD/DVD
Adhu (Tamil) VHS (Abbas, Sneha)
Forthcoming
Saphalam (Mal.) VHS (Uma Shankari)
Pulivalkalyanam (Mal.) VHS (Jayasoorya)
Chakaram (Mal.) VHS (Prithviraj)
Sathrabathi (Tamil) VHS (Sarath Kumar)
Neranju Manasu (Tamil) VHS (Vijaykanth)

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Al-Bahja Cinema

Cinema 1
Open Water (Eng.) 6:00 & 10:30pm
Cast: Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis
Censor Permit No: 51
In The Cut (Eng.) 2:00 & 11:55pm
Cast: Meg Ryan and Mark Ruffalo
Censor Permit No: 52
New Police Story (Eng.) 4:00pm
Cast: Jackie Chan, Nicholas Tse and Charlie Young
Censor Permit No: 39
The Aviator (Eng.) 7:30pm
Cast: Leonardo Di Caprio and Cate Blanchett
Censor Permit No: 43
Cinema 2
Jurm (Hindi) 3:30, 6:30 & 9:15pm
Cast: Bobby Deol, Lara Dutta and Gul Panag
Censor Permit No: 53
Open Water (Eng.) 2:00 & 11:55pm
Cast: Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis
Censor Permit No: 51

Film Information - 24540856
Advance Booking - 24540855
Website: www.albahjacinema.com

RUWI CINEMA

Ruwi Cinema 1
Open Water (Eng.)
2:00, 4:15, 6:30, 8:15 & 10:15pm
Cast: Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis
Censor Permit No: 51
Ruwi Cinema 2
In The Cut (Eng.)
2:00, 6:30, 8:15 & 10:15pm
Cast: Meg Ryan and Mark Ruffalo
Censor Permit No: 52
Ruwi Cinema 3
Jurm (Hindi)
3:00, 6:00 & 9:00pm
Cast: Bobby Deol, Lara Dutta and Gul Panag
Censor Permit No: 53
Ruwi Cinema 4
New Police Story (Eng.)
4:00 & 10:15pm
Cast: Jackie Chan, Nicholas Tse and Charlie Young
Censor Permit No: 39
The Aviator (Eng.)
3:45 & 7:30pm
Cast: Leonardo Di Caprio and Cate Blanchett
Censor Permit No: 43
Lemony Snickets (Eng.)
2:00 & 6:00pm
Cast: Jim Carrey and Meryl Streep
Censor Permit No: 40

Visit us at: www.ruwicinema.com
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FILM INFORMATION TEL: 24780380
FOR ADVANCE BOOKING TEL: 24701564

STAR MAIN CINEMA

Film Information: 24791641, 24600100
For more information please call 24792360

Star Main
Film Information: Call 24792360
(Mal.)
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Star Mini 1
Rasikan (Mal.)
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Dileep, Haripriya and Jagathy
Censor Permit No: 275
Star Mini 2
Galli (Tamil)
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Vijay and Treesa
Censor Permit No: 48
Star Mini 3
Onnaman (Mal.)
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Mohanlal, Kavya Madhavan and Ramya Krishnan
Censor Permit No: 112
Star Mini 4
Ivar (Mal.)
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
Cast: Jayaram, Biju Menon and Bhavana
Censor Permit No: 296

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Dhofar Region
Night Duty
Al Mishaal, Al Salam Road,
Salalah. Tel. 23295035

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by Bron Smith

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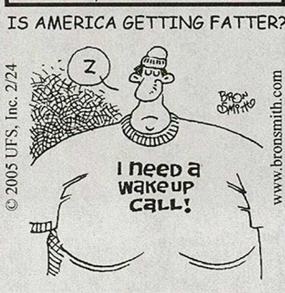


BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS. THE NUMBER OF OBESE U.S. ADULTS MORE THAN DOUBLED BETWEEN 1980 AND 2000.

Health Capsules is not intended to be of a diagnostic nature.

AIRLINE Schedule

WEDNESDAY FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA
GF460	ABU DHABI	0015
GF068	ABU DHABI	0025
GF132	ABU DHABI	0200
GF278	BAHRAIN	0250
AI947	COCHIN-ABU DHABI	0640
GF012	LONDON HEATHROW	0755
GF1734	ABU DHABI	0825
WY806	BOMBAY	0845
EK862	DUBAI	0915
GF059	BOMBAY	0915
WY856	MADRAS	0925
WY816	TRIVANDRUM	0930
WY828	COCHIN	0930
WY608	DUBAI	0930
GF069	MADRAS	0950
G9001	SHARJAH	1020
GF133	DELHI	1035
GF464	ABU DHABI	1230
AI975	CALICUT-ABU DHABI	1310
WY626	KHASAB	1320
GF279	CALCUTTA	1320
GF1438	ABU DHABI	1330
GF735	KARACHI	1335
WY506	SALALAH	1450
GF1011	BOMBAY	1510
MS930	CAIRO	1520
WY618	DUBAI	1650
WY808	BOMBAY	1730
GF478	RIYADH	1825
WY646	KUWAIT-DUBAI	1830
WY616	DUBAI	1830
WY516	SALALAH	1935
WY620	DUBAI	2020
IC977	HYDERABAD-BANGALORE	2025
GF465	BOMBAY	2040
E4434	LAHORE	2100
GF439	LAHORE	2150
AI841	BOMBAY-ABU DHABI	2150
BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2210
IC925	MADRAS-CALICUT	2220
QR168	DOHA	2230
PK229	LAHORE	2255
GF016	FRANKFURT-BAHRAIN	2305
GF472	JEDDAH	2305
GF018	PARIS-ABU DHABI	2315
WY706	ZANZIBAR-DAR-ES-SALAM	2315
LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2325
WY638	ABU DHABI	2330
WY518	SALALAH	2330
WY658	BAHRAIN-DOHA	2330
WY626	DUBAI	2340
EK864	DUBAI	2345

WEDNESDAY FLT NO	DEPARTURES TO	ETD
E4745	ABU DHABI-KARACHI	0001
IC974	COCHIN-MADRAS	0005
BA072	ABU DHABI-LONDON HEATHROW	0015
GF017	BAHRAIN-FRANKFURT	0020
LX243	DUBAI-ZURICH	0040
EK865	DUBAI	0045
WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0045
WY855	MADRAS	0055
LH635	DUBAI-FRANKFURT	0100
GF460	TRIVANDRUM	0110
WY827	COCHIN	0115
GF068	MADRAS	0120
WY805	BOMBAY	0130
GF284	BANGKOK-KUALA LUMPUR	0140
GF058	BOMBAY	0210
GF132	DELHI	0305
GF278	CALCUTTA	0340
WY607	DUBAI	0700
AI946	COCHIN	0745
GF1012	BOMBAY	0900
GF734	KARACHI	0915
WY645	DUBAI-KUWAIT	1030
WY525	KHASAB	1030
WY615	DUBAI	1040
GF069	ABU DHABI	1045
WY705	ZANZIBAR-DAR-ES-SALAM	1045
GF971	BAHRAIN-AMMAN	1045
EK863	DUBAI	1100
WY505	SALALAH	1100
G9002	SHARJAH	1105
WY807	BOMBAY	1130
GF133	ABU DHABI	1140
GF464	BOMBAY	1325
GF279	BAHRAIN	1400
WY617	DUBAI	1400
AI974	CALICUT	1410
GF915	ABU DHABI-BEIRUT	1425
GF438	LAHORE	1455
WY515	SALALAH	1545
MS931	CAIRO	1620
GF011	LONDON HEATHROW	1630
WY619	DUBAI	1730
WY657	BAHRAIN-DOHA	1820
WY517	SALALAH	1930
WY637	ABU DHABI	2040
GF456	DHAKA	2040
WY625	DUBAI	2045
GF465	ABU DHABI	2135
E4435	LAHORE	2200
IC978	BANGALORE-HYDERABAD	2200
AI840	BOMBAY	2250
GF1439	ABU DHABI	2305
QR169	DOHA	2315
PK230	LAHORE	2355

THURSDAY FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA
GF068	BAHRAIN	0025
PK225	KARACHI	0040
BG021	DHAKA-CHITTAGONG	0040
GF904	ABU DHABI	0050
GF076	CAIRO-ABU DHABI	0055
KU677	KUWAIT-DUBAI	0220
RJ600	AMMAN-ABU DHABI	0330
AI949	COCHIN	0430
GF457	DHAKA	0700
GF012	LONDON HEATHROW	0755
GF1734	ABU DHABI	0825
WY806	BOMBAY	0845
GF059	BOMBAY	0915
EK862	DUBAI	0915
WY856	MADRAS	0925
WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0930
WY608	DUBAI	0930
WY828	COCHIN	0930
QR166	DOHA	0945
GF069	MADRAS	0950
G9001	SHARJAH	1020
GF133	DELHI	1035
GF461	TRIVANDRUM	1040
WD603	LONDON GATWICK-DUBAI	1100
GF464	ABU DHABI	1230
AI843	DELHI	1230
GF735	KARACHI	1335
WY506	SALALAH	1450
GF1011	BOMBAY	1510
SV530	JEDDAH-DUBAI	1540
QR168	DOHA	1545
WY618	DUBAI	1650
WY808	BOMBAY	1730
AI847	BOMBAY	1810
WY646	KUWAIT-DUBAI	1830
Y97186	KISH-DUBAI	1845
WY516	SALALAH	1935
WY620	DUBAI	2020
GF465	BOMBAY	2040
IC885	DELHI-AHMEDABAD	2100
MP093	AMSTERDAM-SHARJAH	2100
UL209	COLOMBO-ABU DHABI	2155
BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2210
IC973	MADRAS-COCHIN	2220
WY686	BEIRUT-DUBAI	2245
TG507	BANGKOK-KARACHI	2255
GF016	FRANKFURT-BAHRAIN	2305
LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2325
LH634	FRANKFURT-DUBAI	2330
WY658	BAHRAIN-DOHA	2330
WY638	ABU DHABI	2330
WY518	SALALAH	2330
WY626	DUBAI	2340
GF1438	ABU DHABI	2345
EK864	DUBAI	2345
GF552	ABU DHABI	2355

THURSDAY FLT NO	DEPARTURES TO	ETD
BA072	ABU DHABI-LONDON HEATHROW	0015
GF017	BAHRAIN-FRANKFURT	0020
GF019	ABU DHABI-PARIS	0030
LX243	DUBAI-ZURICH	0040
WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0045
EK865	DUBAI	0045
WY855	MADRAS	0055
WY827	COCHIN	0115
GF068	MADRAS	0120
WY805	BOMBAY	0130
PK226	KARACHI	0140
BG022	CHITTAGONG-DHAKA	0150
GF058	BOMBAY	0210
GF460	TRIVANDRUM	0210
IC926	CALICUT-MADRAS	0235
GF132	DELHI	0305
AI948	ABU DHABI-COCHIN	0530
KU678	DUBAI-KUWAIT	0600
RJ601	ABU DHABI-AMMAN	0645
WY607	DUBAI	0700
GF1012	BOMBAY	0900
GF734	KARACHI	0915
GF911	BAHRAIN-BEIRUT	1015
WY645	DUBAI-KUWAIT	1030
QR167	DOHA	1030
GF069	BAHRAIN	1045
WY505	SALALAH	1100
EK863	DUBAI	1100
G9002	SHARJAH	1105
WY685	DUBAI-BEIRUT	1110
WY807	BOMBAY	1130
GF461	ABU DHABI	1140
GF075	ABU DHABI-CAIRO	1220
GF464	BOMBAY	1325
AI842	ABU DHABI-DELHI	1330
GF477	RIYADH	1340
WY617	DUBAI	1400
WD613	BOMBAY	1400
GF973	ABU DHABI-AMMAN	1425
WY515	SALALAH	1545
GF011	LONDON HEATHROW	1630
SV531	DUBAI-JEDDAH	1640
WY619	DUBAI	1730
WY657	BAHRAIN-DOHA	1820
AI846	ABU DHABI-BOMBAY	1910
Y97187	DUBAI-KISH	1915
WY517	SALALAH	1930
QR169	DOHA	1930
WY637	ABU DHABI	2040
WY625	DUBAI	2045
GF465	ABU DHABI	2135
IC886	AHMEDABAD-DELHI	2200
MP094	HONG KONG	2230
UL209	COLOMBO	2255
TG508	KARACHI-BANGKOK	2359

Schedule supplied by Oman Air • For Flight Information Call 24519223

Museum

Natural History Museum,
Al Khuwair, Tel: 24604957
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Oman Museum, Information City, Qurum, Tel: 24600946
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 2pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Children's Science Museum, Shatti Al Qurum, Qurum, Tel: 24605368
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Armed Forces Museum, Bait Al Falaj, Tel: 312655
Opening timings: Saturday to Thursday: 8am to 1pm
Oman-French Museum, Near Muscat Police Station, Tel: 24736613
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Bait Al Zubair, Muscat, Tel: 24736688
bazubair@omantel.net.om
Opening timings: Saturday to Thursday: 9:30 to 1pm & 4pm to 7pm
National Museum, Ruwi, Tel: 701289
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Sohar Fort Museum, Tel: 844758
Opening timings: Saturday to Wednesday: 8 to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm

STELLA WILDER YOUR BIRTHDAY

Woodlands
For the Pleasure of Family Dining
Tel. No. 24700192

BORN today, you are noted for your adventurous, free-spirited living and eager acceptance of all manner of challenges. You are original in thought and deed, and although you never completely divorce yourself from the motives and methods of the past, you nevertheless pursue your own interests with unique and undying style and energy. You enjoy seeking out new opportunities, and you will eagerly forge a path all your own. You enjoy the company of others but often prefer striking out on your own — particularly if you feel there may be unknown dangers lying in wait for you. You are not the kind to risk the safety of others for your own profit or amusement.

You are likely to experience more than one major change in your life that will shape all you do — from career and finance to love, friendship and religion. And when you change, you really change. Indeed, there are times when you may seem unfamiliar even to those who know you best.

Also born on this date are: Peter Fonda, actor; Naruhito, crown prince of Japan; George Friedrich Handel, composer; Sylvia Chase, newscaster.

To see what is in store for you today, find your birthday and read the corresponding paragraph. Let your birthday star be your daily guide.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2005

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Not every look and every style is for you. Be sure that you make the impression that can best serve you in all situations.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — You'll find great pleasure in the little things. Keep it simple, and don't get caught up in the complexities that surround you.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — You may be feeling like getting away from it all before your week has really begun. There are certain things you can do for yourself right now.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) — You may have to be more responsible than those around you if you expect everyone to stay on track and get things done on schedule.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) — It's time for everyone to pitch in and work with greater dedication toward a common goal. You may have to gather the troops yourself.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — It may be time to turn over a new leaf; appearance, style and overall motives may have to change slightly to suit some new circumstances.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Take care you don't allow yourself to be rushed in any way. Care and dedication demand that you give every aspect of a project its due.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — Don't refuse a friend the help he or she needs, but don't make the mistake of dropping what you're doing prematurely.

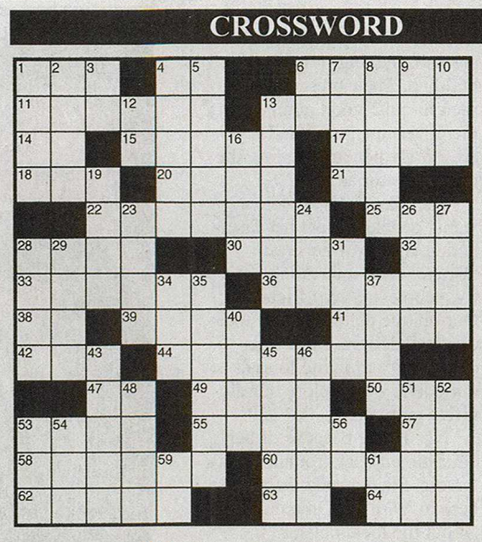
SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — It's time for you to get a little pickier about details. A major project is nearing completion, and you can't afford to miss anything.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — An early start does not necessarily mean an early finish — but at least you'll be able to get more done throughout the day.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — You may find yourself enjoying what seems at first to be unpleasant. To each his own — and if it's unusual it's for you.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — You've been far too suspicious of those who honestly have nothing to hide. Perhaps it's you with something to keep under wraps.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Exasperate
4 Hwy.
6 Rustic residence
11 Pearl source
13 Gasoline rating
14 Morgan — Fay
15 Defleece a sheep
17 Youngster
18 Helpful PC key
20 Self-confidence
21 "Hey!"
22 Type of sale
25 Roswell crasher
28 Bad — day
30 Wordy Webster
32 Teaser
33 Took a stroll
36 Shade of meaning
38 Gridiron pos.
39 Wild guess
41 Sundae topping
42 Chow mein additive
44 Bring charges
47 Mos. and mos.
49 Thoughtful
50 Do christies
53 Teasdale of poetry
55 Flood barrier
57 Not out
58 Careless
60 Archipelago dots
62 Liking
63 West Point grad
64 Hear clearly

DOWN
1 Mouse cousin
2 Stares at
3 Petite sz.
4 Alter a skirt
5 Sleep phenomenon
6 Pharmacist's meas.
7 Courtroom fig.
8 Sluggish water
9 Ready the press
10 Born
12 Mark Twain hero inits.
13 Salem's state
16 Cold — — icicle
19 Nursery item
23 WWW addresses
24 — de cologne
26 Not fiction
27 Some poems
28 Injure
29 Sums for CPAs
31 Dangle
34 Letter after zeta
35 In a sinister manner
37 Female monastics
40 Crusty cheese
43 Pita treats
45 Smithy's block
46 I.e. words
48 Entranced
51 Franklin's flier
52 Technical sch.
53 Sonic-boom maker
54 — — carte
56 Metro RR
59 HS class
61 Such as

Answer to previous puzzle

N	A	T		N	O	V	A		H	O	N	K
A	M	Y		E	D	E	N		E	P	E	E
R	A	P	S	H	E	E	T		L	E	V	Y
C	H	O	I	R		S	E	A	L			
			R	U	B			R	O	P	E	D
N	I	C	E		Y	O	R	K		R	A	E
E	T	O	N		T	A	O		P	E	R	U
W	E	D		M	E	R	V		L	Y	N	X
T	R	E	A	T			E	M	U			
			U	S	E	D		E	M	I	L	E
S	O	A	R		B	A	T	T	E	R	E	D
S	A	G	A		B	L	U	E		I	N	D
T	K	O	S		S	E	N	D		S	O	Y

THE BORN LOSER

By Art and Chip Sansom

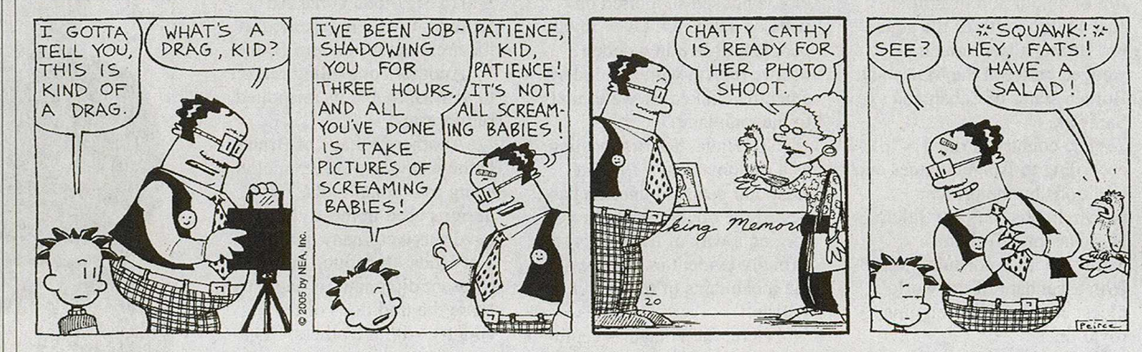


DILBERT

By Scott Adams



BIG NATE

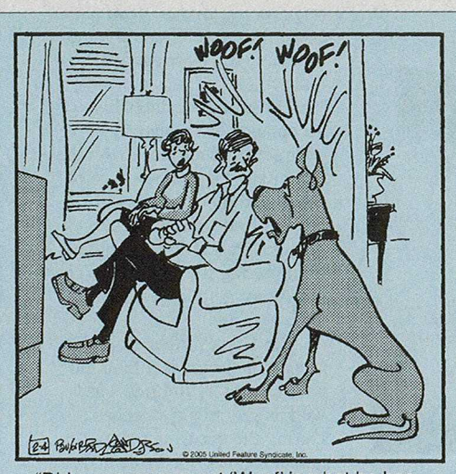


TARZAN



MARMADUKE

by Brad Anderson



"Did you ever suspect 'Woof' is what he has named us?"

KidSpot™

SOLVE THE REBUS BY WRITING IN THE NAMES OF THE PICTURE CLUES AND ADDING OR SUBTRACTING THE LETTERS.

Most insects die at the end of summer, but they leave many eggs that hatch in the Spring. Some insects spend the winter wrapped in cocoons. Honeybees huddle in their hives and eat the honey they collected during the summer. Ants come out of their nests on sunny winter days. Some butterflies flies south to warmer places in the winter, just as birds do. What are baby butterflies called?

A) Nymphs
B) Caterpillars
C) Maggots
(Solve the rebus so check your answer.)



ANS: B. (BEE + Y - EYE.)
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A letter from beyond the grave

Stranger Than Fiction



By John Macklin

NO one survived the crash. So how did a grieving mother come to know all the horrific details?

MARIE Beullac waved cheerfully from her first floor flat as her two young sons climbed into the back seat of their uncle's battered black Citroen and were soon lost amid Paris's rush-hour traffic.

A weekend at her brother's farm near Versailles would do ten-year-old Christian and 12-year-old Jean-Philippe the world of good, she knew.

Nevertheless, as she saw them off on a sunny morning in 1920, Marie Beullac was overcome by an irrational wave of foreboding. Later, she was to recall: "I just knew instinctively that something terrible was about to happen, but I had no idea what. I just knew Christian and Jean-Philippe would be involved.

"Even as they got into the car, I felt I should have stopped them, but I had absolutely no rational reason for doing so."

An hour later, two policemen and the local priest were knocking at Marie and Jacques Beullac's door. Gently the priest broke the news that both boys had been killed in a four-car pile-up on the main road leading from Paris towards Versailles.

Their uncle, Marie's brother, had serious injuries and was not expected to live. In fact, he died in hospital without regaining consciousness.

So no one was left alive to pass on the details of what actually happened on that tragic Saturday morning but, within a week of the accident, Marie Beullac unwillingly found herself in possession of all the harrowing details surrounding the death of Christian and Jean-Philippe. Nor was she in any doubt of their source. They came, she was convinced, in a letter from 12-year-old Jean-Philippe ... a letter written and sent from beyond the grave.

"Of course, my first reaction was that it was a wicked hoax, thought up by some heartless person who enjoyed preying on the bereaved, but the more I looked at it the more I was certain that, in some way I couldn't explain, my dead son had written to me," Marie Beullac was to say later.

An investigation carried out by a Paris evening newspaper involved a leading handwriting expert who, after comparing the letter with writing in the boy's schoolbooks, declared that they had been done by the same person ...

The letter, delivered in an envelope containing a Paris postmark, had arrived at the Beullac apartment six days after the fatal crash.

When she opened the letter, Marie Beullac, a frail blonde in her mid-thirties, had collapsed on a sofa in floods of tears. Her husband, convinced the letter was the work of some ghoulish pervert, had handed it to the police, but later his wife asked for it back.

There were, she said, references in it that no outsider could know about.

In an interview with a Paris psychical research magazine, Marie Beullac explained: "In the letter, my son said: 'I'm sorry I won't be able to bring you home any primroses.'

"No one else would have known about that — he said it just before he left the flat to get into the car. He had said he would bring me some primroses from his uncle's farm.

"We had been alone when he said it — no one could have overheard. There were other references to things that were only known to me and the boys.

"The more I read the letter the more I was convinced that it wasn't a hoax. But how it could have been written when Jean-Philippe was dead is an absolute mystery to me."

The letter also contained a long description of the actual accident, which included what happened at the moment of the crash: "We had turned on to the main road and Uncle Rene was going quite fast, about 90kph, and we were quite near a car in front. I was in the front next to my uncle, and Christian was in the back.

"Suddenly, my uncle shouted and slammed on the brakes. The car in front had swerved over to its left and had crashed into a van coming the other way.

"The road was blocked and we were going straight into the van, which was over on its side. I shouted to Christian to hold on, and then everything went black ... "

Investigations carried out by motorway police showed that of the four cars involved, one was a van which had ended up on its side. The car in front of that carrying the boys had collided with the van and had blocked the entire carriageway. A motorist travelling on the opposite carriageway had later given evidence that the car crashing into the van had been the cause of the multiple pile-up: "The car swerved across the road straight into the van without any warning or any signals. None of the other drivers had a chance."

Police investigating the mystery letter traced the postmark to a central Paris post office.

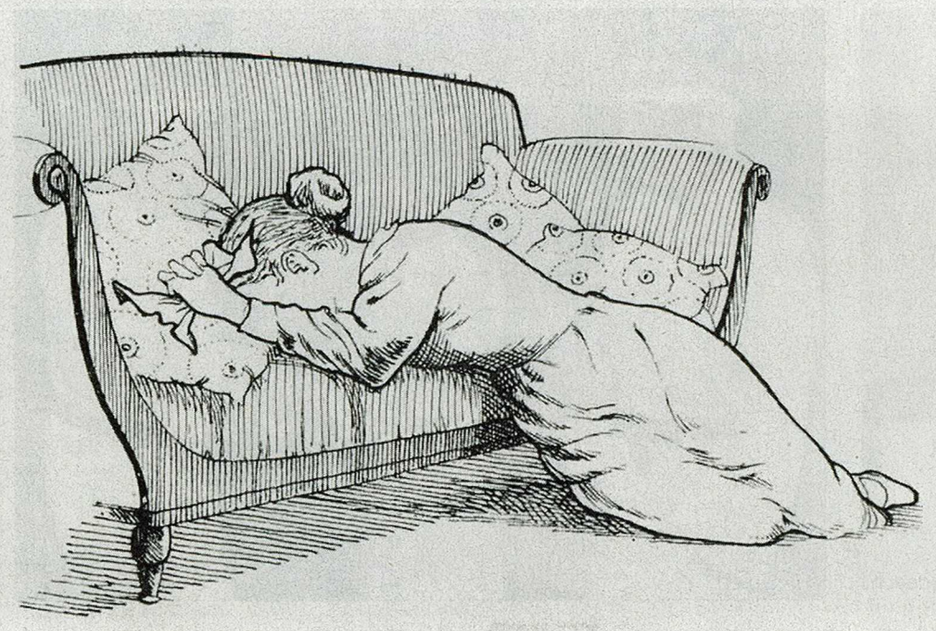
"Ghosts don't stick stamps on letters and post them," a post office official rather cynically observed.

"As far as we are concerned, there was nothing unusual in the delivery." But Marie Beullac didn't agree. For two years, she made her own investigations into the mystery, and finally her persistence was rewarded: a medium named Bernice St Jacques contacted Marie, admitting that the letter had been "dictated" to her at a seance in Reims, and that she had been instructed by her "psychic contact" to send it to "my mother, Madame Beullac".

Madame St Jacques declared:

"When I was writing the letter at the spirit's dictation, I found that my writing was completely different to my normal hand. It was a child's writing. Later, I mailed the letter to the address I had been given during the seance.

"When I mailed the letter, I knew nothing about the tragic accident, and had no idea who Madame Beullac was. "I was reluctant to admit I was the writer of the letter, for fear people would think I was a crank exploiting a family's grief." But that wasn't Madame Beullac's reaction. "I had never believed in the supernatural before," she wrote, shortly before her death in 1961. "But I am certain that, through Madame St Jacques, my beloved son wrote to me from the grave."



ANONYMOUS: She opened the letter and collapsed in a flood of tears

With LOVE

Aasiya Noushad



Date of Birth: February 24, 2003

Love and best wishes from Ejas, Thariq & Thabith

Majna Mumtaz



Date of Birth: February 24, 2002

Love and best wishes from parents

Anuja Krishnan



Date of Birth: February 24, 2000

Love and best wishes from parents

LEISURE invites you to share the happiness in your family with all the readers. Send us a colour photograph of the child (below 16 years) whose birthday you are celebrating, along with his/her full name, date of birth, address, telephone number and parents'/your name to **Times of Oman, With Love, PO Box 770, PC 112, Ruwi or through e-mail to times@omantel.net.om.** Make sure the picture reaches us at least seven days before the child's birthday. This is a free service. The pictures should be of good quality and postcard size.

SCROLEX

(A new word game for the new millennium)



By Hadi Rizvi

SCROLEX is a unique word game puzzle. It combines the vocabulary testing and unscrambling of word puzzles with the fun and lateral thinking of cross-words. The name itself is its best description: SCR ..... Scramble; CRO ..... Crossword; SCROL ..... Scroll; LEX ..... Lexicon; EX ..... Exercise

Visit www.scrolex.com

- Area for valid goal in hockey
- Marketing commercial
- Wicked or immoral
- Grey, dull brown colour
- Chin hair
- One who conforms
- Intertwined with thread
- Shortened version

Rules:

- *Clues are given for a word on each line.*
- *Each word must contain all the letters from the word above it plus one more letter.*
- *No word must begin with the same letter as the word above it.*
- *Plurals ending with an 's' and proper nouns are not permitted.*
- *Slang words, spelling variants, dialect words and common usage shortened forms are permitted.*

Answer to previous puzzle

E							
D	E						
E	N	D					
N	I	D	E				
D	I	Z	E	N			
Z	I	N	G	E	D		
A	G	N	I	Z	E	D	
Z	Y	G	A	E	N	I	D

TV Schedule

Star World - Star Select

0600 Magnum P.I.
0700 Charmed
0800 Wild Card
0900 The Oprah Winfrey Show
0958 Star Asia Travel Shorts
1000 Manhunt
1100 Bold And Beautiful
1200 American Idol
1330 That 70s Show
1400 The Simpsons
1430 The Drew Carey Show
1500 Star News Asia
1530 Friends
1600 American Idol
1730 Philly
1830 Third Watch III
1930 American Idol
2100 Philly
2200 Friends
2230 American Idol
0000 Philly
0100 About Asia: Feeding Nine Billion (People's Planet)
0200 The Simpsons
0230 World News
0300 Friends
0330 Hollywood Squares
0400 Home Improvement
0430 The Drew Carey Show
0500 The Oprah Winfrey Show

Star Gold - Pehla

0440 Manchali
0740 Kuch Hit Kuch Superhit
0745 Khuddar
1125 Kuch Hit Kuch Superhit
1130 Ziddi
1425 Not Available In The Middle East
1430 Naaka Bandi
1825 Kuch Hit Kuch Superhit
1830 Tamana
2205 Chhupa Rustam
0105 Kuch Hit Kuch Superhit
0110 Sansar
0425 Kuch Hit Kuch Superhit
0430 Humshakal

Reality - Pehla

0645 Shipwrecked
0710 Shipwrecked Extra
0735 RPA
0800 Coppers
0900 To Serve And Protect
0950 Hit By Lightning
1040 Code Red
1130 Shipwrecked
1155 Shipwrecked Extra
1220 Curtis Court
1310 RPA
1335 To Serve And Protect
1425 Chopper Coppers
1450 What Went Wrong
1515 Disasters
1540 Hit By Lightning
1630 Code Red
1720 Curtis Court
1810 Crime Strike
1835 RPA
1900 Chopper Coppers
1925 What Went Wrong
1950 Coppers
2015 The Bravest
2040 Disasters
2105 Emergency Services Unit
2200 Against The Odds
2230 What Went Wrong
2300 Cheaters
0000 Storm Warning
0100 The Bravest
0130 Disasters
0200 Emergency Services Unit
0300 Robotica
0350 Against The Odds
0415 What Went Wrong
0440 Crime Strike
0505 Cheaters
0555 Storm Warning

ESPN Sports - Orbit

0600 College Basketball Alabama LSU Live
0800 NFL 's Greatest Games
0930 ICC Cricket
1000 SportsCenter Live
1200 Water Craft Television
1230 College Basketball Purdue Indiana
1430 College Basketball Alabama LSU
1630 Best Of Tuesday Night Fights
1830 College Basketball San Diego State Wyoming
2030 SportsCenter
2130 Wire To Wire
2200 Beach Soccer
2230 College Basketball Purdue Indiana
0030 College Basketball Alabama LSU
0230 NFL Presents
0300 Fitness Pros
0400 College Basketball Duke Georgia Tech Live

Fox Sports - Star Select

0600 The Big Break III: Ladies Only
0700 DU Hockey Minnesota-Duluth At University Of Denver
0930 Men's College Basketball ACC North Carolina At North Carolina State
1130 Gillette World Sports
1200 Playing Lessons From The Pros
1230 Golf Central
1300 Pac-10 Women's College Basketball Stanford @ UCLA
1500 ATP Tennis Regions Morgan Keegan Championship Final Memphis, TN
1700 The World Football Show
1730 Football Asia
1800 To Be Announced
2000 Oryx Quest 2005 Highlights
2030 The World Football Show
2100 Champions Of Boxing
2300 Men's College Basketball ACC North Carolina At North Carolina State
0100 American Hockey League Chicago Vs Houston
0400 Golf Central
0430 Academy - Dave Pelz: TBA
0500 What's in The Bag? Driver...Long
0530 Playing Lessons From The Pros - Rosie Jones

NGC - Star Select

0600 About Asia: Hornets From Hell
0700 National Geographic Specials: Mystery Of The Dakar
0800 Different Ball Game: South India, Fighting For Survival
0830 Dogs With Jobs: Beauty, Cinder & Blaze
0900 About Asia: Truth Files: Latika Tiger Princess
1000 Megastructures: Top Ten
1100 Passport: Norway's Hidden Secret
1200 Taboo: Food (G1&G2)
1300 Chasing Time: Singapore
1330 Running For Freedom: Roxana's Journey
1400 Snake Wranglers: Cambodia Forbidden Pit Vipers (S2 -5)
1430 Dr. Brady Barr: The Killer Croc Of Mondonguillo
1500 Wild: Dogs With Jobs: Cindy, Chipper, Hope
1530 Wild: Insects From Hell: Csi
1600 About Asia: Feeding Nine Billion (People's Planet)
1700 National Geographic Specials: The Mystery Of The Minkes
1800 Passport: Ant That Ate America
1900 Taboo: Bloodsports (G1&G2)
2000 Chasing Time: Shanghai
2030 Blues Highway
2100 National Geographic Specials: The Mystery Of The Minkes
2200 Passport: Ant That Ate America
2300 Taboo: Bloodsports (G1&G2)
0000 Chasing Time: Shanghai
0030 Blues Highway
0100 About Asia: Feeding Nine Billion (People's Planet)
0200 Wild: Dogs With Jobs: Cindy, Chipper, Hope
0230 Wild: Insects From Hell: Csi
0300 Snake Wranglers: Cambodia Forbidden Pit Vipers
0330 Dr. Brady Barr: The Killer Croc Of Mondonguillo
0400 Snake Wranglers: Jungle Geoff & Viper Strike
0430 Dr. Brady Barr: Snake People
0500 Wild: Built For The Kill - Forest

Cartoon Network - ST

0640 Spaced Out
0705 Gadget Boy
0730 Mike, Lu & Og
0755 Dexter's Laboratory
0820 Looney Tunes
0845 Tom And Jerry
0900 Ed, Edd N Eddy
0925 Codename: Kids Next Door
0950 The Powerpuff Girls
1015 Dexter's Laboratory
1040 The Cramp Twins
1100 Johnny Bravo
1130 The Grim Adventures Of Billy & Mandy
1155 Courage The Cowardly Dog
1220 Scooby-Doo
1245 Spaced Out
1310 Dexter's Laboratory
1335 Johnny Bravo
1400 The Addams Family
1425 The Jetsons
1450 The Flintstones
1515 Looney Tunes
1540 Tom And Jerry
1605 Scooby-Doo
1630 Spaced Out
1655 Courage The Cowardly Dog
1720 Samurai Jack
1745 Johnny Bravo
1810 Ed, Edd N Eddy
1835 Codename: Kids Next Door
1900 Dexter's Laboratory
1925 The Cramp Twins
1950 The Powerpuff Girls
2015 Megas Xlr
2040 Samurai Jack
2105 Tom And Jerry
2130 Scooby-Doo
2155 The Flintstones
2220 Looney Tunes
2245 Wacky Races
2310 Top Cat
2335 The Addams Family
0000 The Jetsons
0025 Scooby And Scrappy-doo
0050 Droopy Master Detective
0115 Wacky Races
0140 Tom And Jerry
0205 Top Cat
0230 The Flintstones
0255 Droopy Master Detective
0320 Scooby-Doo
0345 Wacky Races
0410 The Jetsons
0435 The Addams Family
0500 Spaced Out
0525 Gadget Boy
0550 The Cramp Twins

Discovery - Showtime

0610 A Bike Is Born
0635 Be A Grand Prix Driver
0705 Scrapheap Challenge
0800 Building The Ultimate
0830 Massive Machines
0900 Blueprint For Disaster
1000 Extreme Machines
1055 Globe Trekker
1150 The Iceman From Oetzi Valley And His World
1245 Top Ten Shark Encounters
1340 A Bike Is Born
1435 Scrapheap Challenge
1530 Building The Ultimate
1600 Massive Machines
1630 Blueprint For Disaster
1730 Be A Grand Prix Driver
1800 Extreme Machines
1900 City Lives
2000 Speed Machines
2100 Super Structures
2200 Thunder Races
2300 Industrial Revelations
0000 Carthage
0100 Europe's Secret Armies
0200 Extreme Machines
0255 City Lives
0350 Speed Machines
0445 Super Structures
0540 Thunder Races

UK TV - Granada - SS

0630 Fight School
0730 Please Sir
0800 Drummonds
0900 Shades (Hereafter)
1000 Brass
1030 Room At The Bottom
1100 Weddings From Hell
1200 Doctor In The House
1230 Emmerdale
1300 Coronation Street
1330 Murder In Suburbia
1430 Fight School
1530 Please Sir
1600 Families
1700 Yellowthread Street
1800 Upstairs Downstairs
1900 Family
2000 The Piglet Files
2030 Emmerdale
2100 Coronation Street
2130 The Brief
2300 Hearts And Bones
0000 Families
0100 Yellowthread Street
0200 Upstairs Downstairs
0300 Family
0400 The Piglet Files
0430 Emmerdale
0500 Coronation Street
0530 The Brief

Star Movies - Star Select

0630 The Ticket - Ep 8
0700 The Eliminator
0845 Rocky
1045 Swimfan
1215 The Rock
1430 Wrong Turn
1600 The Real McCoy
1745 Sonny
1930 High Crimes
2130 Unfaithful
2330 The Rookie
0145 The Eliminator
0315 First Blood
0445 The Distinguished Gentleman

BBC Prime - Orbit

0600 The Great Philosophersof the 20th Century
0645 Personal Passions
0700 Boss Women
0800 Goal
0830 Learning English With Ozmo
0900 Shakespeare Shorts
0920 Let's Write Non Fiction (ages 7-9)
0940 Captain Crimson
1000 Teletubbies
1025 Tweenies
1045 Bits & Bobs
1100 Step Inside
1110 Andy Pandy
1115 The Story Makers
1135 The Really Wild Show
1200 Holiday On A Shoestring
1230 Ready Steady Cook
1315 Big Strong Boys
1345 Trading Up
1415 Cash In The Attic
1445 The Weakest Link
1530 Doctors
1600 Eastenders
1630 Passport To The Sun
1700 Search
1730 Teletubbies
1755 Tweenies
1815 Bits & Bobs
1830 Step Inside
1845 The Story Makers
1905 The Really Wild Show
1930 The Weakest Link
2015 Big Strong Boys
2045 Cash In The Attic
2115 Ready Steady Cook
2200 Doctors
2230 Eastenders
2300 Location, Location, Location
2330 Design Rules
0000 Safe As Houses
0100 We Got A New Life
0200 Red Cap
0250 Murder In Mind
0340 Black Cab
0400 American Visions
0500 Presumption: The Life Of Jane Austen

Star Plus - Pehla

0600 REF!
0605 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
0630 Hello Dollie
0700 REF!
0705 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
0730 Kesar
0800 REF!
0805 Film Topper
0810 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
0830 Kahiin To Hoga
0900 Meri Saheli
0925 Film Topper
0930 Patang
1000 Kora Kaagaz
1030 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
1055 REF!
1100 Kasautii Zindagii Kay
1130 Kumkum - Pyara Sa Bandhan
1200 Bhabhi
1230 Kesar
1300 Saarrthi
1330 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
1400 Kahiin To Hoga
1430 K. Street Pali Hill
1500 Maan
1525 Film Topper
1530 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
1555 REF!
1600 Patang
1630 Sanjivani - A Medical Boon
1725 REF!
1730 Kumkum - Pyara Sa Bandhan
1755 Film Topper
1800 Hello Dollie
1830 Dekho Magar Pyaar Se
1900 Kasautii Zindagii Kay
1930 Sanjivani - A Medical Boon
2000 Kkavyanjali
2030 Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii
2100 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
2130 Kahiin To Hoga
2200 K. Street Pali Hill
2230 Bhabhi
2300 REF!
2305 Hit Filmein Hit Sangeet
2330 Kumkum - Pyara Sa Bandhan
0000 Kasautii Zindagii Kay
0030 Dekho Magar Pyaar Se
0100 REF!
0130 Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii
0200 Kora Kaagaz
0230 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
0300 Meri Saheli
0330 Bhabhi
0400 Star Geetmala
0500 Maan
0530 Musafir Hoon Yaaron

Zee Tv - Hindi

0600 Bhagwat Katha
0630 Bhakti Bhaav
0700 Jaagran
0730 Yoga For Life
0750 Fitness Plus
0800 Do Aur Do Paanch
0830 Aasman Say Tapki
0900 Chi And Me
0930 Dear Women
1000 Gharana
1030 Banegi Apni Baat
1100 Pancham
1130 Piya Ka Ghar
1200 Kareena Kareena
1230 Reth
1300 Matinee Cinema
1600 Hasratein
1630 Hum Paanch
1700 Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa
1730 Tumhari Disha
1800 Astitva… Ek Prem Kahani
1830 Tum Bin Jaoon Kahan
1900 Pancham
1930 Reth
2000 Tumhari Disha
2030 Piya Ka Ghar
2100 Kareena Kareena
2130 Astitva… Ek Prem Kahani
2200 Tum Bin Jaaoon Kahan
2230 Pancham
2300 Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa
2330 Daraar
0000 Piya Ka Ghar
0030 Kareena Kareena
0100 Astitva… Ek Prem Kahani
0130 Tumhari Disha
0200 Tum Bin Jaoon Kahan
0230 Late Night Cinema
0530 News

Channel V - Star Select

0600 One Hit Wonders
0630 The Record Shop
0700 Double Shot - 90's
0800 [V] Smash Hits (Vj Amanda)
0900 Billboard Us Countdown (Singles)
1000 Double Shot - Superstars
1100 Double Shot - British
1200 Fashion Tv
1230 The Review
1300 [V] Smash Hits (Vj Cindy)
1400 Remote Control
1500 The Juice
1600 4 Play: Franz Ferdinand
1630 The Record Shop
1700 Mix Of Nations
1730 Double Shot: 90's
1800 Mainstage: Yeah Yeah Yeahs Live @ The Filmore
1630 The Record Shop
1700 Mix Of Nations
1730 Double Shot: 90's
1800 Mainstage: Yeah Yeah Yeahs Live @ The Filmore
1900 [V] Smash Hits (Vj Cindy)
2000 [V] Countdown
2100 The Juice
2200 Double Shot - Ballads
2300 Double Shot - Pop
0000 The 10 Best Rock Bands
0100 4 Play: Franz Ferdinand
0130 Double Shot: R&B/Hip Hop
0200 [V] Special:
0300 Double Shot - Superstars
0400 Double Shot - British
0500 The Story Of Depeche Mode

Animal Planet - Showtime

0600 Wildlife Specials
0700 Amazing Animal Videos
0730 The Planet's Funniest Animals
0800 Pet Rescue
0830 Breed All About It
0900 Vets In The Sun
0930 Emergency Vets
1000 Growing Up
1100 Monkey Business
1200 Sharks - The Truth
1300 Shark Tracker
1400 Supernatural
1430 Nightmares Of Nature
1500 Amazing Animal Videos
1530 The Planet's Funniest Animals
1600 Pet Rescue
1630 Breed All About It
1700 Vets In The Sun
1730 Emergency Vets
1800 Growing Up
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2230 Nightmares Of Nature
2300 Amazing Animal Videos
2330 The Planet's Funniest Animals
0000 Pet Rescue
0030 Breed All About It
0100 Vets In The Sun
0130 Emergency Vets
0200 Growing Up
0300 Monkey Business
0400 Sharks - The Truth
0500 Shark Tracker

Programmes subject to change

30 Year Special

3 DECADES OF BREAKING NEWS — TIMES OF OMAN

Key Task



Husna Mohsin Salam Al Sharji
Typesetter

Room to learn, live and grow

I HAVE a dream — to be an Omani businesswoman! And it is a dream that I am carefully nurturing and tirelessly working at. Thanks to *Times of Oman,* I am sure that I will achieve this dream.

How, you may ask? Well, after my NVQ level II training, I headed for one of the best newspapers in town, the *Times*, for an on-the-job stint.

I was put in the credit and collection department where my job involved calling other companies to pay the money owed to us. It was interesting work. I had to make statements, letters, etc. to many companies. After a year or so in the credit department, I was moved to the advertising department where I took on two tasks — working as a secretary and also booking ads for our sister daily, *Al Shabiba*.

When I got the hang of it, I was once again moved to the computer/editorial department as a typesetter, which I am now. I typeset for both *Leisure* and *Thursday*. Work is good, I love it and so are my colleagues. There is an element of camaraderie and everyone is eager and ready to help me.

I have learnt so much since I joined this department and while I know there is much more that I should know, I find that each day, I am learning something new.

At home also I sit and dabble in poetry and other work on my computer. Working in three separate departments has helped me a lot and I am sure it will stand me in good stead. In fact, I have even learnt the art of marketing during this process and all of this will help me build my future. I owe a lot to the *Times* for this. It is a newspaper and an institution that gives you room to learn, live and grow. I wish it all the best on its 30th anniversary and hope I will remain with it for a long time to come.



Mariamma Ninan
Typesetter

17 years of commitment

I OWE a lot to *Times of Oman*! For nearly 17 years I have been contributing in my own small way to this paper.

I joined, first in the Oriental Printing Press, in 1986 as a typesetter. But, although I was in OPP, I was working for the *Times*.

From 1986 to 1990, I worked for OPP and then the work was of a slightly different nature, meaning, the newspaper was just working its way up and so, work was not that tough, although a proper system was only being put into place.

Then in 1991, I was transferred to the *Times* and then work got on in a frantic pace. I had other colleagues, in the same department, doing the same work as me. For instance, there was Ponamma, Sammy and Manny.

Typesetting was not a difficult job for me as I was doing almost similar work as a typist-cum-clerk in Madhya Pradesh – Jhagrakhand – Colliery. After coming to Oman in 1984, I had worked for Oman Holdings International (OHI) as a typist.

But, after joining the *Times* I felt settled and began to enjoy the work. Also, my husband, Ninan Thomas, who has been with the OPP since 1974, that is even before the *Times* came out, has been here and so, we were all here and I brought up my two sons, Sony Ninan (who has recently finished his aeronautical engineering course and is now working at Bangalore airport) and Tony Ninan, who is doing his pre-degree (Plus II computers) in India.

As far as my husband, Ninan, is concerned, he was the first ever employee of the OPP. He has been working as a cutting machine operator and has been with OPP/*Times* as the oldest staff member.



Amna Ali Issa Al Ma'aini
Typesetter

First job — and I love it

AM I the oldest Omani staff in the *Times of Oman*? I don't know. I have been with the *Times* since March 1, 1994. That is, by this March, I would have been working for this paper for 11 years!

What a wonderful experience it has been!

I joined this newspaper as a typesetter, and the fact that I am still here, in the same job, shows how much I love it! It is my first job and I have not gone looking elsewhere, because I enjoy what I do here!

We have grown, and during these 11-odd years, I have been witness to the amazing output of the *Times* – the *Leisure, Thursday, ET, Ice Times, etc.* I have been contributing my bit to all of these in some form or the other.

In *Thursday* I set the crosswords and also some other contributor's pieces, as well as other stories. I also download regular features from our syndicated agencies websites other than my typesetting work, I also help scan reports and pictures.

Over the years, the work has also increased and it is evident in my timings: I used to work from 8am to 1pm, after which it was changed to 8am to 3pm, then to 4pm and now finally to 4.30pm.

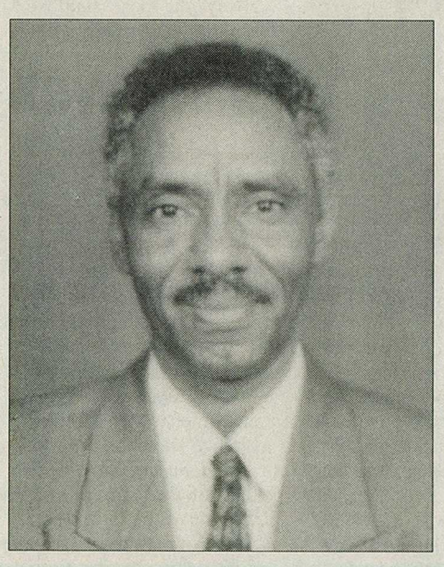
I used to live in Muscat before and so it was easy to reach here, but now I live in Seeb. But, as they say, distance makes the heart grow fonder and the farther I go, I still can't forget *Times*. I love the working atmosphere of the *Times* and I have good company in my department.

Today, I am trying to learn more from this job and I have already started to learn pagemaking. *Inshallah,* I will learn more and contribute more to the *Times* as well as my country, Oman.

Omission and commission were the order of the day. But no more. Computers have really made life easy for typesetters. Still, there are day-to-day challenges when you get every day bunches of handwritten papers, be it for the 'Readers' Forum', 'Words and Verses', 'You Said It' or printouts of press releases. Three of our typesetters, who, incidentally, represent different eras — the era of typewriter and the era of computer — talk of their lives at the 'Times'

Lingual Challenge

Translation is not an easy task, however good you are at languages.
The job of a translator on a newspaper is all the more so, because of time constraint. One has to be fast and accurate. There is not much time to constantly refer to dictionaries. But tell these to our translation desk, they would simply say it is all 'terribly simple'. Here we offer our readers a peek at our translation desk



Hamid Osman
Translator

So simple!

THE duty of a translator is terribly simple. You change the concerned text from one language into another. Do not listen to those who attempt to put you off from trying your luck in the big market of translation. If you fail to know the translation of any word, a big book, called the dictionary is at your disposal.

You need two simple skills. First, reading the language you translate from. Second, writing the language you translate into. Accuracy may help.

A typical translator can enjoy a good pay and read and write materials relating to no less than two, or more, cultures. A translator can work with the minimum degree of work pressure because of his strategic place in the organisation. If some people know Arabic and some people know English, nobody will care about the middle ground area.

If you work for *Times of Oman*, for example, you will increase your knowledge about Oman history, society and culture and you will communicate with thousands of English readers.

During its 30 happy years, *Times of Oman* employed more than five translators. The work is conducted in two shifts and it is important to consult numerous sources, ONA and the TV, in a bid not to miss a relevant news item. Translators are either from India or Sudan. A female translator has yet to work for the paper.

Times of Oman carries translation of local news and reports issued by various government departments and private sector companies and establishments. It also carries decisions and statutes published in the *Official Gazette*. Television programmes, prayer timings and pharmacy are originally Arabic documents.

Of course, the management of *Times of Oman* can promote the role of translation within the future plan of the paper. Firstly, publish more Omani historical and cultural works, particularly book reviews.

Secondly, integrate translation with information and research, for example through an information centre. Thirdly, undertake translation from more languages, for example Hindi, French and Swahili.

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on celebrating their

30th

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30 Year Special



Congratulations

to

TIMES OF OMAN

on their 30 years of excellent coverage

We wish them all the best
in the years to come

Galfar

What makes us tick

MEMORIES never die…unless, of course, Alzheimer's comes calling!

While some newspapers can cause havoc with a thinking mind, ours, we would like to think, is one that allows your grey cells to stay in business. *Times of Oman* may be the proverbial drop in the ocean of the global print media but a drop that, nevertheless, has been quenching a never-ending thirst for information — *with a difference*.

As a newspaper we are thirty years old today; neither too young nor too old. Early this month, the world's first newspaper made of gold was published for $10,675 a copy in south China. The '30th' thrill makes us feel a bit like gold ourselves though we're still a life term away from hitting the 50-mark!

While the Chinese paper was a one-off event — to commemorate the achievements of the National People's Congress, the Asian giant's top legislative body, — for us when we make a good story and receive fine feedback, every day feels like, well, gold.

But for that you must have recognisable characters, dramatic conflict, clear narrative lines and beginnings, middles and endings. They are hard to find, harder to report, harder yet to write. And you'll never be more satisfied than when you've really pulled one off. At the risk of sounding immodest, we'd like to believe we have pulled off a few in our time.

After conversion from a tabloid into a full-fledged daily, it was a conscious decision on the part of *Times of Oman* to premise its contents on a readership preference rather than strictly swearing by standard "heavies" — as broadsheets are often referred to — elsewhere.

In so doing, we may have been guilty of not exactly laying out our pages in blood — so to speak — in order to starkly portray the dark side of our planet (the happenings in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestinian territories come to mind) but as we found out with the passage of time, our readers, too, wanted sobriety on that count.

We also decided to lend a mix of tabloid colour — minus the scandalising and sensationalism — to sit with the serious content to show there was such a thing as infotainment. Where man readily plays devil incarnate, there is also a celebration of life. We feel no embarrassment in admitting that we are more influenced by *joie de vivre* than stories that literally kill the human spirit.

That *Times of Oman* offers investigative reports, news analyses, syndicated columns, commentaries and editorials, in addition to the light news, gossip and entertainment coverage is no news, even if it is a standout from its contemporaries.

Rather the important aspect of our news coverage pertains to layout. In a rat-race involving super-duper layouts, gone are the days when good content could simply be sold with a bland face.

To conform to this appeal, we have also done away with hard and fast rules about font size or space restrictions for photographs. Instead our pages are characterised by bold headlines and big photographs to embellish the often, personal aspects of news, with reports of juicy bits of events.

But as a premier national daily, our greatest strength is a firm home base — the mantra of all great international publications. We have to perform our obligations to citizens. Therefore, more than anything else, we have always endeavoured to be the eyes and ears of the nation, helping forge strong bonds between the government and the people.

National Day supplements at *Times of Oman*, which take stock of the year gone by, have always held a collector's value and find a specific mention here because, in a way, they are a chronology of how this country has risen as a welfare state under the able guidance of His Majesty the Sultan from the time he acceded the throne.

Times of Oman has also made its mark with comprehensive coverage of news events related to the communities, which represent the country's heterogeneous population. In this respect, the mailbox from our expatriate readers gives a clear indication of how our publication holds an endearing value for them.

Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Americans, British and nationals of other European countries have, from time to time, unreservedly praised our paper for giving them a sense of belonging away from home!

There is a reason for this kind of compatibility and meeting of minds. We have in our midst, people of various nationalities, who, then become strong points of reference given the intricate knowledge they have of their countries. You can call that clever management of a simple but successful formula!

For example, we were the first to really cater to the Pakistani community by having a full page devoted to news pertaining to that country, which included subscribing to a home-based news agency and providing in-depth commentaries on current affairs. Obviously, this made us an easy grab for Pakistani expatriate readers as well as forcing our competitors to follow suit!

But primarily, it is our coverage of India in all its finery that brings the highest readership response. One crucial benchmark of a newspaper's success is how it manages to involve its readership into actively raising a voice on issues that appear in fine print. You only have to see how our Indian readers engage in constructive debates to know the kind of fulfillment we derive from our work.

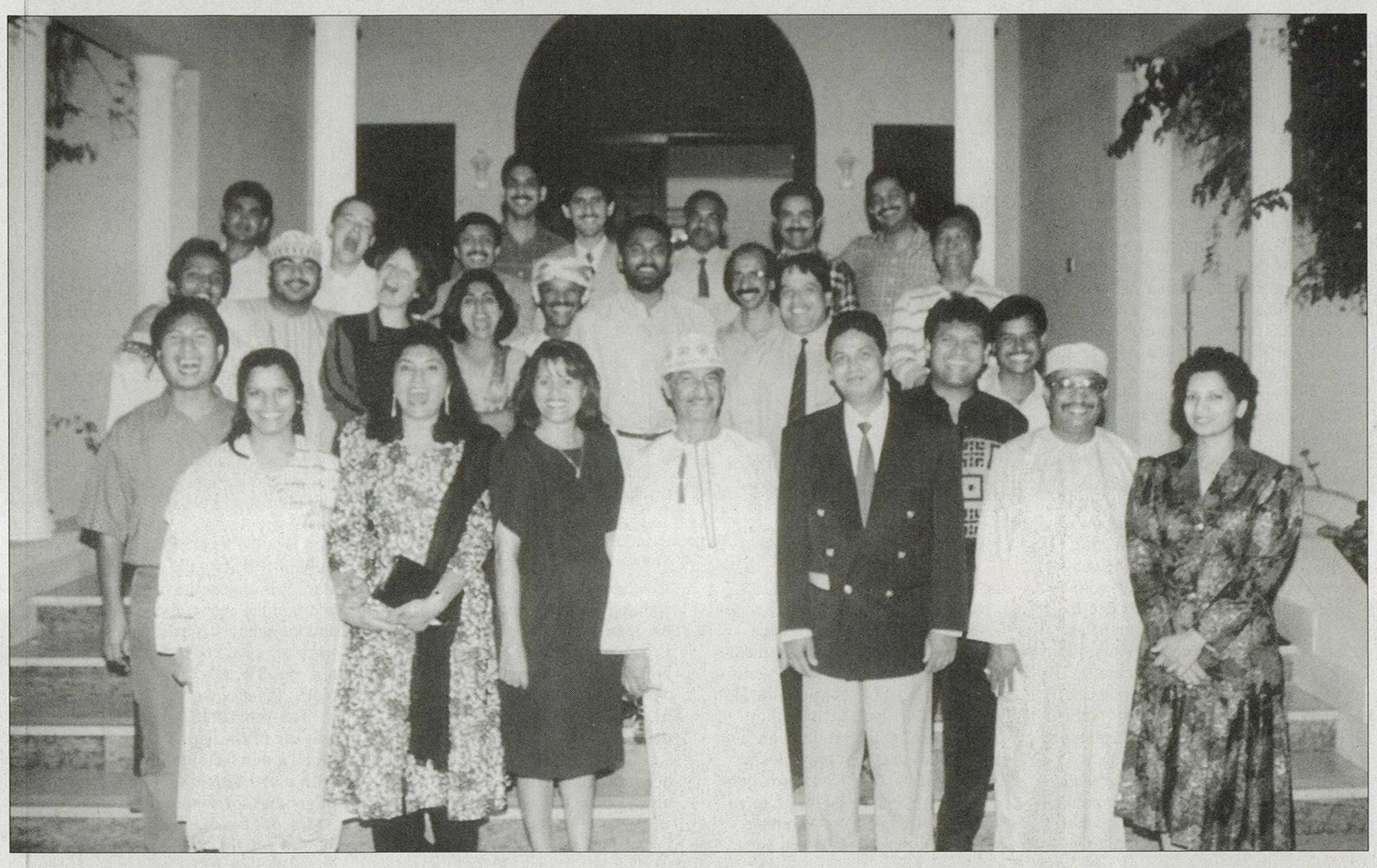
International coverage is always the more, shall we say, fun part of our daily grind. Given that our resources are the richest in this area, we have plenty of room to cater to the taste buds of our readers. The double-column assortment of, sometimes, incredible tales of the unexpected, bizarre and otherwise, often serves as an appetiser for our readers.

But Americas and UK pages are probably more like a sweet tooth for entertainment — both for us and our readers. We wouldn't like it any other way, for there is no biz like showbiz, right (even though our regular weekly diets of *Thursday* and *ET* are themselves a scream)?

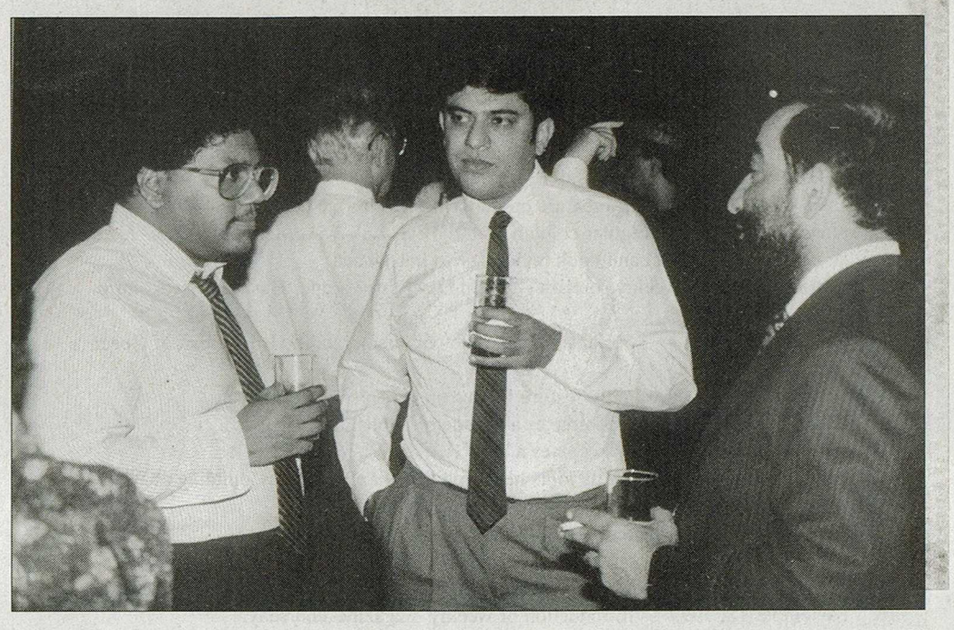
For a newspaper, the most constructive thing is to make people believe they can actually do things and have impact. In a nutshell, all clichés removed, our objective is for readers to feel they have a paper that looks out for their interests — from the weather report to the jumble puzzle. After what we feel is a well-earned bash tonight, we hope to hear from you about how far this baby has come!

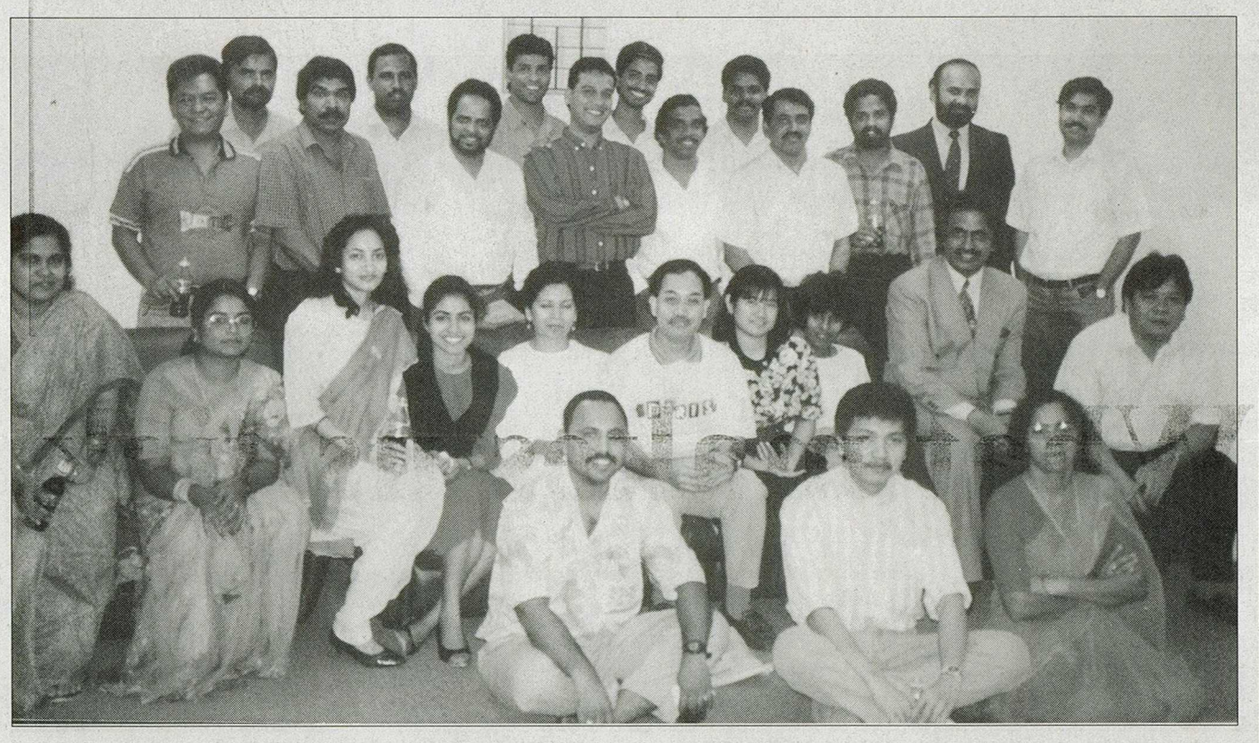
— Kamran Rehmat

Picture from the Past

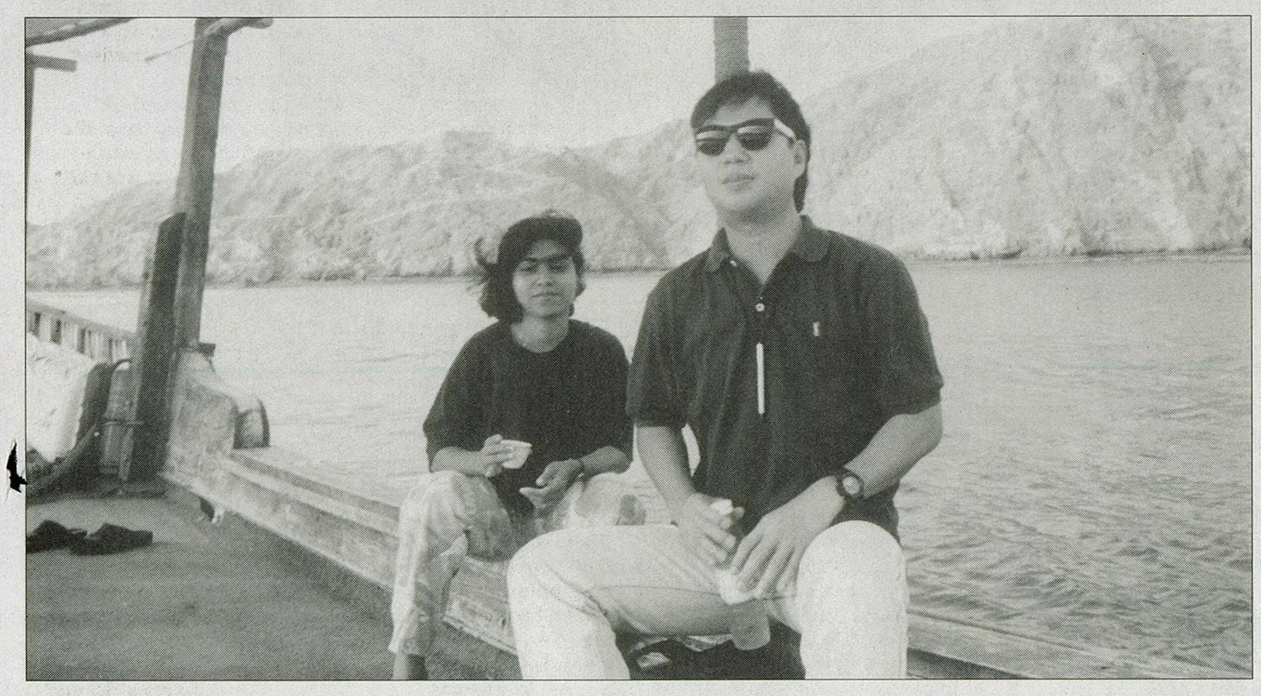












Great days begin this way!



A good night's sleep and your favourite news paper. Thirty years, we have been part of people's mornings across Oman. Times of Oman, we're proud to be associated with you.

Raha
THE POWER TO DREAM

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DDB OMAN

30 Milestones

1. February 23, 1975 — Launch of the Times of Oman, as a tabloid newspaper
2. 1980, Times shifted from one-room office in Muttrah to its own building in Darsait
3. March 1975 — Appointment of newsagent for the paper — Aiman Bookshop — as the sole distributor
4. 1977 — A special monthly feature on motoring was introduced
5. November 1977 — A regular column 'A birds eye view with Meredity Taylor' featuring cookery, beauty, travel and book reviews, was introduced
6. February 1978 — Weekly forecast – Seven Day Stars — and 'Business Week' introduced
7. February 28, 1978 — Special supplement to commemorate the Royal visit of Queen Elizabeth
8. March 1978 — A fortnightly feature 'Focus on Oman' was introduced
9. February, 1985 — Times completes a decade of publishing
10. January 1, 1991 — Times becomes a daily
11. October 1992 — Times shifts to its new premises – a three storey building at Wadi Kabir
12. 1994 — Weekend Review on Thursdays
13. April 1, 1995 — Introduction of tabloid 'Leisure'
14. 1996 — Establishment of Muscat Press and Publishing House
15. November 1997 — Friday edition of Times
16. November 18, 1999 — Introduction of weekly magazine Thursday
17. December 1999 — Moves from traditional camera to digital camera
18. February 23, 2000 — Times completes a full quarter century
19. February 2000 — Purchase of new printing machines
20. February 23, 2000 — Silver jubilee celebrations
21. June 2, 2001 — Entertainment Times
22. April 6, 2002 — ET becomes broadsheet
23. April 11, 2002 — Launch of web portal
24. August 2002 — Launch of ICE Times
25. 2002 — Chairman and Editor-in-Chief begins a weekly column titled 'Viewpoint' to air his views on current events
26. December 2003 — Introduction of daily Business pullout
27. July 2004 — Leisure metamorphoses into a broadsheet pullout
28. October 4, 2004 — Launch of e-Paper
29. 2004 — Weekly auto supplement Al Muharrak
30. February 23, 2005 — Times completes three decades!

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Question Time

Quiz Times

What is the secret of success of the *Times of Oman* (TOO) quiz? What has made it so special and why do similar events around the Gulf not attract anything like the crowds that flock to the TOO Quiz? What has converted an esoteric, cerebral, participant oriented activity into a fun filled spectator sport?

Perhaps it is a unique combination of various elements that are well mixed and have come together synergistically to create a bookmark in the Muscat calendar.

Times of Oman is a family paper offering a combination of information and entertainment. Reflecting this, TOO quiz introduced the concept of family 'infotainment' with free entrance for all. In contrast to other options which may not be as suitable due to the cost of entry, the location , the ambience, the nature of the event or some other reason, the TOO quiz offers an excellent family outing at virtually no cost. Promotion of any event is important. This is where a medium like *Times of Oman* can be expected to excel. The publicity barrage prior to a quiz show has always been a major contributor to its success.



The fact that the TOO quiz series has risen from a commodity to a brand has been mainly due to media support, both editorial and advertisement. Some people consider the high level of publicity to be overkill.

No, because the promotional campaign is designed not only for the event itself but also for to provide very attractive mileage to the sponsors. It is the sponsors who have made the difference between entry fee and entry free. This mileage to sponsors is multi-media in its original sense, combining newspaper publicity and on-site exposure with brand name reinforcement weaved in as part of the event itself through mention by the quizmaster and by dedicated questions during the event.

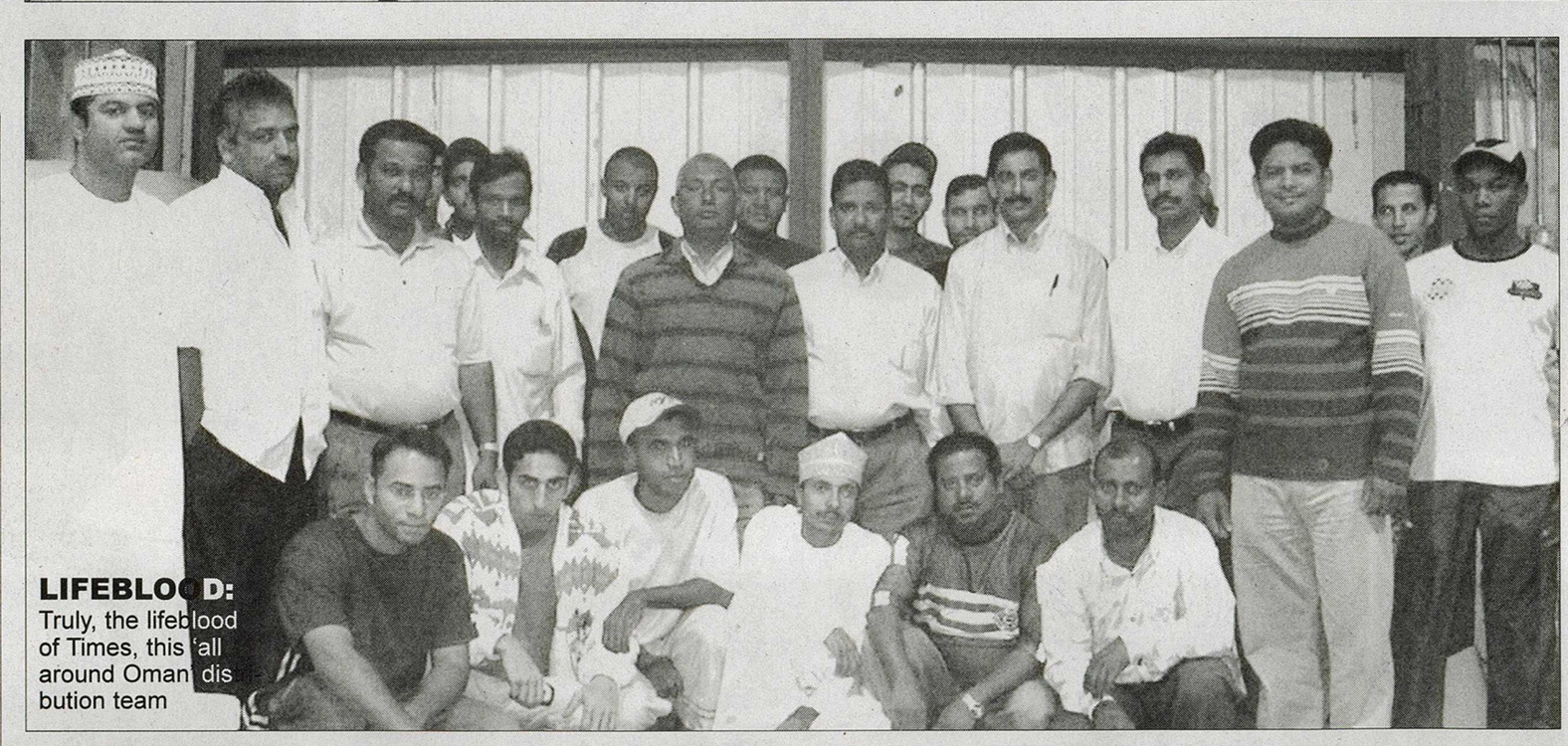
No event would succeed without an audience. The TOO quiz has always been known for audience enthusiasm and participation. Oman has had a very well established culture of quizzing, particularly in Muscat, with events like the Quiz Pot, the family Quiz series, the sponsors "serious" quizzes and so on. As a result, the audience has always been very knowledgeable and enthusiastically involved. This enthusiasm has been bolstered by the very attractive array of audience and entrant prizes.

And last but not the least – the authorities. The venue provided by the Muscat Municipality is the largest and perhaps the best outdoor amphitheatre in the Gulf. Thanks to the superb design, location and facilities, plus the level of support cheerfully provided by the municipality staff, it is almost the ideal venue. In addition the cooperation of the ROP and the schools, particularly ISG as the traditional venue for the prelims, and the ISW, all contribute to this recipe for success.

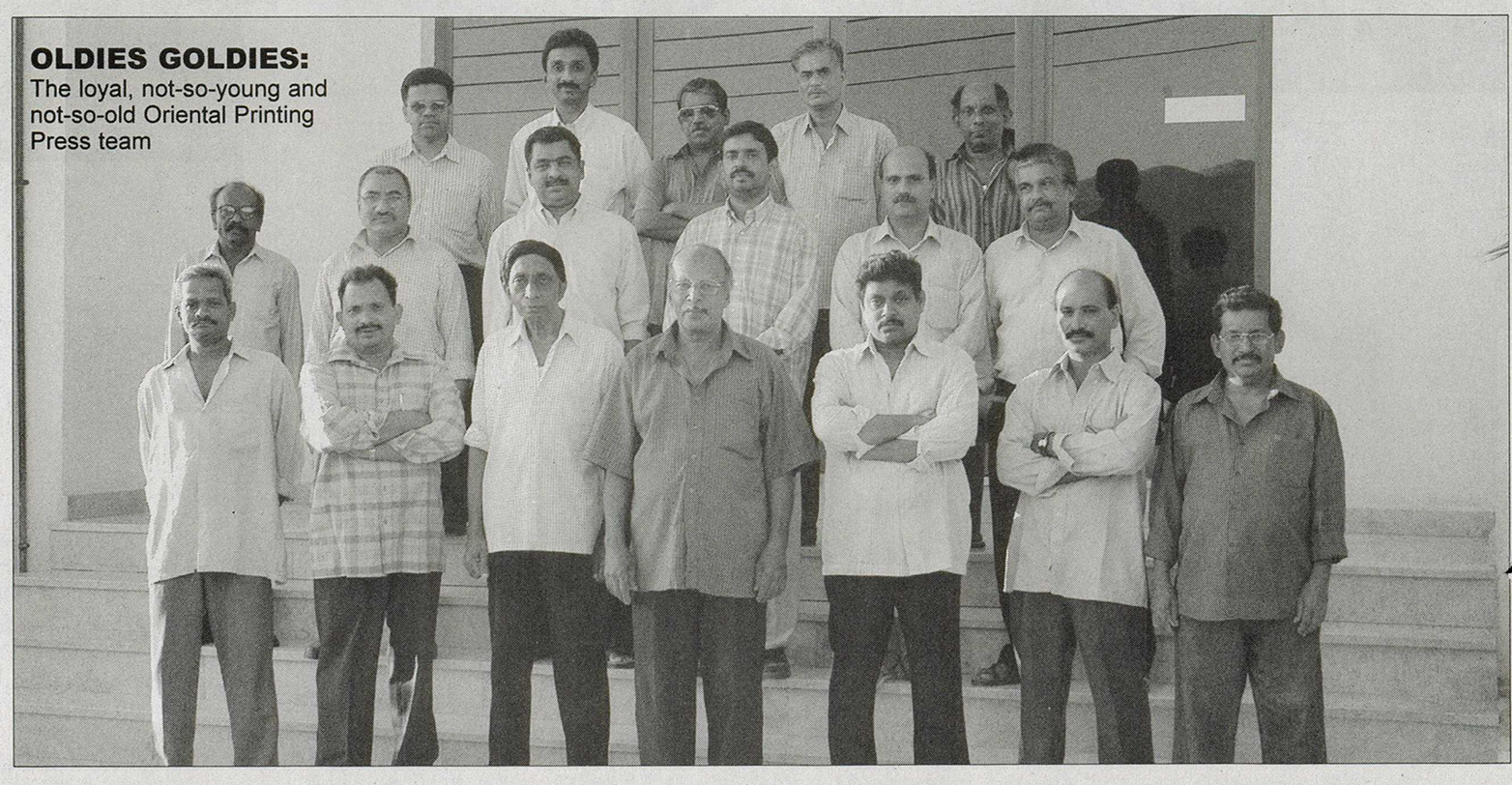
The year 2005 will see a new episode of the Times of Oman Quiz, a new version, new style, with a promise of double the range of goodies for the audience. So watch out for our Quiz on March 30 and April 1, 2005!



OUR SUPPORT:
The team at advertising takes a smile break



LIFEBLOOD:
Truly, the lifeblood of Times, this 'all around Omani' distribution team



OLDIES GOLDIES:
The loyal, not-so-young and not-so-old Oriental Printing Press team



Features Plus

Features offer a respite from violence and bloodshed. *Times of Oman* has a well-spread-out features section of which *Thursday* is a the flagship. *Thursday* is a complete family magazine devoted to a range of topics, including health, beauty and lifestyle. *Leisure* celebrates life in its various hues, and our recent mix of 'business plus pleasure' pullout is a great hit. *Entertainment Times* sums up the best of two tinselworlds — Bollywood and Hollywood. Our exclusive arrangements with *Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Nature* magazine, *Independent* and Bollywood journals help us offer the readers the best of both worlds — the West and the East, Hollywood and Bollywood

Wholesome magazine

A DELIGHTFUL weekend accompaniment, *Thursday*, was launched in November 1999. The idea was to meet the demand of a weekend family magazine in English. Of course *Leisure* catered to the requirement of everyday light reading but *Thursday* was envisaged as a complete publication with varied reading material previously missing from any publication in the Sultanate.

The magazine started off with various sections like Hollywood and Bollywood roundups, cookery, diet guidelines, fashion tips, children's section and, of course, cover stories that touched the throbbing issues in the region.

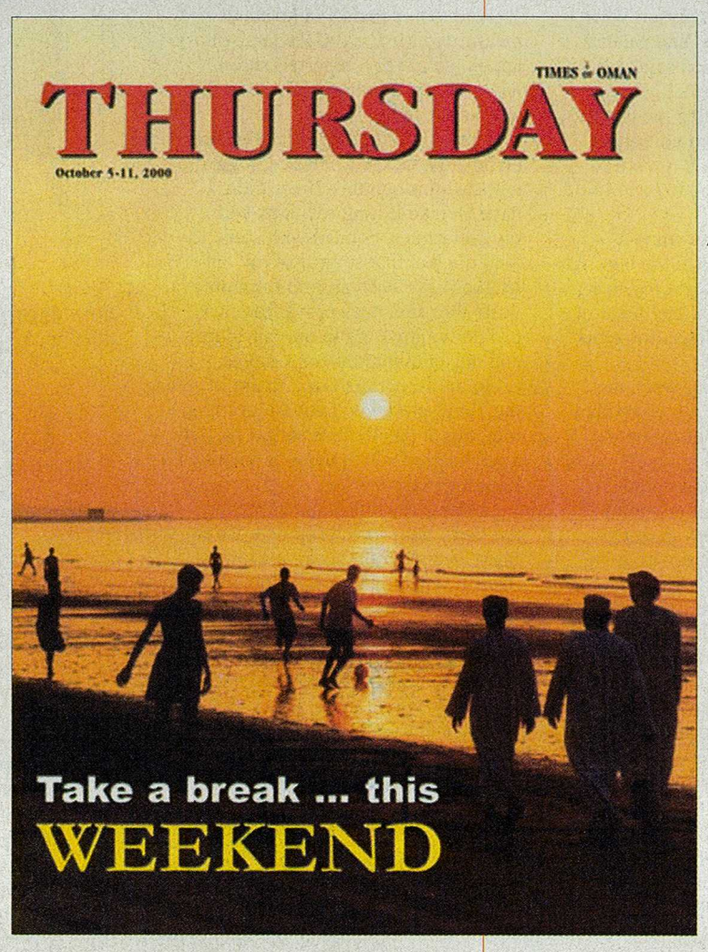
The potpourri was an instant hit in the market — call it quality, luck or pure genius! The fact remains that the magazine has evolved into the finest reading material available in the region.

The niche of the magazine has been its dynamic content and look. Evolution has been kind to *Thursday* and today the magazine has grown from 48 to 64 pages a week. Intermittently special issues are produced with more pages to cater to a topical demand. The most significant growth has been in terms of amount of interaction with the readers. From an almost one-way communicator, *Thursday* has evolved into a readers' own magazine. Not only does the magazine carry contributions like *Take a Break*, *Words and Verses* and recipes but there are also regular columns from local contributors like *Doctor's column*, *Beauty Tips*, *Food Facts* and *Word Wise*.

The reader interest specifically spiralled after the contests were introduced, the first being *Take a Break* contest followed by *Cookery* and *Words and Verses*. Today the magazine is running four different contests simultaneously and the readers don't seem to get enough of either!

November 2004 marked the fifth anniversary of the magazine. The occasion was celebrated with a 120-page special issue, which received rave reviews from the readers and the market. This milestone behind, the magazine can only go further on the path of popularity and promises to do so in the most dynamic manner possible.

None of this would have been possible but for the interest and support of the readers.



Refreshing tea after a full-course meal

LEISURE offers the readers the much-needed respite everyday from the stories of gory violence. Originally produced in tabloid format, *Leisure* is now part of the main edition and throws the spotlight on varied subjects. Besides inspiring stories on lifestyle, local cultural events, culture and heritage, people, health, food, travel and tourism are the broad categories finding expression on the supplement's four pages.

All these years *Leisure* was mainly filled with subscribed features catering to a select audience. Of late, efforts are being made to zoom in on local interest subjects which give an insight into different strands of cultural life in Oman – whether it is heritage, crafts, lifestyle, travel, people – preferably with a strong human element. Most of the features have lasting educative and informative value.

Leisure's lifestyle stories are focused on wholeness and life experiences. It is about healing experiences that allow us to make the most of our potential and find our best possible place in the world. It captures the uniqueness of life.

Leisure also carries the world-famous Tony James features which highlight musical hits, profile top Hollywood stars, narrate tales stranger than fictions and give an opportunity to test your legal skills through 'verdict'.

Then there is a weekly quiz presented by Derek O'Brien, the celebrated quizmaster, challenging you to test your knowledge on varied subjects.

Our travel stories capture the essence in a way that inspires readers to visit the places.

Leisure employs a tone which is gracious, welcoming, interesting and cultured; proud of its Omani heritage and yet outwardly looking, embracing other cultures of the world around.

Leisure is informative. It is packed with a slew of information ranging from TV listings, airlines schedules, museum timings, pharmacy contacts, movie schedules, etc.

It offers a platform for children to share their birthdays with others.

Leisure's 'With Love' column is always crowded with innocent faces celebrating their birthdays.

Humour, if used tactfully, can be a great way to capture the attention of the audience. And *Leisure* prides itself to offer the readers humour in the form of cartoons, jokes, limericks which are light, elevating and rejuvenating. There is an interesting word game called 'Scrolex' and crossword everyday to improve your vocabulary skills.

To put in a nutshell, *Leisure* is like drinking a refreshing tea after a full-course meal.





The best of Bollywood and Hollywood



Entertainment Times was born in June 2001 in magazine format and took its broadsheet avatar in April 2003. The rebirth was more memorable as there were just two days for the transformation, two harrowing days to deliberate over content, layouts and the final printing. The entire team worked day and night to deliver an international look to eight colourful pages.

Et has captured a niche in the market which was hitherto untapped by other publications.

It is a comprehensive guide to the entertainment world, which includes the best of Hollywood and Bollywood, the literary world and, most importantly, food and fun. Features are sourced from world-class syndicated agencies like *Los Angeles Times-Washington Post, The New York Times News Service* and *The Independent.*

Any event in town, *et* make sure it reaches there first. Any celebrity in town and *et* makes sure he/she is featured. Stories are taken in the main edition first and exclusive interviews are carried in *et.*

Many important celebrities like Jagjit Singh, Pankaj Udhas, Naseeruddin Shah, Adnan Sami, Hariharan, Mohan Lal, Zila Khan, Karine Polwart and many others have graced *et* pages.

Our weekly column 'Band In Town' helps the partygoer to decide which band in which restaurant or hotel really rocks!

The food and fun pages are a veritable source of information on what's happening on the hotel and restaurant scene in Oman. The pages, besides providing a comprehensive roundup of events happening at hotels and restaurants, also features a popular 'Dining Out' column.

Et gets invited to the popular eating-out joints for reviews of menus and food promotions.

'The Dining Out' column is your window to buffets and a la carte menus, of cuisines ranging from Chinese to Lebanese in mouth-watering details. *Et* is proud to have reviewed the best of food at the best of restaurants and hotels.

For the entertainment buff, there are views and reviews of films and, not to mention, gossip too. An avid music lover can scan the pages to find music reviews, profiles of popular artistes and lyrics of their favourite songs.

A separate section for book lovers and home viewing makes sure other popular segments are taken care of.

Bold headlines, classy layouts and aesthetic colours have become *et's* hallmarks. But it will also be our endeavour to bring out our own little changes soon.

30 Year Special

Features Plus



Here we are friends

Suzy Fontes
Reporter for *Thursday*

BLAME it on age or on the complacency of having been with the company for almost 13 years – yes, incredibly, 13 (long?) years – that recalling/retracing all those years seems achingly difficult. I am tempted to colour it with my dose of farcical imagination and present a masterpiece of a tenure that has had its moments of excitement, sloth, creativity, restraint, tears, reprisal… But this is from the heart!

Long…? Does seem so in retrospection as I count the years, but it has been more like a winking of an eye — an exaggerated winking of an eye!

Achingly difficult…? That's because I am on the verge of bidding a tearful adieu to my *Times* family, which began as a modern-day nuclear family, but one that has grown into a little community with relatives from far and near.

As the *Times* completes 30 years, I am amazed that I have been a part of nearly half of that! Against my previous track record of job stations that whizzed by without prodding me to stay put for more than a year, this long *Times* trip does seem amazing.

It was the first day of this building — the building that has since borne the name 'Oriental Printing Press' on its facade…

Nervous to the roots of my goosepimply hands, I ventured into the building, more like a first-time thief hoping to get caught and punished for even thinking up the act. What was I doing here? If anybody had ask me that question I would have looked dumbly, searching for my voice that I had left outside the freshly painted door. I wondered several times if I had ventured into a strange territory. There was an atmosphere of cheeriness as people went about screaming for chairs and desks and wondering aloud where the heck they are supposed to pitch tent. It was reminiscent of a family shifting into a new home.

My initial apprehension was lost in the eye-over I received from several of my soon-to-be-colleagues, who were more curious about this little girl in a frock. All the 'this way's led me to my little cubbyhole, which despite all my self talk 'five-years-is-all-that-I-need' has accommodated me all these long years.

From the first by-lined story to the first column, I have had my share of journalistic ups and downs. I have stood the test of time, so to say.

I have let frustration sweep over me when insensitive folks have remarked 'You are from *Times of Oman*… Tee hee… Don't you guys check spellings?'

I have almost hung myself when a 'lady' threw tantrums and wanted to retract all that she had said in a story with a standard retort, 'I have been misquoted', making me carry a corrigendum in the next edition stating that she had not said a word of what she was purported to have said in the previous story.

I have broken a fuse many a times when secretaries to the big bosses have refused to put my line through or feigned that they were busy even when I had appointments for interview.

I have sweated it out when the driver 'forgot' to pick me up on time, making me dash memos to the department head.

I have had tiffs with my colleagues when I thought my point of view was right; but like all things family forgotten about it with a 'hi' the next day.

I have cussed myself no end when my inability to learn Arabic has lost me many a good story.

And I have grown. In years and in experience. I have matured. I have still miles to go and loads to learn, journalistically or otherwise, but I have gotten there, somewhere, where there is comfort in familiarity and warmth in appreciation.

I am still as human and do get frustrated and emotional, but the reasons are different today. Today I am able to retain my cool when a reader threatens to cancel his subscription for hurting his sensitivity with a story.

Today there is awe when I say I represent *Times of Oman*. There is instant recognition. There is a sense of achievement with every cover story or column churned week after week.

And that is thanks in no small measure to Mr Essa Al Zedjali, who appointed me as a reporter; sure I had it in me to deliver the goods. He has been a father figure.

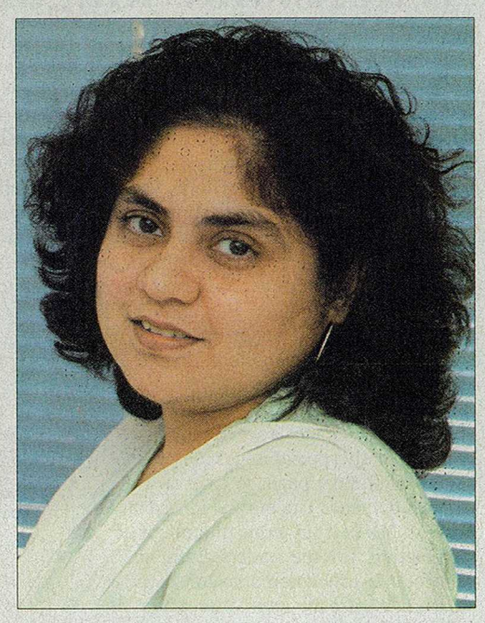
I belong to the *Times* family. As I clambered, trekked, faltered, jogged, whizzed through this *Times* train, I have formed lasting relations with my colleagues, bonded with some… And the fact that several of my colleagues have been around for more years than me, does prove the spirit of family, lingering in our corridors and our familiar, unkempt rooms.

In the Reporters Department of the *Times of Oman*, I have played my role, big or small, becoming a part of a publication which today is seen as a leader in the market.

Money, obviously, lured me to the Gulf, but I have been here for so many years purely because I loved my job. There is immense job satisfaction and there is the undefinable joy of working with friends. Here, at the *Times*, we are friends; friends who have been together through thick and thin.

Have always wondered what it meant to be through the thick and thin, and now, at the fag end of my tenure here, I am still unable to explain it, but the feeling of emerging victorious from the 'tick and thin' lingers.

I guess I am blessed!



Ridiculously in love with challenges

Hemani Kashikar
Sub-editor, incharge of *Thursday*

I HATE being in charge of *Thursday* magazine — because it takes away the pleasure of reading the best magazine on my weekend!

Really, before I took over *Thursday* in 2001, I used to look forward to my Thursday off. Now I am apprehensive. I get up and without even slipping on my slippers I am flipping from cover to cover, searching anxiously for mistakes, if any! It's a ridiculous way of starting the weekend but it's my job. I have spent more than three years with this superb product and yet I fail to get over this Thursday morning ritual. We did make mistakes and we still do but over the years the number of mistakes have dwindled. We have got the grip of the magazine and it's like a comfortable pair of jeans now — just right!

I know it's the same with every desk I have held since I started working in '96.

Luckily I was fresh and escaped getting ulcers producing the lifestyle and trade magazine I was working with in Mumbai. In fact, now that I think of it, even teaching was similar. My stint with undergrads only taught me that when you take a job seriously, it is fraught with tensions and challenges. But youth lives on the adrenaline that rushes through the veins with each new demanding situation. The pleasure is learning while being paid for it! I was with *Leisure* when suddenly I was shifted to *Thursday* — and all I thought was 'well, another day, another challenge!' But it's easier said than done. No matter what I say in public, it does make a lot of difference what people say and how they react to each and every issue, each and every week.

The job is neither easy, nor is it impossible but it keeps throwing challenges. And that's what keeps me hooked. There are times when weeks pass in a monotony of one magazine after another. Times when I secretly feel I have had enough but then comes a special issue, a special story, a special reader request and I am back on track. Firing questions, looking for answers, pictures, contributions.

Of course, I have loads of help. The pagemaker might want to kill me half the week but he goes along with whatever I say the rest of the week. The proofreader-cum-assistant-cum …(girl Friday actually) would love to display my head on her desktop at times, but on Thursdays we exchange a quiet drink and laugh the feeling away! And so it goes on — the story I now am proud to be connected to — *Thursday*.

30

MANY CONGRATULATIONS
TIMES OF OMAN
FOR ILLUSTRATING THE NATION
WITH WORDS FOR THIRTY YEARS NOW.

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Just do it…buzz that launched a career

Rekha Baala
Sub-editor, incharge of entertainment times

IT is 4:45pm. I am in the middle of writing a 'scrumptious' story. If I remember right, it was on a sumptuous Chinese dinner I had at a five-star hotel the previous week. Somewhere in between the hakka noodles and stir-fried vegetables in Sczhewan sauce, the editor summons me.

"Yes?" I query with some trepidation.

His face is passive. "Can you meet this person from X airline?" he asks.

I am stunned.

All I can murmur in reply is, "But that is a business story…"

"That's okay. You can do it!" he replies.

But when is it?" I try the time tactic to try and rope in some other unsuspecting reporter.

His voice is calm.

"Now. It is at 5pm!"

I do not wait for the conversation to end. I rush to my desk, fling my bag on my shoulder and run. Thank God for small mercies that the venue for the meeting, Sheraton Oman Hotel is just next door.

And for the next 20 minutes I bluff my way through my task. I try hard to stop myself from asking inane questionsI also say silent prayers so that my dictaphone does not conk off in between the interview. And as I hold the press release in my hand I thank God once again.

"You can do it!"

Initially this statement pounded on my ears. Though I cannot say that they sound sweet after all these years, more often than not, they are a kind of wake up call. A wake up call to yet another challenge, a wake up call to a new subject to be researched on, a wake up call to *just do it* — like that world famous brand tells you to!

These wake up calls have given me a continuous urge to learn; because only when you learn can you earn… I mean write.

Whether it is an article on Pranic Healing, an interview with a ministry official, a profile of a popular singer or a roundup of hotel happenings, there is so much to learn. I have done stories on most beats, local, business as well as features except for maybe, sports.

Though I wouldn't say no to an interview with my son's favourite hero Hamed Al Wahaibi.

Are there perks to my job?

Yes, as *entertainment times* (*et*) incharge I get to meet interesting people like singers and actors. I get to review the best food in town — besides devouring some. Editing *ICE Times* (though mind-baffling in the beginning) has not made me a geek as yet but has at least made me tech-savvy.

As a reporter for a leading newspaper, most people treat me with respect when I approach them for news. My first byline and many of those that followed have given my confidence a tremendous boost.

But above all these, there is a strong sense of satisfaction that comes from a flexible, non-interference policy (especially from the editor) that helped me thrive and succeed. Not to mention the support of the editor and my colleagues who have arranged interviews, given me leads and helped me with editing.

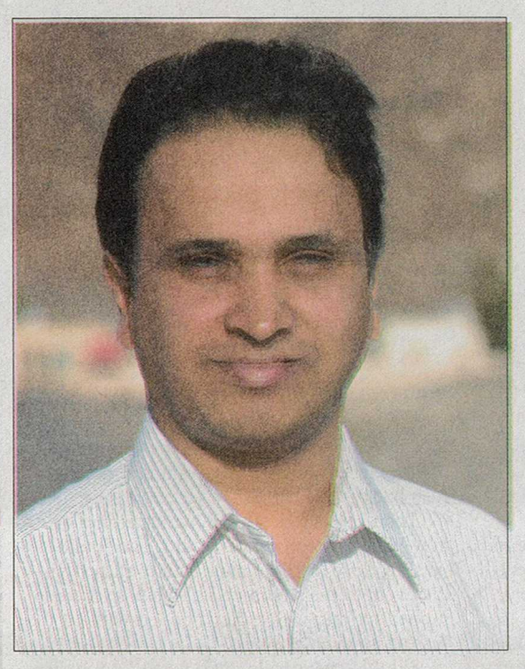
Believe me, I would never have been able to spread my wings and take the flight of imagination I have in any other organisation.

On the flip side, there are instant deadlines and late nights; heartburn and acidity; and even the Writer's Block, which I reckon is a given. But there is no monotony as such.

As *Times* along with *Leisure, Thursday, ICE Times* and *et* goes from strength to strength, there are only more stories for me to unravel and *just do it* wake up call to follow.

Rekha Baala is in-charge of Entertainment Times, edits ICE Times, reports for Times Leisure and the main edition besides handling a small section of Thursday magazine.

Features Plus



Milestones to cross, promises to keep

Aftab H. Kola
Sub-editor, incharge of *Leisure*

IT'S a privilege to be a part of an organisation which has just crossed a milestone and celebrating the eventful 30 years. The saga of *Times of Oman* will continue to unfold as time marches on and reaches heights of greater glory.

There are many more milestones to cross, promises to keep, jubilees to celebrate. The flame lit 30 years ago by Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, our chairman and editor-in-chief, will steadily grow and set aglow the path of generations yet to come.

My association with *Times of Oman* is not long and yet I feel I have been a part of it from the beginning. When I joined the *Times* had already carved a niche in the domain of print journalism in the region. That does not mean that we keep oiling the engine as a routine exercise but need to pump in more efforts to maintain the dominance lest we lose the kingship.

Before I took up employment with the *Times*, Oman has been my favourite stop-over whenever I flew from India on my way to Saudi Arabia to meet my parents who are settled there for the last 25 years. I can still recollect my very first visit to Oman. It was in 1990, there wasn't a hint of breeze and heat radiated from everywhere. Yet I loved the place which exuded a quaint and magical experience! It was the spirit and liveliness of the place that attracted people like me to Oman. Even today, notwithstanding the massive development going on, the basic spirit has remained unchanged.

And thus when I was asked to join the *Times* I was delighted. At the *Times* I manage the *Leisure* desk. *Leisure* is a four-page daily pull-out (except Thursday) which throws spotlight on varied subjects like lifestyle, culture and heritage, health, food, travel, people, etc. besides being packed with a slew of useful information.

General reporting has been my forte and only occasionally I used to contribute feature stories to whichever newspaper I worked for. But my stint with the *Saudi Gazette*, a popular English daily brought out from Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, gave me ample opportunities to focus on feature writing. *Leisure* all these years have been carrying subscribed features. Now, efforts are being pursued to focus the lenses on local interest subjects. That means, due to lack of a features reporter I have to penetrate into the Omani and expat communities to dig out interesting storylines. Armed with a smattering of Arabic (unlike Saudi Arabia most Omanis in the urban areas know English and Hindi) I venture out twice a week to different places hunting for stories. And Oman is a happening place so there is no dearth of stories. In the coming months readers will be treated to more local fare in the pages of *Leisure*.

To handle *Leisure* you need to be more than a journalist. Coordinating with a number of people who sends us all kinds of information, ranging from TV listings to movie schedules, is slightly irritating but nevertheless fun.

Though the overall atmosphere is one of bonhomie but sometimes the pressure of working with limited resources can have a toll on our personality. But, we do respond to such eventualities with all the zeal and responsibilities so that the quality is not affected and *Times of Oman* moves ahead with all its might.

Sheer joy of working

Swati Dasgupta
Proofreader, Thursday



I HAVE an identity crisis. Don't get me wrong. Nobody is to be blamed for this.

On records I am the proof-reader of *Thursday* magazine. I take care of the finer nuances and all the 'misses and slips' of the magazine at its grooming stage. In short I pore over the 64-page weekend every week and I guess there's no raison d'être to elaborate on that.

But call it my over-enthusiasm or my plain and simple folly, off records I have become 'Jack-of-all-trades' where *Thursday* is concerned. (Though I still wonder whether I have mastered any one or not.)

Any missing picture, last-minute captions, a pending unedited story, an urgent clarification, an article to be written, or an unwell in-charge — the gap is always filled and the need is always met with 'no noise' at all.

Thursday desk has the big responsibility of handing over the right coupons to the right winners. Different contests, different rewards and different faces … it's a Herculean task indeed to retain and recall every detail on time! Allow me self-praise for a while. I have been blessed with a pretty good memory, especially when it comes to faces.

Maybe a God's gift but the gift is indeed a boon, it saves lot of our time and embarrassments.

In absence of the *Thursday* incharge I conveniently step into her shoes completely 'in charge' — voluntarily. But in her presence I quietly slip back to my own role with no hang-ups whatsoever.

'Who asked you to deliver these 'extras'?' One may retort reading this account of self-praise. No one apparently. I personally feel it is the colossal growth of the magazine in these five years and the demand of the desk — which currently requires lot of assistance — have made my 'additional participation' mandatory. It was also my desire to learn the tricks of the trade and the challenge thrown at me by the incharge, albeit politely, "can you do it?" But most of all it's the sheer joy of working as a team without the barriers of the pre-conceived roles that makes all the difference.

By All Accounts



3 DECADES OF BREAKING NEWS — TIMES OF OMAN

Atul Deshmukh
Group Financial Adviser

FINANCE and accounts is a critical support function of the MPPH. Though in the background most of the times, it ensures that cash and funds, which is the bloodline of every commercial enterprise, are flowing smoothly through the establishment. It will not be wrong to say the department is the face of company, to the extent it means honouring the commitments, settling the dues and ensuring that the contractual obligations are met.

We are proud to be associated with MPPH, a company that is a leading media and publishing house in Oman. Opportunity to interact with interesting people from different walks of the life can definitely be considered as a perquisite of working with the MPPH.

We, in the accounts and finance department feel honoured that, we are a part of *Times of Oman*, the flagship paper of MPPH, living legacy that is already a legend and byword in the field of journalism in the Sultanate of Oman.

The department that was a part-time operation when the *Times* began its journey towards eventual glory is now a full-fledged one with double-digit staff and a virtual hive of activity.

It will not be inappropriate to state here that level of Omanisation within the department is a healthy 58 per cent, which is quite in excess of the government-mandated requirement.

It will be our endeavour to ensure that various components of both internal and external environment are serviced to the best of our ability. This will contribute and supplement the effort of all other departments of MPPH in containing to garner the goodwill and affection of its readers, advertisers and all of its well-wishers. We, in accounts and finance, extend our heartiest greetings and best wishes to the *Times* on its 30th anniversary. We also wish years and years of sustained growth to *Times of Oman*.

Congratulations
to
TIMES OF OMAN
on their
30th
Anniversary
celebrations

Indian Social Club Muscat

30 Year Special

In the Picture

This is the tale of a one-man army, who captures not just your image, but also your soul. Himself an almost omnipotent personality present nearly everywhere, every function, every do, every beat, the man who has captured agony and ecstasy, dreams and reality and life and death with an almost deadpan face and a heart beating not just because he has a deadline to meet, but because he feels, he cares as he saves these images for posterity – your posterity



Rodolfo Alfonso
Staff Photographer

Picture perfect

IT was 1990. Gulf War was brewing in the neighbourhood… I realised if I wait for it to begin, my chances of getting to Oman in time would be remote. So, having been appointed by the then editor Arthur Cushing, who came to Manila for the selection, I joined *Times of Oman* in November of that year. But I officially began work for the paper on December 1, 1990, at the then *Times* office in Muttrah, where the Oriental Pharmacy is now housed. It was still a tabloid, on the verge of getting a 'daily' changeover.

As the photographer for the weekly tabloid, I initially had to use Oriental Printing Press dark room. In those days I had a Yashica camera which exposed half frame and so a roll of 36 films was good for 72 shots. And since it was a weekly paper, developing and printing the pictures also was a weekly affair.

It was only when we became a daily in the beginning of 1991 that I got to have a separate small dark room as well as a professional camera — Minolta Maxxum — with all the accoutrements.

Those were the black and white days.

I have been and I am the only photographer of *Times of Oman* and all its publications since. Although the task seems daunting, I have no complaints, thanks to colleagues who have been a constant source of encouragement and support. From the ministries to sports stadiums, from banks to hotels, I have covered every beat in the paper. With the introduction of daily *Leisure, Entertainment Times* and *Thursday*, I have been doing that much extra, but things have been smooth, so to say, thanks to the commensurate advancement in the technological arena.

I still remember working in the dark room, manually agitating the exposed film in the process of developing it... Pan to the present and it is as simple as a click of the mouse to download pictures from the digital camera on to the computer.

Like any journalist returning to the office to key in the story, I had to come after every beat to develop the film and print pictures. In the process of developing, the film is put in the reel and the reel is put in the developing tank. Chemicals are poured into the tank and the top is closed before manually agitating the tank for eight minutes. After that the chemical is drained and it is washed with water, which again is drained.

The fixer is poured in and after five minutes, when it is fixed, the can is opened, the film is washed with water in a tray and hung for drying. After 15 minutes of drying, it is ready for printing.

However, since we did not have a developing tank, I would have to hold the ends of the film on separate hands and keep moving the hands up and down, like a see-saw, to agitate the film for eight minutes. All this, indeed took a long time, especially if there were several events on one single day and the deadline was looming.

To make things easier for the editor in selecting the pictures, I also used to make contact sheets. My photo library of negatives then used to be in little envelopes marked with the date and the event.

In 1995, with the onset of colour photography, things changed markedly. Now I had to take the roll to the studio, get the film developed, select good pictures, print the same and rush back to the office.

Then I had to deal with two deadlines — newspaper as well as the studio. The studio used to close at 10pm and I had to rush from the event to the studio or call them up to keep it open for me, which they obliged without fuss as it meant business.

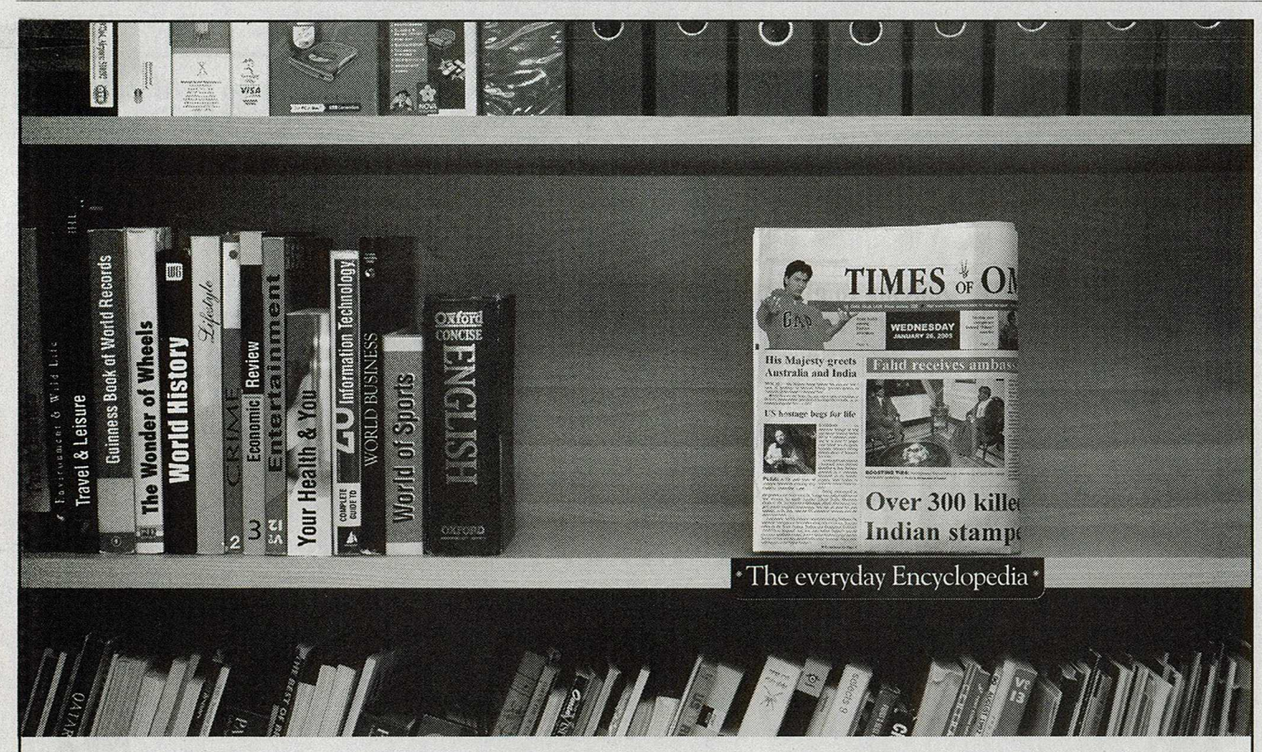
All that changed in 2000 when I got a digital camera, thanks to the farsightedness of Mr Mohammed Essa Al Zedjali, then CEO of *Times of Oman*.

I still rush from one assignment to another. I still lug around my camera and am a constant figure at most assignments. I still do the same task that I used to do when I first came here — that of clicking pictures. But what a change!

Today I return from an assignment, pull out the wires to fit in the memory card and there, all the pictures are downloaded onto my PC. I have the facility to preview pictures as soon as it is taken and can take more shots if it isn't good enough, without a thought to the number of films I would be using. And once the picture is downloaded I can correct it for brightness, etc without any problem. It is easy for my colleagues too.

They just have to fetch my share and select the pictures for their story. No more does the pagemaker have to scan the pictures. Now my picture library is vast with CDs of different events for every month.

With the *Times*, I have grown too.



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Mouse Power

No matter how good your story is, if it is not displayed well you may miss it. The 'Times' has, over years, blended convention and creativity, and the hands and brains behind the visual impact of the *Times* is our pagemakers. Without their speed, their imagination their skills, we would have been 'lost'. Here we unravel the faces behind the page



Samuel K. Belda,
Pagemaker, main edition

Ordinary to outstanding

IN late 1990, three merry Filipinos landed in the Sultanate of Oman for the first time. The trio were recruits of *Times of Oman*!

They were so excited about landing in the Sultanate of Oman that their feet was hardly touching the ground!

Indeed, we were! I remember, we (former editor Olimpo, and *Leisure* pagemaker Manny) couldn't sleep till the morning of the following day after landing here! We were chattering away, looking out of the window, our hearts beating and totally enjoying this ultra-clean, unpolluted atmosphere, which Oman has managed to maintain till today.

Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the chairman, and the then editor, Arthur Cushing, had recruited us from Manila. In fact, our interview was conducted at the Manila Garden Hotel (Hotel Nikko).

Seeing the *Times* advertisement in a local daily, I had applied for the post. I was working for a graphics company in the Philippines then, and so I was not really sure whether I should go. But, meeting up with Mr Essa and Arthur Cushing made me think I should get the job. I did and soon enough, I was sent my visa, and here I was!

The only initial hesitance was that it was 1990 and it was the start of the Gulf war. Also, my wife, May O' Belda, was pregnant with our second child. And it was the first Christmas that I had spent away from my family.

As I said, this was my first experience with a newspaper and everything was new and exciting for me. I was given Page 1 on the first day itself and even today I am doing the same.

In these years, I have learnt a lot and developed into a full-fledged pagemaker, with the ability to innovate, design and experiment, qualities which I owe to the *Times*.

I know what I was when I joined: an ordinary pagemaker, but I knew the *Times* was an innovative newspaper, especially with forward thinking people in the management, like Mr Mohammed Issa, who was the brains behind *Computer Times*, a tabloid that came with the newspaper.

So many exciting things have happened: and I can't list in my fingers the amazing growth of the *Times*. When we shifted to a new building, we were all struck by its squeaky clean and spotless environment. Everything was new and it was a great new beginning for all of us!

Slowly, we evolved into a fascinating newspaper, with an eye on the unusual, and the depth and verve to be bold and different!

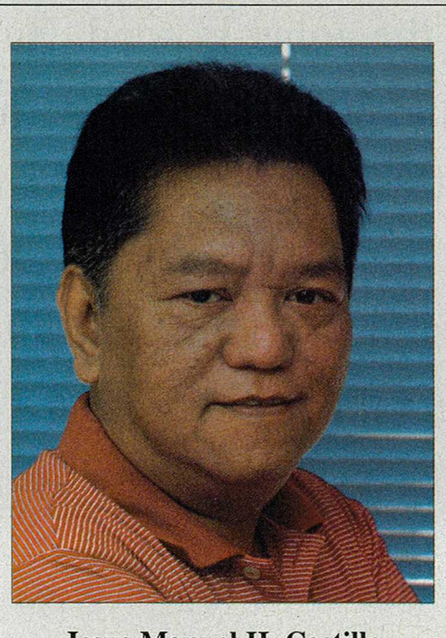
Designing Page 1 is quite serious business. It is not like working on a supplement or any other pages for that matter. It carries a certain weight and we have to maintain that level of seriousness.

I can say with a great degree of honesty that I have been a loyal part of this great newspaper. It has played a great role in cementing a solid future for me and I feel one with the *Times*. Because, it has given me this all-important role of a pagemaker.

Also, personally, it is gratifying to note that I am a full-fledged professional now, with the capacity to turn in a sparkling new page from just nothing! I must also confess, thanks to the *Times* stint, May and I have been able to have two kids, both 'made in Oman'!

May also had her stint with the *Times* as a temporary typesetter. Now, all of them are in the Philippines and I am planning to bring them back here, if time and fate permits.

Mouse Power



What I cherish most

Jesus Manuel H. Castillo
Pagemaker for *Leisure*

I WAS one of the three Muscateers, or rather the three Filipinos, who landed here in December 1990. Our former editor Olimpo, my colleague Sammy and I landed here some 15 years ago.

Till today, I am bitten by the same love bug for this wonderful newspaper.

I joined as a typesetter and was there for two to three years. The early days were tough, but I had proper background before joining the *Times*. That is to say, nearly 23 years of media experience before joining the *Times*.

My last job prior to the *Times* was with *Manila Bulletin,* where I worked as a programmer. That, coupled with the 15 years in the *Times,* I have 38 years of experience in the media, having joined this field when I was just 16 or 17.

But, it is the *Times* stint that I cherish the most. Media is such an exciting field and everyday brings in new surprises and wonders. As for the *Times*, the biggest enjoyment is being able to mix with many other nationalities, especially locals, whom I think are the friendliest beings on earth.

After nearly three to four years as a typesetter, I was asked to do pagemaking for *Leisure* and the *Weekend*. It was a lot of work then, but for me, it was a good learning process too.

As I said, being in media means getting daily surprises. And each surprise used to be a pleasant one, even if it meant more work. But, the best part of work is finishing it, then, it becomes an achievement and for me, each day, when I finish *Leisure*, I look back at it as an achievement. I love working with the *Times* and my 15 years is testimony to that.

Over the years, I have learnt quite a lot — be it computer concepts, pagemaking, layout and design, or the Internet — which has made me an out and out professional in my work.

I feel that both *Times* and I have grown today. I feel that it is one of the best newspapers in town, and not just because I work for it, but because I read it and know how good it is.

The *Times* will climb to greater heights in the future and achieve even bigger role in the world media.



Smile away your stress

Prem Anand
Pagemaker

STRESS is part of life. But, as far as I am concerned, stress should be tackled and done away with, totally!

In a newspaper, you deal with several levels of stress, today being more than yesterday and tomorrow being more than today.

In such a scenario, work can get affected if you do not put into practice several tactics to bring stress levels down. So, while I worked, I also embarked, parallely, on various methods to bring my mind to better levels of focus.

I believe that if I am focused, calm and my thoughts are all centralised, I can take my work to bigger heights.

And I have applied this philosophy in aspects of my work.

I joined as a typesetter on March 28, 1992. Prior to this, I had a six-month stint at the National Publishing and Advertising (NPA) in the artwork section.

But, at the *Times* I started out as a typesetter. Work was tough because of the volume of work and then, within months, I became a pagemaker, and things got even tougher, because I had to do both pagemaking as well as typesetting.

Well, I shouldn't be saying that: on some days, work was easy and other days, tough, depending on the flow of work on that day.

Years went by and as the *Times* grew, brick by brick, to the heights it has reached today, where it enjoys the position of a top newspaper in the Middle East. And my work also got better.

Still, each day is challenging. I don't like to compromise on work, so I keep learning new techniques to tackle each day. For instance, I have learnt meditation and am a practitioner of yoga. All of this has helped me take on any amount of work and cope with any stress level.

The *Times* office is a wonderful set-up and I am glad that I am working under such an editor like Prasad Panicker. Hats off to him, for we know the kind of work he does. Because he is such a hard worker, we cannot afford to shirk work in anyway. Sometimes I feel, we are all satellites revolving around him in the office and our functions are best determined by him.

I am married with two children: Mahalakshmi, four, and Akshayalakshmi, two-and-a-half years.

I feel comfortable working in this office. I feel happy and proud to be part of this great newspaper.



Pleasure and pain

Baby Sankaran
Pagemaker

I HAVE been with *Times of Oman* for the past 11 years. In these 11 years, I have been here on every working day of the *Times*, without fail. I don't know how I did it — but I did!

Also, two years from joining the *Times*, I developed back pain. Even today my back aches, without respite.

I am not a hero. Yet, sometimes, after finishing the load of work that is entrusted with me and I go home, I go with my head held high. For, only I know how it feels, working with a paining back.

Work is tough, but, thanks to the loyalty and dedication that I feel for this paper, I feel I have become tougher. Work comes first and everything else afterwards, so it is in this manner that I have moved ahead, ever since I joined the *Times* in May 1994. I joined as a typesetter and after three years I moved into pagemaking.

I was then given the task of making the pages for the eight-page *Leisure* and the 16-page *Weekend*. So, in a span of six days, I used to finish 24 pages, plus take on any other work, like filling in for those who have gone on leave.

Around 1998, I was shifted to the main edition and since then, I have been there.

During this period, I have learnt so much, worked and enjoyed every bit of it. While my capacity to work and my interest in the work, so has my family: My wife, Jolly, and I, have two kids: Vighnesh, eight years, and Vijaitha, two years.



Tension that never dissolves

Zachariah Kurilodil Koshy
Pagemaker for *Thursday*

ZACHARIAH Kurilodil Koshy, pagemaker of *Thursday* magazine, on tension that is seven days a week:

It is really wonderful to be part of this great organisation. I am proud of that and I am thankful to God for being one of *Times of Oman* staff. I joined *Times* on October 15, 1996 as a typesetter and within a year, I was moved up the ranks to be a pagemaker, a position which I am still holding. But I was initially doing pagemaking for the main edition, that is *Times of Oman*, after which I moved permanently to *Thursday*. This is a challenging job! Each day is a challenge, and on most days, I am totally lost in work … Yes, it is tough, but I love it.

While I was a typesetter, I also had to don the role of a librarian. That was not an easy task, but each challenge that posed itself before me was a learning process for me. I learned a lot as a librarian, a post I held for more than two years.

After taking my role as a pagemaker, I was put into a totally new and different environment, and more challenges were put before me.

Then, once again, I was taken off from the main edition to work for *Thursday*.

Even today, when the main edition pagemakers are on leave, I will sit in for them, as well as handle the library work when our librarian is on leave.

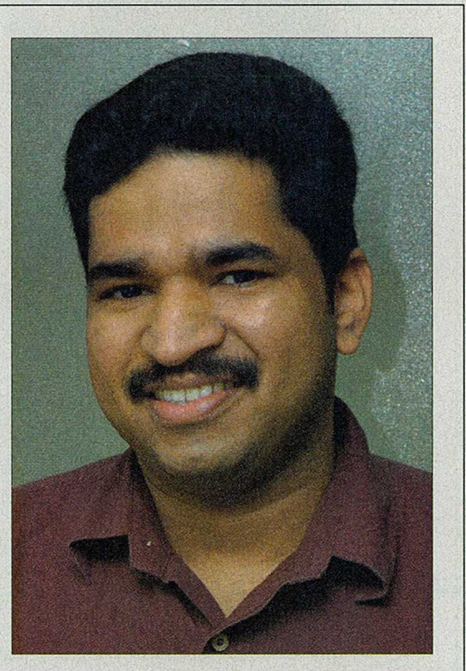
I have also assisted the person in charge of the web edition, when one of the two IT team members goes on vacation.

As far as the main edition was concerned, the tension was on a daily basis, which also dissolved the moment the work got over. But, not so with *Thursday*! Outsiders will never know the workings of a newspaper and magazine and will not understand the tensions within. But, can you create anything without hard work, without sweat and blood? No! I am sure that all of these efforts will add to my experience.

I love this job and this organisation. I am proud and grateful to be part of the *Times.*

My wife is Suja Zachariah and we have a delightful daughter, Stephy Ann Zachariah, who is three-and-a-half years old.

Two high points, and ever ready for new challenges



Sahir Vayappat
Pagemaker and team-member of *Times* web portal and *etimes*

SOMETIMES, you feel grateful for being part of a great set-up. You may not be the star performer there, yet you feel so good just being that drop in this ocean. I feel great about being part of the *Times of Oman*.

I joined this newspaper on April 11, 1998, as a typesetter. The beauty of it was that I did not stay long in the same position. Within three months, the computer system changed from Macintosh to IBM, and my position also changed to pagemaker.

With new position came new challenges and new problems. The job was tough, but I took it as a task that I must master to come up in life.

Every challenge is given to you for a reason – to overcome it and to master it!

A whole new world opened up before me and before I knew it, I was doing pagemaking work, updating of the Internet edition of the *Times* and also providing systems support. It was engrossing as well as exciting.

Today, I no longer do systems support, but work has grown manifold and it has encompassed every part of my life.

During this period, I also got married and my wife, Najira, is here with me.

I have been part of the *Times* on special occasions, and one of the biggest occasion during my time was the launch of the *Thursday* magazine, *Entertainment Times* and the Internet edition.

They are embedded in my memory as highlights of my career.

As for my capability, I leave that to the company to judge. I trust that I have contributed my mite, and if the company wants me to do more, I am only willing to — I feel, I must do my bit to give back to this company what it has given me — a sense of responsibility, a sense of ownership, pride and professionalism.

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office (P.O.L.O.) and

the Philipppine Overseas Workforce Welfare Administration (OWWA)

in partnership with the

Filipino Community Social Club - Oman (FILCOSOC)

extend their

Warmest and Sincerest Congratulations

to the

TIMES OF OMAN

on the occassion

of its 30th Year of Anniversary.

Special Felicitations is also given to its

Founder and Editor-in-Chief

Most Honourable ESSA BIN MOHAMMAD AL-ZEDJALI.

We Wish you all the Best!

30 Year Special

Proof Positive

When all hell breaks loose

They don't come in the picture when the going is good. But when the going goes wrong, as in this goning, they are in the limelight — at the receiving end. It's true the advent of computers has made their life a lot better, but this modern world of bomb blasts and bloodshed in the name of politics, ideology, regionalism or nationalism offers them little respite. Here, four of our proofreaders tell their side of the story

IN this age of computers and information technology where one gets to hear and read the news at the click of a button, there is a constant battle going on between the electronic media and the newspaper industry to cover the latest happenings taking place around the world.

This brings me to the mien of us proofreaders, a breed treated more like the bridesmaid than the bride in today's world of journalism.

Proofreading is a thankless job, which has been done away in most newspapers thanks to the arrival of the so-called IT age.

It was not always thus. Time was when these newspapers simply couldn't do without these "endangered species". Even today, no newspaper worth its salt can actually fly a flag without an observant, precision-driven human eye for absolute verification. If machines could do the trick, we wouldn't be here!

Today *Times of Oman* — the only e-paper in the Gulf, is celebrating a milestone as a newspaper thanks mainly to its dedicated team of journalists including proofreaders, who have — in a manor born — shed blood, sweat and tears all these years to put it where it is today against all odds.

What does all this mean to a layman? It means that right from the stage news blinks on the computer till it reaches the press there is always somebody there to hold the baby and most of the times it is our lesser appreciated breed since we are always considered to be the last line of defence!

If you are wondering where does the proofreader come into the picture and what role does he play, let me give you a gist of the work: a proofreader is involved at any given time — which is what enables you to find your morning cuppa with an error-free newspaper! There are of course, times when we have slipped — but then our folks are not alone in tripping in the line of duty.

For the benefit of the readers, here is how the grind is like:

On any given day at the office, one can find the sub-editors glued to their monitors to gather news from different news agencies and putting it together. This is then passed on to the pagemakers, who then give it to the proofreaders to scan them for errors.

There are finer parts to our trade, which very few, if at all, among the ordinary readers are aware of. This pertains to the sensitive side of information. If we are not on our toes all the time, sure as hell we're done for (remember the last line of defence part?).

In a nutshell, we do our job to the best of our ability, we don't get noticed. Ironically, however, one big mistake and we storm back into the picture with the result that all hell breaks loose. Like the age-old adage goes, "Nobody notices what we do until we don't do it."



Calvin Bearder
Chief Proofreader

Where it all began

IT'S almost a decade-and-a-half to the day since I set foot in this country. Not knowing anything about its people or culture, I jumped headlong for the offer. It was the job of a proofreader at the *Times of Oman*.

I was nervous at the beginning but then, who is not, especially when one leaves his motherland for a new venture?

I thought to myself if I have to make a man of myself I have to accept whatever comes my way. So like an Englishman in New York, I strutted off for the *Times*, trying to find my bearings.

I began work, showing no fear for the loads of proofs I had to read. I read them all — after all I had already seven years of experience under my belt. But then, I did not expect to be the only guy handling a 12-page edition.

This went on for a couple of years with all its ups and downs, till one fine morning I was told that I would get someone to share my burden.

Now, after almost 15 years, I still have to pinch myself when I think how I survived all these years. Let me tell you, I love my job, my colleagues around me and the *Times of Oman*, because it is this company which has provided me with a life that I love so much.

And I am proud to be one of the lucky guys who will be celebrating this joyous occasion.



Ashish Dubash
Proofreader

I don't need to ask for more

'HOW will you manage the late night shifts," my hubby frowned seeing my appointment letter. This was his instant reaction knowing my plans to work as a proofreader for *Times of Oman*. His worry was justified.

Working for the main desk, i.e. the newspaper, late nights were inevitable. And being the only lady at the desk then was not easy either.

But I was so interested in being part of a newspaper that I could not decline.

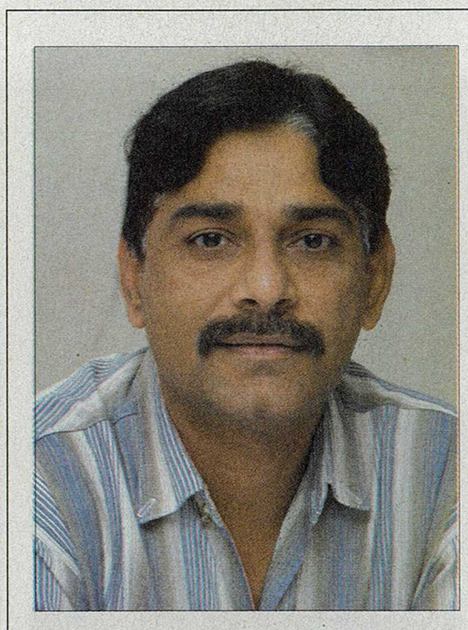
Many years have passed since that day and I am still delivering my work everyday with the same sincerity.

I have seen *Times* grow from the typesetting era to the fully computerised period. I have seen the making of *Thursday* from its infant stage; *Entertainment Times* witnessed its first dawn after a month of late nights at office… I have said good luck and goodbye to many and have also welcomed the newcomers… reminiscences are plenty to bind in few words.

To speak about the existing times I am proofreading *Leisure*, and also reading the main edition.

And that's not all. *Entertainment Times* gets brushed up under my vigilant eyes in the final stage as I have the knack to spot the last minute mistakes (the *et* incharge will vouch for that.) The gourmet in me savours the best of food around to tell all what to relish and what not to. Times have changed in '*Times'* indeed but I am just the same … always enthusiastic, chirpy, flashy and loud.

To sum up my 'earnings' of many years … I can never forget the prayers of my colleagues when I was fighting for my life in hospital … my most precious gift for my long years of dedication and hard work. Should one ask for more?



Zafar Aslam
Proofreader

Proof lies in the pudding

THEY say the proof of the pudding lies in its eating. It does, I can tell you!

The lot of proofreaders is both heartbreaking and backbreaking: one is connected to the other. I mean we virtually strain our backs to get the word right — to use a figure of speech — yet, if it does not come off, inevitably, we have to suffer a heartbreak!

And when all this happens, nobody seems to notice as to who cooked the pudding in the first place — in this case, the sub-editor or whoever looking for a convenient scapegoat.

It reminds me of the story of the wolf and the lamb. When the wolf ran out of ideas to eat the lamb, he just blamed the poor lamb for muddying the waters of the stream from where he was drinking water! As they say, someone's gotta give — and you know whose neck conveniently goes on the chopping block, then.

Enough of puddings and muddying waters.

My association with the *Times of Oman* is not very old, neither is it new. A stable job was all that I was looking for back in 1998 and a leave vacancy for a proofreader ushered me towards the world of news, views — and a short fuse!

A background in science and Master's degree in agriculture were my strong points but it doesn't require rocket science or cultivation of land to know that you carry just an atomic particle's weight in God's universe. This is not to suggest I was in any way discouraged. Rather in due course, I began to enjoy the 'by-products' of my labour.

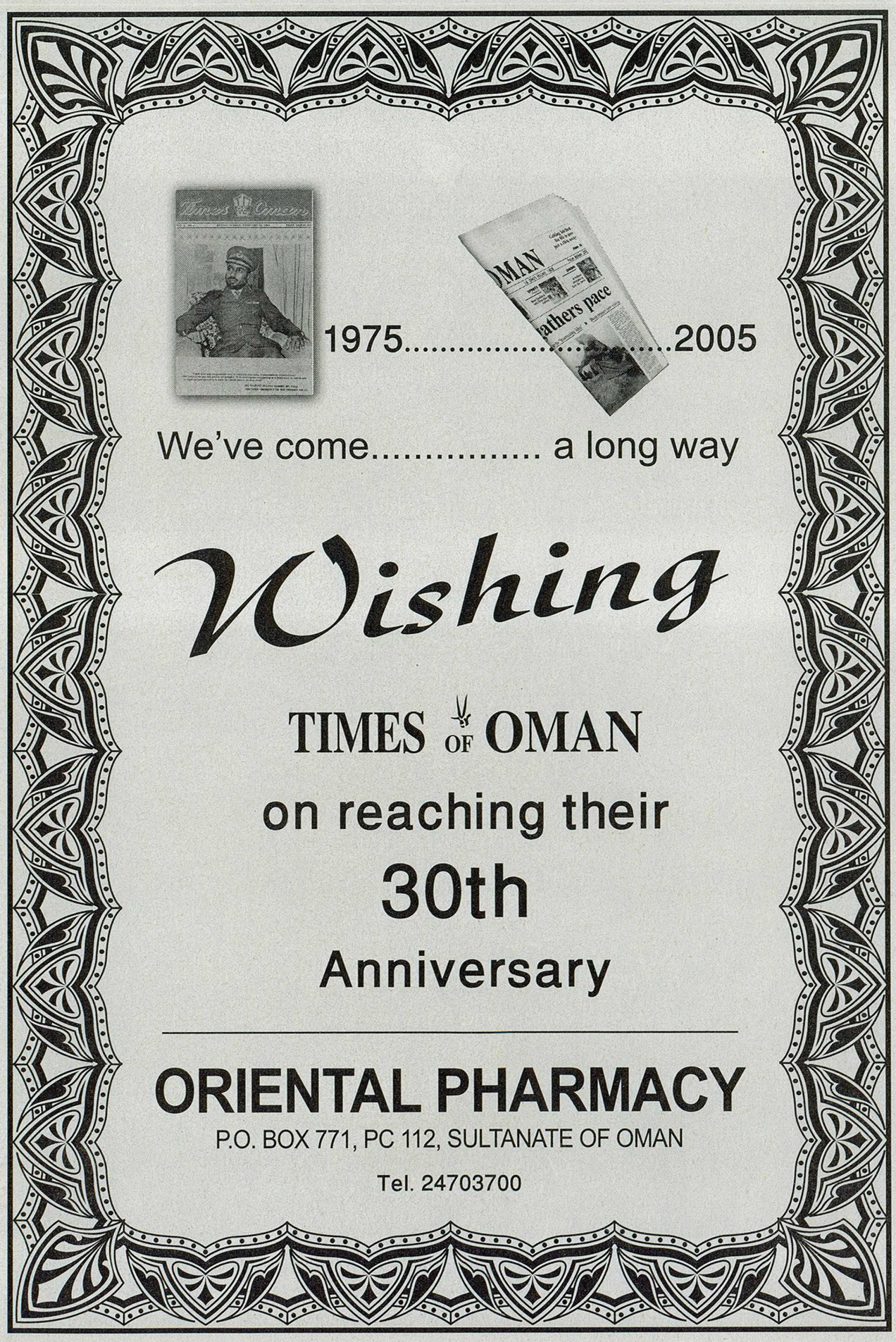
Not only was I getting a hang of my work, I was literally "in the news" if you can call it that! I mean where else can you be a beneficiary of getting information with such flurry as part of doing your work — in this case looking for proof errors and verifying the corrections.

Who would have known that leave vacancy would become a boon in a job that appears from a distance to be a bane. I enjoy my work to the hilt. But a line of disappointment surfaces time and again when efforts that are put in behind those flawless pages of news and information are less recognised than expected. But then I guess that goes with the territory.

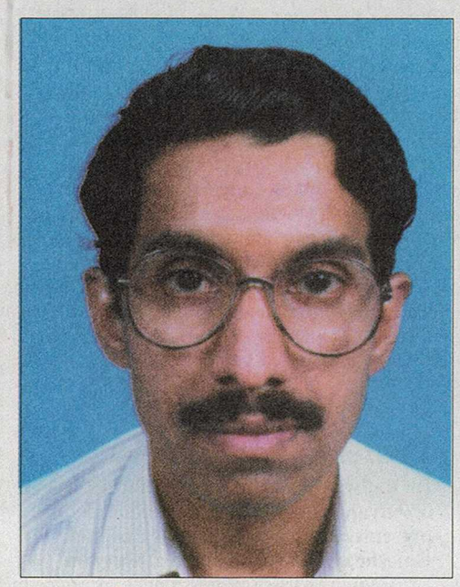
Regardless of the satisfaction or disappointment, the crux of the matter is that every day, in the hands of the reader is a neat display of news for which we work day-in and day-out with passionate zeal.

Certainly, the feeling of contentment is more than discontentment. This keeps me fully committed in all conditions — an injured back, a sick child at home and a sudden crisis at the desk (I'm accustomed to all these and more) — there has never been a moment when I have dropped my shoulders.

Here's wishing you all a nice pudding!



Proof Positive



Mr Dedication, from day one

K.A. Nazar
Proofreader

IN 1990 when *Times of Oman* was spending its last days as a tabloid and was graduating to a full-fledged broadsheet newspaper in Oman there were just two in the proof-reading department.

This meant that there was going to be added pressure on the proofreaders so we took the opportunity of asking the editor that since the workload was going to increase, he should try to beef up our department so that we are able to cope with the pressure.

And sure enough, he was able to get us an additional proofreader – a man who spoke only in monosyllables!

The editor introduced him to us and asked us to give him some work, so we gave him a couple of proofs to go through: he took his time, but he seemed to be all right. Our main worry was whether he would cope with the pressure, especially when the chips were down?

We threw him a couple of general questions regarding work and he seemed confident. There was this glint in his eyes, which told us that he was willing to learn and sure he did.

But he seemed to have got his basics right from the initial part itself and that was what we were all concerned about. Because, at the end of the day what mattered most was that the newspaper should be error-free.

So as the days went from weeks to months and the months went to years he remained with us and is still with us thanks to the dedication that he showed when at the table and we are very grateful to the editor for giving us someone of his calibre. Not only is he meticulous in his job, he is hard working, and to this day his love for the job has not waned, which only goes to show that if one is willing to learn and give it his best there is no way that anyone can put you down.

A decade has passed and he is still with us and he still shows the same enthusiasm that he had shown when he joined us and we can all vouch for that he has been an asset to the department from day one. On any given day you can see him going through the proofs so minutely that you would say to yourself, 'I wonder if he does ever get the newspaper at home?' But, then that was his style and there was nothing that was going to change his set pattern for working.

Even at the end of the day, when we are all ready to pack up and get out of the office you could get a glimpse of his magnifying glass, which he uses to spot any error, and as though that was not good enough, he would ask each and everyone if the headlines or the datelines were correct.

If he doubted you, he would go back and check it for himself, to be satisfied. So that is why we are so proud of him.

● *Nazar is back in India on health grounds, and is undergoing treatment. This piece has been written by his colleagues and we all wish him speedy recovery.*

Pressing Ahead

Where colour comes alive

Jose Mathew
Press in-charge



EVEN though the system of communication is so advanced, the newspaper still sieves as the important source of news. The main purpose of the newspaper is to collect and reproduce current affairs to the public.

So many are involved in the publishing of a newspaper, and the printing press is the final department where the main task of production takes place.

In the olden days all departments of *Times of Oman* like editorial, pre-press and press used to work in the same building. Now with the advancement of technology and computerisation of every field, the situation has changed: The papers are compiled in one area at the editorial headquarters and printing is being done at a different location.

Our printing press is located in Wadi Kabir, away from the main office and the new press was commissioned on October 15, 2000, with sophisticated, modern machineries. The Arabic daily *Al Shabiba* and the English daily, *Times of Oman,* are printed in colour (page 1 and 2 and the sports page). The paper includes, on a weekly basis, other publications like the *ET*, *Times Business*, *Leisure*, *Times Al Muhharak* and *Thursday* magazine.

Once the editorial section is ready for the next day's edition, the pages are transmitted from the pre-press centre to the press through computers. The image setter at the printing press delivers this as film. This film is then used to produce aluminium-printing plates, which is already available in the form of chemical coated aluminium plates in the press. Here in our press we are using four colours, i.e. yellow, magenta, cyan and black. For each colour separate plates are made. These plates are used in printing machine to reproduce the images as real and original letters and pictures. Huge paper reels are used in the printing press, which is cut as the daily or magazine.

The separately printed papers comes out as the gathered and folded newspaper automatically through the machine, which is ready for distribution in the early morning.

The success of our department depends on the team efforts of the department head, the press-in-charge, distribution supervisor Amjed, preventive and breakdown maintenance and electrical/mechanical supervisor Devadas. Moreover, we have efficient cameramen, good paste-up artists, plate makers, printers, binding and cutting artists.

The workers are ready to deliver the goods, be it night or day, according to the peak and light hours. Printing is done mainly during night but when there is an additional supplement like *Thursday* they have to work day and night.

There is excellent cooperation among our staff members, which help us in publishing the newspaper in time. The management has given full responsibility of the press to us, which also makes decision-making and implementation easy and faster.

List of printers and despatch staff

Jose Mathew, Prod. Press In-charge, Amjad Fakir Mohamed, Distribution Supervisor; Devadas, Elec. Technician; Rajasekharan,Cameraman; Raj Kumar, Paste-up Artist; Abdul Rehman, Paste-up Artist, Nagarajan, Paste-up Artist; Masilamani, Plate Maker; Sanjeev, Plate Maker; Raman Kumar, Printer; Murali, Printer; Rajesh,Printer; Sivakumar, Printer; Vinod, Printer; Antony, Printer; Mehmood Khamis, Assistant; Kapil, Assistant; Mustaq,Assistant/Binding; Sayed Ahmed, Assistant/Binding; Salim Ali, Assistant/Binding; Bijesh Kumar, Assistant/Binding; Ummer Farooq, Assistant/Binding; Mohd Nasser, Assistant/Binding; Vincent, Tech./Cutting M/c; Junaid Mohd, Tech./Cutting M/c; Younnis, Assistant; Hussain Khamis, Assistant; lorish, Assistant; Mohd. Abri, Assistant.



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30 Year Special

Readers' Write

Readers are our strength. *The Times* is forever indebted to the readers who have welcomed our initiatives and offered constructive criticism. That motivates us. The support of our readers each and every day of these past 30 years is what makes us tick. Over to some of our readers



Part of my lifestyle

Kanak G Khimji, Partner, Khimji Ramdas

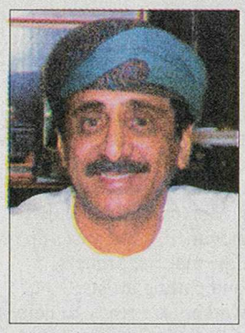
THE *Times of Oman* has been part of my lifestyle ever since it started 30 years ago. My day is not complete without it. The *Times* is quite a mature newspaper. It has relevant editorials, provides excellent reporting of local events and gives wide coverage of international news. These have been the hallmarks of this paper. The *Times* is well on its way to becoming an institution in our nation. With competition intensifying, I am certain that the *Times* will rise to the challenge, adapt and innovate in tune with the changing expectations of its readers and continue to be a leader. I wish it all the best.



Needed: more focus on local tourism

Ali Al Kiyumi, director-general of Nature Conservation at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources

I HAVE been a regular reader of the *Times of Oman* for the past five years and I am drawn to the articles focusing on the environment. Local articles on such subjects make interesting reading and I have been following every story written on such lines. However, I would like to see more articles on tourism to encourage residents here to take it up as a weekend venture. It would be good to have a weekly feature on a particular spot, prodding readers to visit that place with relevant information. Another thing that I wish all publications would seriously consider is publishing reports of forthcoming events, giving readers all the details required to participate in it, at least a week before it takes place. Very so often we read about the event after it has taken place. Moreover, I wish readers would respond positively to issues raised in the media with proper feedback so that it can be taken up at various levels.



Newspapers to stay

Maqbool Hameed, chairman, OHI Group of Companies

THE *Times of Oman* stands out as a quality newspaper in the media market in Oman. It has adequate news coverage, and the reporting is timely as also incisive. The subjects covered are well diversified satisfying every interest group. I have been reading the *Times* during its last three decades of publishing life. I believe that the paper has matured in terms of quality over the years. With the rapid changes in technology, Internet communication being the most pervasive manifestation, people were expecting that newspapers would disappear. This has not happened for those newspapers that have kept up with the challenge to continue to attract their readers' interest and attention. I believe that the *Times* will meet such challenges and continue to flourish during the next three decades and more. I wish the owners and the entire *Times* family best of luck in this endeavour.



Candid and factual

Pankaj K. Khimji, Partner, Khimji Ramdas

THE *Times of Oman* is a candid and factual newspaper, and these are two aspects that I like of it. In the last three decades, the *Times of Oman* has grown from a local-area, weekly tabloid to a full-scale and respected newsprint. It is independent, resourceful and intellectually thought-provoking, aspects of which it will continue and develop in the next three decades.



Comprehensive newspaper

Aida Al Hajry, director of Studies and Research at the Ministry of Social Development

THE *Times of Oman* is a comprehensive newspaper. Every time I read it I am pleasantly surprised by the different subjects it tackles through all its publications. There is both hard news as well as light reading material. I must admit that my son regularly refers to the magazine as well as the newspaper to do his homework. Of course, the paper has seen several positive changes over the years and I wish it all the best in the years to come. I also hope the decision makers in the country would encourage young Omanis to get into the field of journalism.

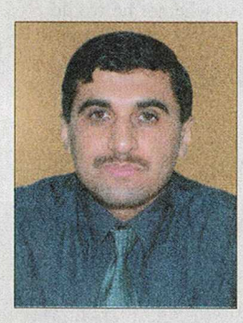


Good blend

Aly Al Harthy, Private business entrepreneur

KUDOS to the *Times of Oman* for being a reliable local newspaper, with a multicultural facet. Three decades is a good enough maturity period for a strong paper — you get serious reading material, especially *Thursday*, which complements the regular paper. Talking business? You will find many subjects and there are articles from international news media which give an international touch within a local newspaper. What I like most about *Times of Oman* is the *Readers' Forum* that provides an excellent exchange of views from different people of different cultures where they express their own thinking.

The *Times of Oman* is a paper which I don't miss reading... Three decades of the *Times* — as I have seen it — well, with all the changes taking place in our world during these 30 years, the *Times of Oman* has blended itself well, tracing all the events, which has strengthened it to resists all its competitors from across the borders. If you are bored with politics; go to the *Entertainment Times* pages to get an up-date of events and you can even get the happenings in local hotels and restaurants for your relaxations. Have you had a chance to read the column, titled *Viewpoint*? Oh la… la...! Sometimes it is too hot and on the dot! What I would like the *Times of Oman* to do is develop its African news and features. Oman has a great link with Africa, like the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). What is missing is news from East-African countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the great Democratic Republic of Congo. Sometimes we see in the news only wars, diseases and poverty... What really matters is a cultural exchange from those countries where most of Omani tribes lived before the Renaissance of Oman in 1970. Lastly, I wish the *Times of Oman* and its lovely team longevity. Keep up with changes to the modern world of thinking!



Professional approach

Dr Radwan Faraj, former Medical Director of Advanced Fertility and Genetic Centre, presently at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead/Newcastle, United Kingdom

I HAD two years of professional experience in Muscat and it was really fruitful for many infertile couples in Oman. Also, it was a good scientific success and challenge in the field of reproductive medicine. The *Times of Oman*, by its professional approach to any events in the region, managed to clear a lot of queries in this challenging field. The *Times*' team was there at the proper time and proper place doing a real great job to Omani society and the region in general. From me, all the progress and success on *Times*' anniversary!

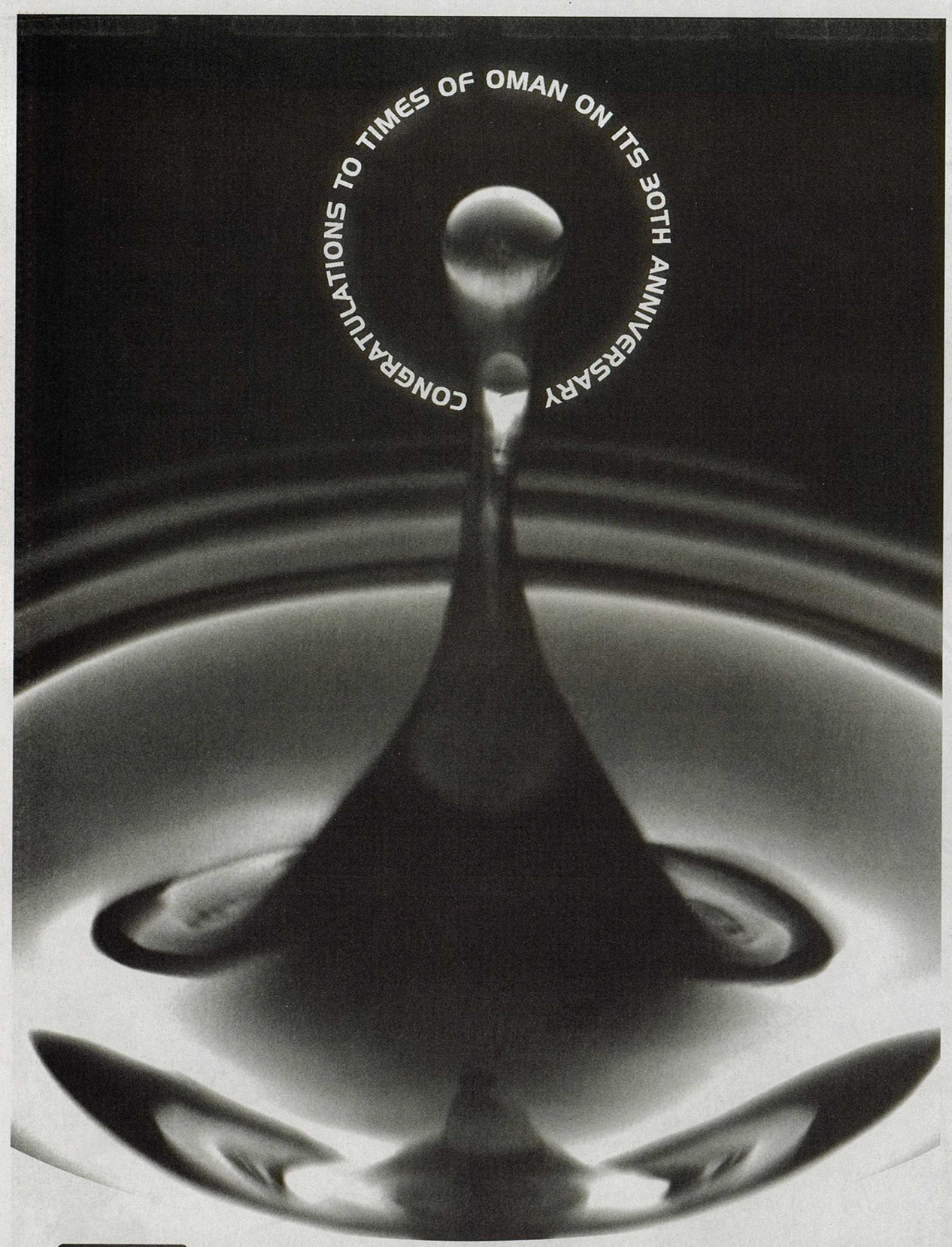


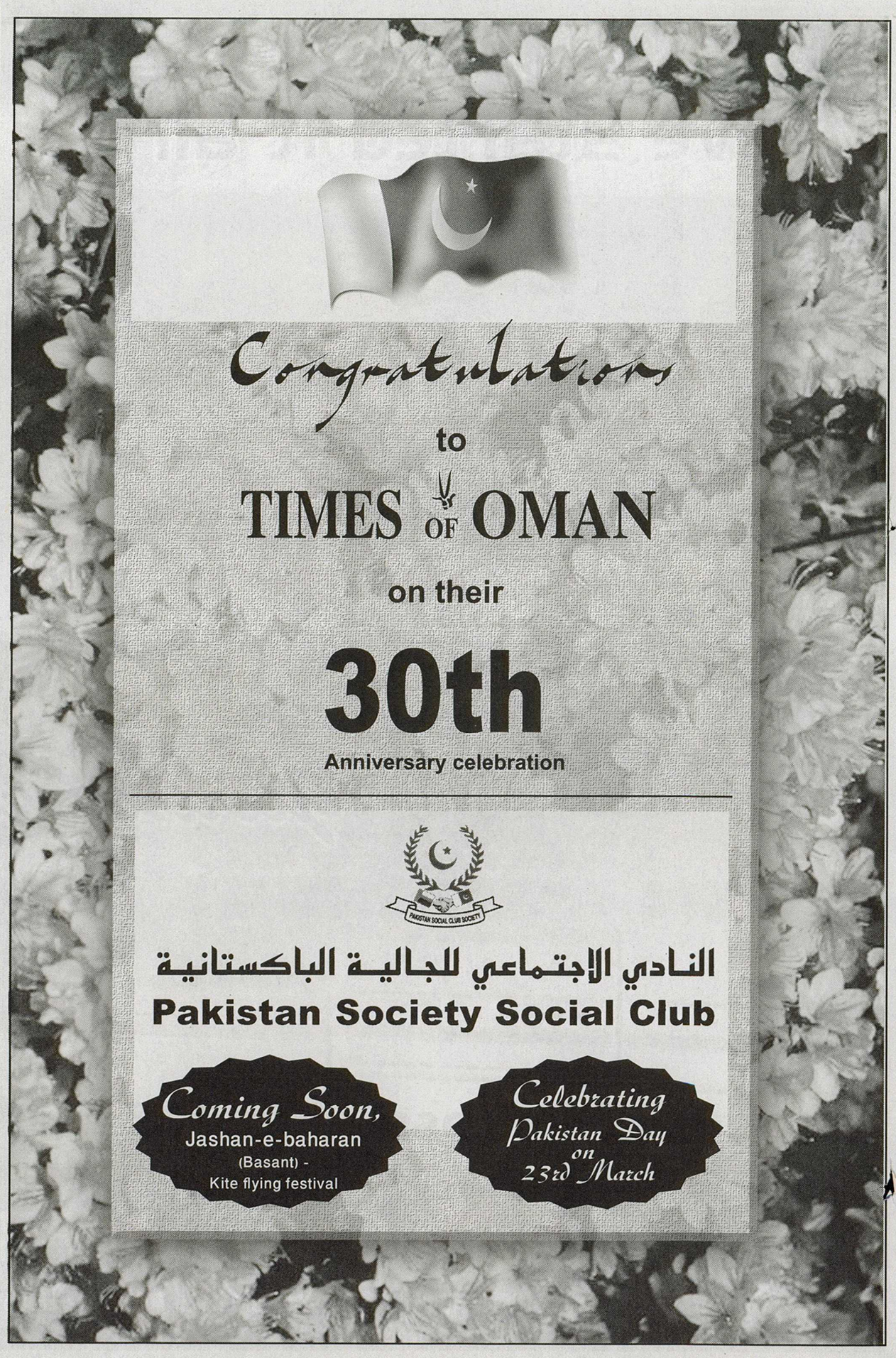
Frank and fair

Maha Hajjar, sales and marketing coordinator, Muscat Private Hospital

(Jordanian living in Muscat for the last 15 years)

WHAT I like about the *Times of Oman* is the objectiveness, truth and frankness of the journalists concerned of the publication, particularly Mr Essa Al Zedjali. In the past, when the *Times of Oman* was a weekly, it used to be like a mirror for me, reflecting and summarising important events of the particular week. Now, the *Times of Oman* is the daily mirror, handling all aspects, from all corners of our social, economic and political life. In the coming decades I see more prosperity and success to the *Times of Oman*!





3 DECADES OF BREAKING NEWS
TIMES OF OMAN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2005

30 Year Special

TIMES OF OMAN SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Readers' Write



Refreshing

Hamed Al Wahaibi, Oman's international rally driver, Oman World Rally Team

THE *Times of Oman* brings to the reader refreshing features, articles and various opinions and that is what I really like about it. Everyone in the *Times* should feel proud of this well-managed publication. As for the past 30 years of the *Times*, I can easily say three decades long, but this is one newspaper that is still a young and sunrise publication. On a personal note, I should say that the *Times* is one of the leading local newspapers that has supported my rallying career right from the very beginning. Apart from this, I knew the paper as a good and professional one. For the next three decades, I will wish and pray to see the *Times* incubating young sportsmen in Oman. Well, I know it is not a minor thing, but at least to help young generations showcase their talents in a much better way.

More colour, more power

Majid Al Toky, partner of Trowers & Hamlins

THE *Times of Oman* has established itself as a major source of news within Omani society and has over the years acquired the recognition of its readers. It is important for any news provider to have integrity and to report accurately, which I think the *Times* does with aplomb. The focus seems to be on attracting all types of readers, not just Omanis but also foreigners from various parts of the world. The new colourful image has given it a better look and more enjoyable to read and I can only see it more colourful in the next 30 years.



Professionalism in all aspects

Abdulaziz Younis, translator – Omantel:

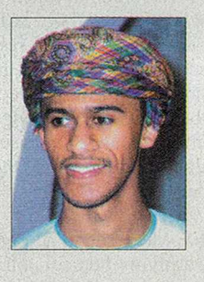
THE *Times of Oman* has always been a reliable source of English printed information in Oman. The professional sentiment is felt in all aspects of the newspaper. The *Times* takes a unique approach in addressing local, Arab and international issues. It is different, and that is the single-most factor that sets it apart. Although I haven't been here for three decades, I have been reading the *Times* over the past 14 years. It has a long history. The paper has, in this period, changed, for the better of course. In the next three decades, I wish to see the *Times* interacting more with its readers and proactively engage itself with the local community. It should also attempt to give broader windows for various opinions and also have more pages.



Unique, accurate

Nizar Shanfari, Omani Rally Driver, currently contesting the 2005 Middle East Rally Championship

THE *Times of Oman* always gives accurate sports coverage, and showcases a wide variety of sports. I also find the *Times* presents a unique perspective on issues of international interest. In the *Times'* 30 years, the paper has grown in size and has become more outspoken in it's perspectives. The *Times* also serves as a mouthpiece and advocate for the various expatriate communities in the Sultanate. The *Times* has always chronicled the progress of Oman and its Renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In the next decades, I hope to see the *Times* provides continued support for social and community causes, and perhaps a dedicated motor sport section.



Global reach!

Tariq Hilal Al Barwani, Omani IT expert who has been writing a weekly column for the *Times* for the last seven years

WHEN I had been abroad completing my Master's degree, timesofoman.com portal enriched me with latest news and information about Oman. Its online existence made me feel at home and kept me updated throughout my academic venture. The *Times of Oman* delivers cutting edge and unbiased news be it in business, local, sports, international, etc... Virtually all you need to know about Oman or globally is presented in a one full-fledged package (electronically via the web or print media from a local store). *ETimes* is a fantastic addition! I was glad to learn about the *Times of Oman*'s e-paper *e-Times* addition. That indeed is something we all readers are pleased about as well. With it, we can view, read news, articles, pictures/photos, etc. exactly as it appears in the printed edition. Now we no longer fear of missing a paper, we can always log on timesofoman.com and check the archive for the days we missed or the ones we desire to read.



Time to redefine

A. L. Hall, manager of Dive Center at Al Sawadi Beach Resort

THE format of the *Times of Oman* looks professional. I like the pullout section for the business-entertainment and also like the crossword puzzle. I like the contents, but sometimes, I think you include 'silly' news from the USA, when there are so many serious issues to cover in the USA. If we look at the past three decades of the *Times*, I think there is too much 'control' of the press, too many good news saying 'no problems'. You cannot solve any problem unless you first identify and define the problem. This is one of the responsibilities of the press. In the next three decades from now, the *Times* will see much more competition — from inside like the new newspaper, and outside like the Internet, weekly newspapers, e-magazines, etc. The *Times* would need to define itself (the product) and its target market.



Good sports coverage

Bob Dibben, captain of Ghallah Wentworth Golf Club

THE *Times of Oman* is a paper that reports facts as they are and that always makes for good reading. Also, in my opinion, the sports coverage is very good. If we look back at the past 30 years, the *Times* has become a newspaper that has grown with the Sultanate of Oman, into something that the whole country can be very proud of. And for the next 30 years, I feel that it will be a newspaper that will continue to grow as will the Sultanate of Oman.



Relevant local coverage

Christine Terres, who recently completed the 'Sohar to Shati for Sumatra' walk

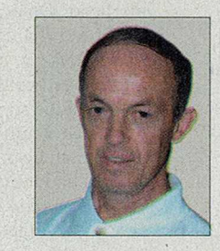
I LOVE the comprehensive local coverage of the *Times*. For my recent charity walk, the daily publicity provided by the paper has translated into substantially more donations — and this translates for the tsunami relief effort into children protected, children reunited with their families, children being educated and children having a better future.



Informative and helpful

Christopher Pike, general manager of Radisson SAS Muscat

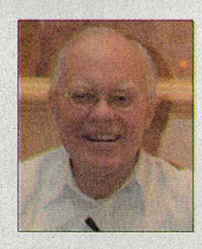
I FIND the *Times of Oman* a very informative publication for news. The paper has always been helpful in regard to disseminating information in regard to events and activities of our hotel. I would say the *Times of Oman* has contributed strongly in its own way in the development of Oman. Please accept our congratulations on your 30th anniversary. We look forward to working with the *Times* in the future also.



Easy to read

Duncan Snell — Teacher with the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO)

I FIND the *Times* has a well laid out format and is easy to read. The international news coverage is very good for a regional newspaper and the local news is spot-on. I like the sports news and the way it is presented. I don't always agree with some of the comments and letters, but you do get a chance to offer your own viewpoint. In my time here in Oman, I have seen the newspaper develop and progress and refine its presentation, so it is a much more readable paper and I am quite certain that the standard of journalism will improve even further in the future. I wish the paper well.



Progressive force for journalism

Hugh Duxbury, Canada

IT is with great pleasure that I offer my congratulations on the success of the *Times* over the past 30 years. Since first accessing your website, I have come to accept the *Times* as a progressive force for journalism with its presentation of an accurate, unbiased account of the news in Oman and the wider Middle East. I wish you and your staff at the *Times* all the best as you move forward with the same high journalistic standards over the next 30 years. Best regards, and good luck in the future!



Reporting peace

Jan and Mal Douglas, Deputy Management Officer and Engineer, respectively

What do you like about the *Times of Oman*? Its coverage of the world news!

Three decades of *Times* ...

Is equivalent to the growth of Oman!

Three more decades (of *Times*) from now:

Reporting peace in the Middle East!

CONGRATULATIONS

TIMES OF OMAN
www.timesofoman.com



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of dedicated service
to its readers



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Readers' Write



Interesting package

Florence Quillerier-Mazni, health and sports manageress, Al Falaj Hotel

THE *Times of Oman* covers varied themes and presents points of views of different people in an objective platform, which indeed makes it a very interesting package. The layout is good and pleasing to the eye. I have been a reader of the *Times* for the last 11 years and I should say I have enjoyed every issue. Of course it has improved tremendously in its presentation and style over the years, earning it more readers. I particularly enjoy reading health articles, which has seen a marked increase in the last few years. Health concerns everybody and I consider it to be an important subject. In the years to come I hope there is more focus on social events in the local context. I also hope to see in-depth reports on specific sporting activities with special analysis from experts. I hope the *Times* carries on for three decades and more. Happy anniversary!



Consistently good and the best daily in Oman

Jane Jaffer, yoga teacher, Reiki healer and writer

CONGRATULATIONS to all the staff of the *Times of Oman* on putting together a consistently good and certainly the best daily newspaper in Oman. The *Times* has been a constant in my life here for more years than I care to admit to! The whole family, including my thirteen-year-old son Aymen, reads the *Times* avidly from cover to cover first thing in the morning (thanks to the team who deliver it to our door). The *Times* is packed with up-to-the-minute current affairs news stories from around the globe, making it relevant for the entire and very diverse population living in the Sultanate. The *Times* is also a rich source of information about events and developments happening right here in Oman. It acts as a link, bringing people together and providing individuals in the community with the broader picture of Oman's progress. I would also like to thank the *Times* for developing the nation's social conscience. The staff have always been very supportive of charitable events and fund-raisers, acting as sponsors and also writing about good causes. I remember when the *Times* kindly published an article I had written about Dr Loreen's important work to raise awareness and funds for Down's Syndrome children living here in Oman. RO17,000 was raised following that campaign — money that is now being used to support the development of Down's Syndrome children. I also remember the *Times* appealing to the public for help for a poor Indian guy who had fallen on hard times (pardon the pun). Over the years, the *Times* has printed many articles about alternative therapies and the latest research into health, fitness and nutrition, subjects close to my heart. On occasion I have also asked the *Times* to print details of forthcoming workshops and events run by visiting specialists in the alternative health field and the staff have always done so willingly, which has certainly improved numbers in attendance at courses held. I am also grateful for the article that was written about me and my little book of poetry entitled *Women On The Edge*. As I am now nearing completion of a novel set in Oman, I may well be contacting the *Times* again soon! Well done everyone and especially to my good friend Suzy Fontes who has worked so hard at the *Times* for many years.



Innovative

Jill Lewis, housewife, Muscat

TIMES of Oman is an innovative newspaper with good, all-round coverage of local news, world events and sports from home and abroad. It is nicely laid out and makes easy and informative reading. Over the years the *Times* has become more professional in its approach to journalism with in-depth world reporting and greater coverage of Oman, its history and its heritage. Plus, there are more pages to read. I think the future of all newspapers will be as 'tabloid' editions — so, why not be the first one in Oman?!



Window to the world

Paul Bellavance, director of HR design and development at Oman Telecommunications Company

CONGRATULATIONS on the 30th anniversary of the *Times of Oman* and on your excellent initiative. The *Times of Oman* is my window to the world and a great way to keep abreast of what is happening locally and in the region. It also offers a local perspective on worldwide events that often provides a different point of view on things. I think it helps me better understand the people of Oman, their concerns, hopes and dreams. The *Times of Oman* has become an integral part of Oman and is well integrated with the culture. Oman is a beautiful country and *Times* is a reflection of the particular lifestyle that makes it such a great place to live. My wish is for the *Times* to continue to grow and prosper at the same rate as the country!

Fantastic sports section

Sarah Fryberger, coordinator, Shanfari Rally Team

I like the diversity of articles and the fantastic Sports section. Often the opinion that the *Times* presents in the editorial and perspective are at odds with my own, and I enjoy exploring a different viewpoint within your pages. I also found the *Thursday* article about the labourers in construction camps gutsy and well-written. The *Readers Forum* also provides significant entertainment. I think *Times* will continue to cover the Sultanate's growth, and perhaps follow a more outspoken path in the next thirty years. A dedicated motorsport section would be fantastic. Since *Times of Oman* has grown so much maybe it's time for a move to a bigger building? Happy anniversary.

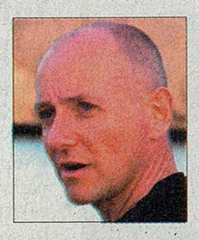




Great features

Sarah White arts adviser and manager of Bait Al Zubair Foundation

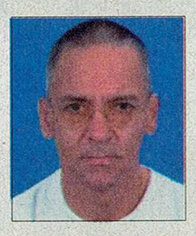
I ENJOY the weekly column *Viewpoint* by Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali in the *Times of Oman*. I think this column is very pertinent and valuable to current events as it deals with different issues in a very holistic way. I also enjoy feature articles in *Leisure* and *Thursday* magazine, especially when there is focus on Omani culture and heritage. I am also happy to be a part of the publication with contributions like the traditional perspective presented by Bait Al Zubair on the first of every month in the *Leisure* section. It pertains to Omani culture and heritage. I have also contributed to the magazine. I have seen *Times of Oman* from 1986 to date and I have enjoyed it since then — from the time it was a tabloid to now. At the Bait Al Zubair museum we preserve copies of the newspaper, especially the ones that highlight heritage and culture. We have done a lot of work with *Times* and enjoy a good working relationship. I hope to see more progress in the publication in the years to come. I also hope that more Omani writers and photographers get into the field and there is more development, especially of the Omani youth. It's an ever-growing industry. Every few years things change and grow and I hope the *Times* continues to be very successful. We wish the *Times* continued success and look forward to many more years of it.



Around Oman through 'Times'

Mark Evans, British explorer who had recently done the first leg of the *Around Oman* kayak expedition

Happy 30th Anniversary' to the *Times of Oman*, from the Around Oman kayak team. Your daily coverage of the first leg of our journey back in December enabled people to get a real feel of what we were doing, and helped them feel part of the expedition, sharing with us the highs and lows. Perhaps more importantly, your newspaper played a pivotal role in raising public awareness of the vital work currently being undertaken by the newly formed Oman National Association of Cancer Awareness. The Around Oman team looks forward to working with you again when we start the leg two of our journey.



More local news, please

Shadley Fataar, radiologist, Royal Hospital

Times of Oman is an independently owned newspaper with good international news coverage. I enjoy the editorials and the articles by correspondents, especially those affiliated to the *Independent*. *Times'* sports coverage (both local and international) is good! I have been enjoying the *Times* for the last 10 years. As far as its future is concerned, I feel that the *Times* should be able to carry more local news. As expatriates we get very little news about what affects ordinary Omanis, bad traffic accidents, more vibrant discussions about events in Oman, more colour photos and better print quality!



Local touch is important

Tony Salt, director of Student Services at ABA, an IB World School, Muscat

I HAVE lived in Oman and worked at the ABA for the past six years. The *Times of Oman* and *Thursday* magazine, I believe, owe much of its success to a commitment to community involvement and contributions from locally based experts on all manner of social, health and educational issues. At ABA we have been happy, over the last few years, to contribute articles to a number of issues of the *Thursday* magazine that focused on educational matters, including topics of student motivation, balanced curriculum and special educational needs amongst others. The advantage of involving contributors from the local community is that advice and comments are more likely to be appropriate to a local readership. This is very true in my own field of expertise, education, in which schools may differ greatly depending upon the local setting, diversity of population and extra-curricular opportunities. I hope that *Times of Oman* will continue to involve local contributors and maintain community involvement and local news. The local touch becomes more important as international news is increasingly available on television, radio, Internet and even GSM. Oman's coffee shop tradition should ensure a continued desire in readers over the next 30 years. TV screens cannot beat the experience of sitting down in a beautiful setting with a freshly brewed coffee and a good 'old-fashioned' printed newspaper.



Vivid and accurate details of informations

Danny Abordo, sports enthusiast, projects architect

The newspaper provides the most vivid and accurate details of information contained in a concise form, easy to understand and one can cover the entire newspaper from headline to sports page in a snap. It is best suited for busy people like me who don't have that much time in reading the daily paper. In each daily issue, especially on *Thursday*, you'll find the profoundness in each accompanying photo, that's why it is eye catchy and adds more interest to the reader. Since I am a sports buff, it's a habit to browse the sports page before finally letting go of the paper. It is striking, informative, entertaining and powerful. Three more decades of *Times*...? I might not be here for three more decades, but I surely believe that people who include *Times of Oman* in their daily lives will grow more intelligent. Happy Anniversary to the newspaper and staff of the *Times of Oman*.



'Everything' matters

Dr Yousuf Kamal Mirza, senior consultant psychiatrist, Ibn Sina Hospital, Al Shatti Hospital and Emirates Medical Centre

WHAT do I like about the *Times of Oman?* In one word "Everything!" *Times of Oman* has kept on maturing with the passage of time. My association with *Times* started when it was just a two-year-old toddler learning to walk without falling. Today it is a strong and lively adolescent. It stands proud among many an older peer. All newspapers give us news but *Times* delivers much more. It carries news with a commitment to the readers... My association with *Times* has not just been as a reader but also as a fairly regular contributor to *Thursday* magazine. With this magazine in hand, Thursday mornings become pleasantly dedicated to getting enlightenment, a wider perspective and a pleasurable start to our weekend! To name a few of the *Times of Oman* things that I just seem to have become "addicted" to:

- Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali's *Viewpoint*: a very sharply written column that really gives us a vantage viewpoint. It is often a thought-provoking, a hard-hitting and a critical piece of writing that hits the facts on the head and drives a clear message home;
- Kamran's reviews are very insightful and his in-depth analysis removes any ambiguities and doubts about the truth that is out there;
- Thursdays with Adarsh and Suzy have been a treat with topical cover stories and other interesting articles that give a variety of views drawn from a cross-section of local and expatriate contributors;
- Mondays bring us *ICE Times* that keep us up to date with what's what and what's new in this Information era. *Tariq Online* is also a must-read for anyone with a PC while he helps us to keep our computers 'tweeked' for maximum speed, getting the best of the Internet world and cleaned from various dirty tricks of the computing bad guys and spies;
- *Entertainment Times* and *Al Muhharek* keep us entertained and informed about wheels and their deals.

As for three more decades from now? I hope I live that long — the *Times of Oman* certainly will! If I did live that long then I am sure to see a *Times* that has gone from strength to strength to become the most popular on-line and in-print newspaper of the Arabian Gulf. I wish the *Times of Oman* and Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali many, many happy returns of the day. Happy Birthday *Times of Oman*!



Enthusiastic

Ainsley L. Edgar, principal, Indian School Muscat

I like the consistency of *Times of Oman* in providing quality journalism, not puerile yellow journalism. It is an enthusiastic and committed daily, which acts on opportunities and balances the local with international news. Out of the three decades of *Times*, I have seen it less than a year, but during this period, I have become an avid addicted daily reader of the *Times*. It keeps one abreast of all that is happening and is an excellent window to the world. Due to the greater patronage of readers it will become a daily with more pages, more colourful advertisements, better quality paper and continue to be the choice of the vast majority.



Independent and truthful views

M. C. Jose, general manager, projects & logistics, Khimji Ramdas

Times Of Oman knows the requirements of the readers and gets us what we are looking for. *Times* is independent, positive and truthful on its views. The local as well as the international coverage are good. In the last three decades, *Times* has grown at a steady pace and the direction was right. It has come up with changes that the readers wanted. The leadership and the team behind the show has proved their capability in bringing up the operation to this level. In the next three decades, I would like the *Times* to grow without losing its identity.



Snappy and simple, brief and direct

Carmelita B. De Jesus, teacher-in-charge, Grade School Department, Philippine School – Muscat

I LIKE reading *Times of Oman* because it carries the latest, freshest and up-to-date news. It presents straight news that reports occurrences or events through the ease of words that are snappy, simple, direct and brief. Moreover, the views are balanced and their relevance to present-day society is very much evident. Since 1990 I have been a reader of *Times of Oman* and I have seen its transformation. Its features are very substantial and its reportage can be compared to reading a story. There has been a gradual shift from simple to complex, from an initial event to a series of struggles and from one suspenseful problem to another, leading to the climax. Apart from straight or hard news, I'm confident that *Times of Oman*, in the next three decades to come, will continue to inform, educate and seek human interest stories that will provide entertainment and pleasure to its readers.

Congratulations

TIMES OF OMAN

on it's great performance for 30 years

a Comfortable habit for many!



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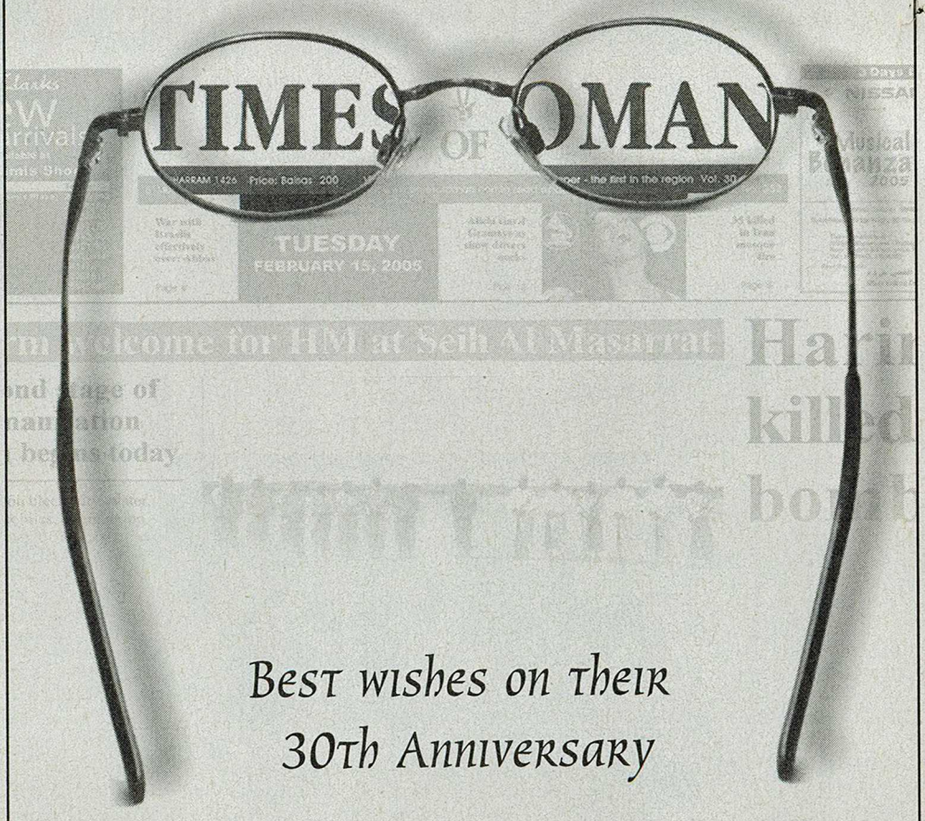
TIMES OF OMAN

...the Vision of tomorrow



Best wishes on their 30th Anniversary

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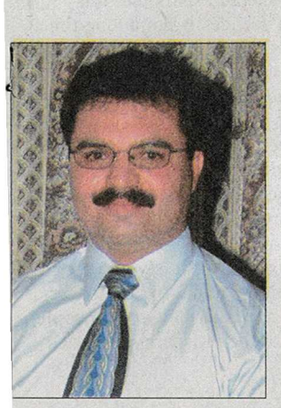
Readers' Write



Mission accomplished, with grace

THE Sultanate of Oman has recorded tremendous development in various fields in the last 35 years of its renaissance under the wise and benevolent leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and likewise *Times of Oman* has also made magnificent growth in this period. *Times of Oman* has thus passed through three historic decades of playing the accomplished role of a very responsible newspaper. Awareness, information sharing, steady education and image building of Oman have been the salient features of *Times of Oman* in the last 30 years and in next 30 years we would like this valued newspaper to be more interactive, analytical, persuasive and imaginative. Having lived with the newspaper for more than 22 years, I have no doubt to say that *Times of Oman* has accomplished its mission with grace and has been recognised as a conscientious independent paper. The newspaper has been catering to the journalistic appetite of both local as well expatriate readerships. In the coming 30 years, in view of the new challenges which the whole world, particularly this region is likely to be encountering, *Times of Oman* would be required to take up the challenge with greater responsibility to steer the nation to a still brighter future. I wish to see *Times of Oman* take a lead in assuming the noble task to prepare the youth and equip them with state-of-the-art technology, knowledge and wisdom and prepare them to have greater participation in governing their country with better skills and transform Oman, our cherished second home, into a society where the concept of welfare will be supreme, speedy justice, healthcare, unhindered accessibility and quality education would be ensured at affordable cost to all citizens and residents. I would also expect *Times of Oman* to set up a public library in the name of its founder father in one of the public parks, close to the town, with branches spread all over so that young people get back to the habit of acquiring knowledge through reading books and magazines while sitting in a free and frank atmosphere. It is also my cherished desire that *Times of Oman* plays a significant role in initiating a dialogue between the thinkers of the West and East to bridge the gap that has been created mostly by disinformation and is taking the shape of 'Clash of Civilisations'. In view of Oman joining the WTO and adopting the concept of free economy, I would foresee a significant role for *Times of Oman* to educate and protect the consumers from the onslaught of multinationals who would have enormous support of media against fragile consumers. Last but not the least, while looking at the independence movement of the subcontinent of India-Pakistan we find a profound role played by Iqbal, Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, just to name a few. Simultaneously, we also notice the remarkable contribution made by the newspapers and magazines like *Tasneem*, *Zamindar*, *Turjmanul Quran*, *Niwa-e-Waqat*, *Kohistan*, *Dawn*, *Chattan*, *Chiragh-e-Rah*, *Urdu Digest* in securing independence and preservation of Islamic identity. In the same context while we find the youth of Oman and the Islamic world being targeted by the hostile cultures and media we do need and wish *Times of Oman* to make concerted effort to protect and promote the cultural and social values of Oman and Arab society, which teach Islamic principles highlighting accommodation, tolerance and forgiveness. Before I conclude, I take this unique opportunity to congratulate the staff, administration and the proud founder and editor-in-chief Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali on this historic occasion of completing 30 glorious years. During my stay in Oman I have always enjoyed his columns, which have been educative and inspiring.

● Javed Nawaz is honorary investment counsellor of Pakistan in Oman and member of the board of directors, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development & Transparency (PILDAT), a prestigious non-government organisation, working in close cooperation with United Nations Development Programme. He is also on the board of directors of Institute of Overseas Pakistanis (OIP), a non-profit organisation that has established over 100 schools in rural areas. Nawaz also established three community schools in the Sultanate of Oman while he was chairman of the board of governors Pakistan School Muscat.



30 years of unrivalled services

Javed Iqbal, lecturer in English, Higher College of Technology Muscat

TIMES of Oman is turning thirty today. Through these 30 years of unrivalled services the *Times* has carved out unique niche for itself and deserves big 'Well Done' from all of us. Its wholesome coverge looks like beautiful tapestry with every thread lending it very special colour and singular style. All the burning international issues have found place on its pages and all the social events have not escaped its microscopic eye. It has also helped the economy of Oman through its business pages. The sports pages have captured the attention of all the young and the old, through its detailed coverage, which brings back to life all the thrill of the games when one reads through it. I hope that this team of excellent professional will not fall prey to complacency and will touch new heights of professional excellence through ceaseless efforts as ever before.



Irresistible viewpoint

Khalid Sher Khan, SVP and country manager, Habib Bank Limited

TIMES of Oman covers all the important news of Oman and round the world. The special pages in *Times,* covering news of various countries, are also of great interest to me, specially the Pakistan page. Also, I feel *Times* has the best sports coverage in the Omani media. Another favourite of mine and a must-read articles are the columns (*Viewpoint*) of Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, editor-in-chief of the *Times*. The pieces are very courageous and quite informative. I have been a regular reader of *Times* for the last three-and-a-half-years and I have seen continuous improvement, especially introduction of colour, exciting layout, etc… I hope in the next three decades, *Times* would increase its pages to not less than 50, plus introduce three more weekly magazines covering the following subjects:

- Weekly business review
- Culture and tourism
- Lifestyle
- Women's magazine

Also, I feel that the newspaper should contain:

- 10 exclusive pages for international and regional news
- 5 pages should provide due coverage of local events in the country, more coverage should be given to the interior of Oman and reporting from small towns to be further strengthened
- 10 pages devoted to expatriates, including local news of their countries, for which I suggest that reporters from the respective countries may be deployed to design the expatriate workers' country pages.

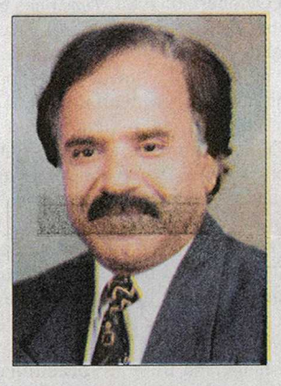
In the sports' segment, I hope to see:

- More promotion of sports in Oman. Here, I suggest that in the next coming years more coverage should be given to local sports events. At the same time, sport pages to be allocated for the international sports coverage. Also indoor sports should be given more coverage. As for the special pages to be added, I feel that the *Times* should have a 'Women of Oman' page, which talk about women in sports, be it in schools, colleges or universities. This will encourage girls to participate actively in sport activities of the country.

Worthy companion

Bashir Iqbal, lecturer in chemistry, Higher College of Technology Muscat

TIMES of Oman has rendered meritorious services to the Sultanate of Oman and deserves all our commendation and felicitation. The *Times* has proved a worthy companion of this great country through all these years of progress and prosperity. It has not only helped in creating awareness about different global issues, but has also provided an invaluable insight into the social fabric of a cosmopolitan society. Giving an all-round coverage is the hallmark of this English daily. It is also of great value to the business community as it has been covering all the business buzz. At the same time it is of immense help in promoting culture, tourism and sports in the Sultanate. Through its periodicals, especially *Thursday*, it has endeared itself to all its readers. But above all, it has strengthened the ties of love and trust between a caring ruler, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and his loyal subjects. I believe that *Times of Oman* will grow from glory to glory and height to height in the years to come.



Born to win

Prof. C.F. Joseph, director, *Born To Excel* Success Motivation Centre, Dubai

What do you like about *Times of Oman*?

GREATER professionalism, especially when compared to other print media in the Middle East. And the professional integrity of young journalists in *Times*. **Three decades of *Times* …** I have used the services of this newspaper over a decade now. It gave me good returns on advertising investments. **Three more decades (of *Times*) from now – as you see it.** Hope to see it flying high!



First love

Professor Irshad Ahmed, former principal of Pakistan School Muscat and at present principal of Chenab College Chiniot District Jhang-Punjab, Pakistan

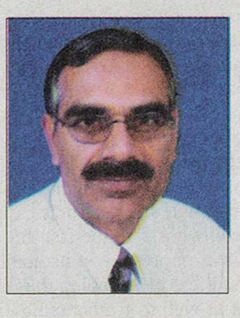
WHAT do I like about *Times of Oman*? This seems to be a very simple question at the face of it, but very thoughtful if we start pondering on it. It is difficult at times to answer why we like one particular person or thing. This is in an age of competition and speed. Choice is more and time to choose is less. The principle of 'love at first sight' is probably more valid as compared to the Shakespearean Age when it was merely a fantasy and a drama. It happened with me also. I joined my assignment as principal Pakistan School Muscat on October 31, 1998, and saw a copy of *Times of Oman* in my office and found almost everything to my satisfaction. After having gone through it daily, a pattern of seeking information and knowledge was well set in my mind and I used to miss something if I could not read the paper even for a day. I would read other newspapers too but I could not find anything better than my 'first love in Oman'. Later when I started my humble contribution to the *Readers' Forum* and *Thursday* and also had the honour of meeting Chairman and Editor-in-Chief Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, I found out that the *Times* was not only a newspaper but a family; a happy, considerate and caring family.

Past 30 years…

Out of the three decades I could only see the last about seven years, but glimpses of some of the 'old is gold' could be seen in extracts from the 'archives'. I could see that besides impressive news updates, it had sufficient coverage of the local activities specially detailed reports of the activities of educational institutions, thought-provoking articles of some experts on almost all positive aspects of life like health, art and literature, politics, human psychology, ethics, religion, etc. It also had weather reports, Salaat timings, business information, a dynamic *Readers' Forum* and comprehensive coverage of sports. Special contribution by the editor-in-chief on current affairs was a trend-setting and motivating force for the readers. I can say with confidence and conviction that these brave efforts, which frankly portrayed the facts with honest and courageous *Viewpoint*, can be considered as a guideline for the Arab World and Islamic Ummah.

The future

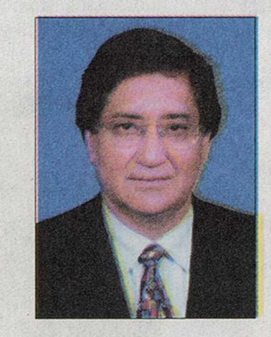
Prediction about the future is not an easy task but for the *Times*, with a glorious past and its present being in very sincere and safe hands, one can predict that it is going to have a very brilliant future. We all know that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved tremendous and commendable goals in the last three decades under the extraordinarily wise and able leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. His Majesty has raised it to a level where all communities are living so peacefully. Oman has become a role model for other Arab countries. We find that *Times* has played an active role as an important medium to achieve this goal by educating people and creating an exemplary harmony amongst all the communities living in Oman. In the field of education, introduction of Inter-School Debate Trophy in Pakistan School Muscat and All Schools Arts and Essays Competition at Indian School Al Ghubra under Serve and Inspire Group are the two of innumerous ventures which I personally observed being so fruitful and beneficial, not only for the cause of education but also for developing harmony between various communities. We hope and foresee that this journey will continue towards eternal progress and for more and more achievements, *Insha Allah*!



New highs

A.H. Raja, general secretary Pakistan Social Club

- *TIMES of Oman* is an excellent English newspaper which has grown popular among all communities, particularly Pakistanis, for its wide coverage of varied cultural and social activities.
- I am one of those people who have seen *Times* grow from a tabloid to broadsheet and then into a full-fledged national newspaper which has been the pioneer of certain standards in English journalism in Oman. I admire how the paper has expanded its horizons and started to accommodate all communities which is why it has emerged as the leading English paper in Oman. *Times* has undoubtedly been the trend-setter in this particular area. Pakistan and sports pages are among my favourite segments in *Times*.
- As always, I expect *Times of Oman* to keep growing and lead the way into the next decade. The last few years have seen tremendous growth for *Times* and its readers can expect new highs in the coming years. Good luck, *Times*.



A must with my morning cup of tea

Shahid Bashir, general manager of Al Felaij Group of Companies

I HAVE been in Oman for the last 30 years and first thing in the morning to enjoy with a cup of tea is *Times of Oman*, which provides comprehensive news. *Times* is a very professional/informative newspaper, giving special coverage to the Asian countries and catering to every one's need. In the last three decades, though it provides worldwide news, it has always covered how Oman has grown from strength to strength and prospered. The *Times* is part of this growth by bringing every thing in the limelight of the people of Oman. We hope with the expertise, commitment and devotion of the chairman, management and staff of *Times of Oman, Times* will extend to the people of this country their best possible services by giving them each and every news. Definitely the *Times* will seize every opportunity to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. I wish all the best to *Times of Oman*.



A window to the regions

Dr Bashir M. Mohammed, head department of medicine The Royal Hospital & Clinical Associate Professor in Medicine — SQU.

TIMES of Oman is highly readable daily with its language. It has comprehensive coverage of the regional and world events. It is indeed a window through which one can vividly see the happenings of the other regions. This enables me to know about the people and places around me and therefore I feel part of other regions and communities.

Thanks to the *Times* I have become educated on almost all subjects of my interests. I start my day confidently. The *Times* has become part of my early morning ritual without which I feel incomplete and feel something is amiss. I stay updated on political affairs, sports, entertainment and events (good/bad) in the world. It is gratifying to see the *Times* grow from strength to strength. I hope *Times of Oman* will continue its present standard, improve its language further so that it becomes a source of education as well. I expect a page for children to be added at least twice a week.

Best regards and more power to *Times of Oman.*

Congratulations to

TIMES OF OMAN

on celebrating 30 years of excellent coverage and

We wish them smiling years ahead



Dental Clinic
Dr. Priya Rajeev
(Dental Surgeon)

Dental Lab
Krikor George
Tarik Sahlul

Our Motto
Happier Patients
No Remakes
More profitable Dentistry

A Beautiful White Smile, A Fresh Clean Breath and A Painless Oral Cavity are the just three features which can transform the way the patients feel about themselves for a life time.

Al Essa Dental Clinic with the help of Al Essa Dental Lab continues to bring our patients the most innovative and exciting aesthetic dentistry today.

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Congratulations, Times of Oman, on your 30th birthday.

Today, as you make news by turning 30, we're proud to be associated with you.

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30 Year Special

Readers' Write



Balanced coverage: Clear definition of its audience

Sunita C. Gomes, British Airways - Country Manager, Oman & Yemen

I LIKE the breadth, the depth, the link that *Times of Oman* draws between journalism and responsible citizenship. The *Times* certainly seems to display a balance in covering a wide range of issues that satisfy local residents rather than what is often ubiquitous journalistic focus on exceptional and dramatic stories.

In the past years, it has managed to have balanced coverage overall, specific to its target audience, and coverage centred on responsible reporting rather than sensationalism. I think most people here would agree that the *Times* has a clear definition of its audience. In my four years here I note that it has rejuvenated format and content, sometimes taking stories to the market before its competitors. Newspapers along with other media, compete with ever busier lifestyles for attention. Closer linkage to these changing lifestyles, articulate language and consequential information demands is one route to its success in the future. Within the next decade or so, the *Times* may well use format change as a catalyst for revamping business processes throughout the newspaper — from editorial to sales and distribution — cutting costs and modernising wherever necessary. I imagine that the *Times* is also likely to avail of digital media strategies that deliver success. A format change affects the entire value chain of a newspaper and, therefore, provides a rare opportunity to prepare it for a tougher operating environment, especially if local media coverage gets increasingly on TV and the Internet, and as growing broadband penetration encourages the wider use of online media. Public perception currently has broadsheets associated with serious news coverage, tabloids with more frivolous content. However, at least one leading European quality newspaper had promising results a year ago, while converting itself from a broadsheet into a tabloid: readership immediately increased by 22 per cent overall and by 16 per cent among women — higher than the average among other newspapers that changed formats. Some regular readers were lost, but there was a net increase overall. The short-term decline in advertising was limited compared with the experience of other newspapers that changed formats. The newspaper was able to raise its prices per column centimeter and even enjoyed higher advertising revenue in the medium term. Over the next three decades and more, I look to the ongoing success of *Times of Oman*. As a leading English language newspaper, and it will continue to have the responsibility to help generate a dialogue in Oman that will produce solutions. But you will also have a responsibility to ensure that your reporting does not sustain any discontent or give it the soil in which to grow.



Family newspaper

P. Y. Venkataraman, deputy general manager, corporate credit, Oman Arab Bank

The *Times of Oman* is a family newspaper containing articles not only of interest to office-goers and business people but also to housewives and children! This is what I like most about the *Times*. Out of the three decades of *Times* existence I am proud to say that I have been reading it for over two decades and the interest in the *Times* has not dwindled but, on the other hand, increased with more and more features being added on a regular basis. The *Times* not only carries news items about Oman but also carries important news items from the subcontinent which is of equal importance to expatriates like me to keep abreast of things happening back home as it unfolds. I am eagerly looking forward to continuing reading *Times* if I were blessed with three more decades of life immaterial of living in any part of this universe. Yes, the electronic version of the *Times* is what I glance throough the Web whenever I am away from Oman. This makes me feel I am still in Oman when I am away either on business or vacation. Recently when I was on a trip to Turkey I was pleasantly surprised to have every morning the Web version of *Times* printed by the hotel and sent to my room as part of hotel hospitality. The e-version of *Times* is a real boon even while travelling within Oman in the interior regions. Keep it up!



School news promoter

Suad Mohammed Al Mudhaffar, principal, Azzan Bin Qais Private School

Congratulations to *Times of Oman* on completing 30 successful years. I am happy to be part of this historic occasion. The newspaper has come a long way since its inception 30 years ago. The attraction of the newspaper lies in the fact that the news articles are categorised and laid out in a systematic manner, which gives the reader ease and accuracy while scanning for the news they want to read first. I think it is a brilliant idea to have full-page sections for different regions of the world. Today, readers can enjoy quality journalism in its local and world news, sports coverage, business updates and special features catering to all sections of society. The business section has a reader-friendly layout while the pictures in the sports section are very attractive. As an educationist I particularly appreciate the *Times* coverage of local school/college news and functions. At a time when education in Oman is progressing in leaps and bounds it is encouraging to see the support offered by the *Times* in sponsoring annual inter-school competitions and featuring school articles aimed at developing our future citizens. In the last three decades I have seen the *Times* improving in its quality and variety of articles and features keeping the reader up to date about recent as well as forthcoming events. In the next few decades I would like to see the *Times* develop into one of Oman's leading information channels continuing to provide unbiased reporting. It would be nice to have a special section devoted to private school news catering to our growing student population, which would provide a base for school children to exchange views for their positive growth. In conclusion, I would like to express my best wishes to the *Times* for achieving many more successful milestones as one of Oman's leading English newspapers.



Excellent local and international coverage

A. M. Vasudevan, Commercial Manager, Oman & Yemen

I LIKE many things about the *Times of Oman,* especially its cooperativeness and its willingness to promote local activities and news. In the last few decades, the *Times* has managed to present excellent coverage of local and international activities. I wish it many more years of success and I hope it continues its current successful trend.



The lady charming

Vinobha, principal, Indian School Ibri

ON the occasion of the 30th birthday celebration of the *Times of Oman*, I cherish my memories of her. I met her when she was in her teens and so she was very attractive, could easily catch the attention of anyone, including mine! I have not much information about her childhood or early adulthood, but I know her very close for the past 12 years, her each day has been an issue with full of issues, colourful and cheerful! I am very happy to know that she is completing her 30th birthday on February 23 and so I wish her a very happy and fruitful, long life with full of issues! Also, congratulations to her parents and guardians on having brought her up with great care and concern! Her international coverage, as well as the due importance to the national coverage is very appreciable, indeed. To have a fast look at what is going on and around the globe one needs only to know her a little closer. Her words are very attractive and eye-catching and, therefore, at first sight itself one feels to get into it and once one goes into it, wouldn't get out of it, as it is very interesting and informative. In 30 years, she has become matured in her approach towards various issues and in another 30 years, she may even bring news from the other world, too! She delivered a cute baby, *Thursday*, when she was 25 years old, which made all her people happy, and they impatiently wait for the weekend to see her and pet her. *Thursday* too is as pretty as her mother under the great care of Adarsh, Suzy and many others. She is part of my routine now, like many others, and one day, she would be of everyone.



Dedicated team, outstanding service

Rubina Shah, former English teacher at Pakistan School Muscat (currently, senior English teacher, Beaconhouse School System in Lahore, Pakistan)

Times of Oman has excellent coverage of news from all aspects and various fields, including current and international affairs ... informing, educating and entertaining people not only in Oman, but also abroad, being an English newspaper of its stature.

Its assets include:

- Serving the nation at its doorsteps
- *Thursday*, a *Times* product, which is an integral part of it. It's a real treat over the weekends, just like enjoying a barbecue in a relaxed mood and in the company of some nice people
- It's staff is committed to human values, caring and personal relationships, collaborative and thoughtful work; all within a human scale environment
- It's a modem that transfers information at high speed.

Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the editor-in-chief of the *Times* deserves real gratitude from all of us, for we adore the paper and its other publications and the people that work for it.

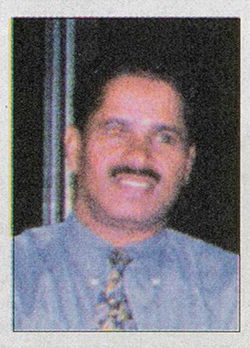
Three decades of *Times*:

- 30 years of excellence and service … building bridges.
- With age it has matured and shows its ability as well as its experience
- Amiable and dedicated team's continuous efforts and hard work has made this tree bear fruit that is sweet to taste for all.
- Over 30 years, it has set a tradition of outstanding service to readers not only in Oman but overseas as a whole. It has become synonymous with quality work and a force to reckon with in the world of journalism.
- By publishing the works of other nationals/expatriates, it has helped to build the bridges not only between the varied people but also between the countries having united them by giving an opportunity to exchange and share their views.

Three more decades of *Times*.

- When it comes to the future I see the newspaper flourishing and more widely read with increasing number of readers
- Having great reach and sowing better and more elaborated coverage

Lastly, congratulations dear *Times of* Oman! Happy 30th anniversary to you… May you have many more of such times of joy to celebrate and be proud of!



Complete newspaper

Sasidharan Kunnath, sales and marketing manager, Souk, Talal Al Zawawi Enterprises LLC – retail division:

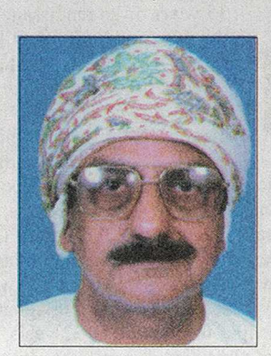
TIMES of Oman is a complete newspaper and together with its weekly magazine, *Thursday*, caters to almost every section of the populace. *Times* is a great and informative companion from morning to night. It is filled with knowledge and information with a vivid array of writers and readers contributing to it, especially the *Viewpoint* of Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedajali, which itself shows its true commitment to society. Moreover, *Times* and *Thursday* nurtures the writing skills of many in Oman. *Times* satisfies all ethnic groups, and has, in its readers' midst, Omanis, Indians, Europeans, South Africans, Filipinos and Americans. Since the day I landed in Muscat from Abu Dhabi on October 30, 1984, *Times* has been my daily companion. First, in the morning I gaze through the headlines and get in touch with the current events and as the day grows, I take time to read more and more and by night I finish with all the major articles. Thus *Times* enriches me and my family with information and knowledge that makes as stronger in both official and personal life. We do contribute to *Times* and *Thursday* and my elder daughter used to be a regular contributor of poems to *Thursday*. Thus we have seen that *Times* has formed an inseparable part of our lives. In the 20-plus years I have seen transitions that took place in the *Times* and it has become more and more beautiful in attire as well as contents. Now, with all my youth with the *Times*, I am sure on my transplanting to my homeland from this beautiful second home who fed me and my family, we may not be able to be without *Times* and we will find a way that *Times* is reaching us wherever we are — and now through the web it is already there too. I wish *Times* the very best in the coming years and decades too. It is sure that *Times* will grow along with the time, making readers filled with knowledge and information. The production staff of *Times* and the readers might change but one thing is quite sure that *Times* will keep eternally rolling in the hands of it readers. My congratulations to Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali, Prasad Panicker, Adarsh Madhavan, Sreekumar Venmony, Suzy Fontes and many others in the offices of the *Times* and the very best of success and good health and blessings from Almighty God!

Blossom like a rose

Azhar Shahzad Malik, general manager (sales), Alka Trading

THE *Times* is like an azure sky, where birds are flying high, which is brightening up the world. The *Times* portrays an image of the modern world...reflecting things as clearly as they are. It presents a clear, elaborate and sophisticated analysis of day-to-day happenings in the real world. It unveils real incidents and informs people of what is happening in Oman and around the world. I have been in Oman for the past 13 years and since then I am a regular reader of the *Times* as well as of the *Thursday* magazine — both products are unmatched and incomparable with any other publications here.

The *Times* has maximised its vision and knowledge of the readers and the paper is poised to reach new heights of excellence. The *Times* has been doing a wonderful job for the past 30 years and we are sure it will continue in the same manner. Happy 30th anniversary to you *Times of Oman*! May you always blossom like a rose and continue brightening this world! I wish and pray that you continue serving this great nation and provide outstanding service to your reader, not only here, but also internationally!



Always on the forefront

Dr P. K. Hamza, general practitioner

TIMES of Oman is quite informative and forthcoming. I have been here for nearly 30 years and since *Times* is my favourite newspaper and has seen it growing, not only in appearance, but in substance. As a witness to the amazing developmental strides made by this country, I have found not only chronicling that, but also surge ahead, as though to keep up with its pace. One unique aspect of the *Times* is its keenness to promote youth and it has been quite successful in this regard. The *Times* has also been on the forefront in promoting Omanisation in every aspect. The *Times* has a distinct voice and I hope that it maintains this and is heard not only in Oman, but elsewhere in the world too!

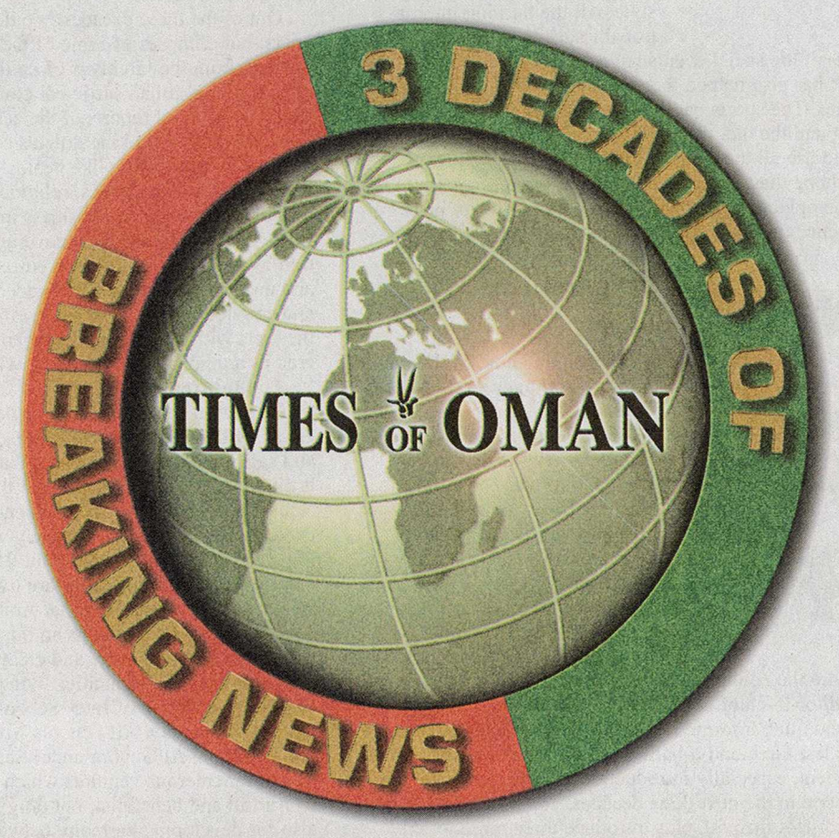


Newspapers excite curiosity

Nimal Fernando, principal, Sri Lankan School, Muscat

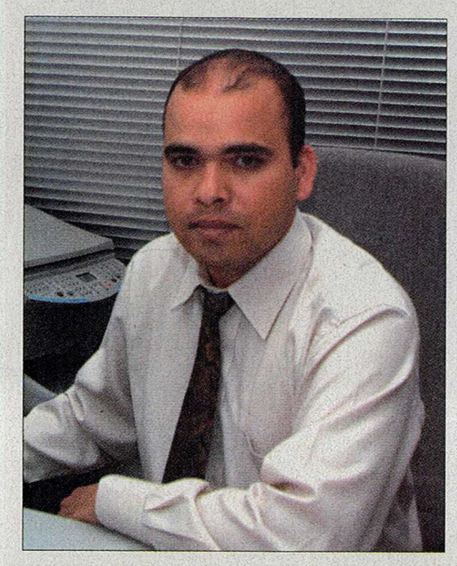
A GREAT distinction and a rare privilege indeed to be invited to be a part of this grand occasion of the coming of age of *Times of Oman*. It is gratifying too to be able to use this opportunity to put into words the sentiments I frequently felt like expressing during my short association with this marvel, a gem among newspapers. As Charles Lamb said, `Newspapers always excite curiosity.' This unique journal does much more. It satiates ones hunger for news, the thirst for knowledge and the burning, eager desire for inquisition. Being an avid reader, I expectantly and enthusiastically await my daily copy of *Times of Oman*. Though only acquainted with it for barely two years, I have found it to be such an informative treasure trove that I feel a void within me till I have at least glanced through its main news items. A day hardly passes by without my having read almost all its pages and savoured every stimulating report. Being at the helm of an organisation comprising mostly intellectuals, I have often been amazed at the significant role this `daily' plays in the society. The obvious reason would be that it covers a wide range of topics such as current affairs, sports, entertainment, fashion, health, tips, etc. It does the country proud as well. Invariably one finds such inestimable and exceptional articles depicting the beautiful Omani culture and heritage. The patriotism and prestige bestowed on Oman is evident right from the Oryx logo at the top of the glossy front page of *Times of Oman.* It is outstanding in that it not only caters to one cross section of the community. Young and old, male, female, educated and the common people, one and all bask in the brilliance of this all pervading, all seeing daily newspaper. Its colourful supplements, *Leisure, ICE Times, Entertainment Times* and the weekly *Thursday* magazine are pearls that adorn and add sparkle to this invaluable treasure. Three decades is not a long time. But long enough for *Times of Oman* to climb up the ladder of success to great and greater heights. The vast progress attained steadily is manifest in the cover pages of National Day supplements which have evolved from good to better and better still. Each one appears unique and more desirable than its predecessors. Perceiving the advancement gained over the past decades, one could envisage how *Times of Oman* would blossom out in the next thirty years. By leaps and bounds, it would progress effortlessly and proudly, a brightly shining star in the realm of newspapers, catering to all the reading needs of the Omani people. Here are my best wishes for the prosperity and success of *Times of Oman.*





Systems/Web

Technical edge



SYED Shanawaz Hussain, paints a challenging, fulfilling 'back ofice'

IT departments are always service departments. They service a client base that exists as employees within the firm.

Most of what the IT Department completes during the day revolves around the "back office" of our company.

The back office can best be defined as the hardware and software that interacts with every employee's computer, without the employee knowing about it. Examples of back office hardware are the file servers, print servers and routers and switches of the network. Users might be aware of these as driver letters on their computers and printers on their network. Back office software examples include e-mail, virus protection, workflows of the software that are running at the back or backup software running on the network. My responsibility is to make computer and IT usage more efficient and let employees get more work out of it. I really prefer my job responsibilities and duties. I enjoy helping my staff and my co- workers; it's very detailed work and gives me an outlet to be creative. I enjoy working and serving everyone in my company and have a great time during holiday parties. I really enjoy working with my group MPPH and am hoping there will be more great opportunities for us in the years ahead. The way the company is growing is excellent and confirmation that MPPH is a very forward-thinking company.

Syed Shanawaz Hussain
IT Manager

Designation: I have been involved as a Senior Systems Engineer and IT Manager for the more then 6 years in the IT field, and have expert knowledge on Information Technology.

Beating the system



AT the time I joined, the IT department of *Times of Oman* was just branching out and growing wings. This was three years back.

It is now a far cry from what it was then. Today, the IT department has proven itself to be a key segment in the workings of the *Times*, so much so we are a 'must-have' department!

This shows two things: that the *Times* has grown so much and the other thing is something we, Hussain and I, can be proud of, which is, we have made ourselves to become an integral part of the newspaper and everyone realises its worth.

If you ask me what I do, I will take this whole page, for it is not an easy issue to describe. Simply put, we take care of the systems and are there to service any aspect or cover any systems' needs that the staff has.

It is a 24x7 job and it is not only time consuming, but it is all enveloping. The whole organisation is computerised and the departments are many, so sometimes we cannot be everywhere at the same time.

It is great to work for this paper as within these three years, I have grown along with the *Times* – both professionally and otherwise. I wish this great paper, great things!

Syed Rahimuddin
Systems Administrator



When you get paid for being hooked on to Net...

Cariappa A A
Web editor of www.timesofoman.com

Yeh Dil Maange more time... is what I would have characteristically wanted to squeal. Phew, I am just eight weeks old at *Times of Oman*, and to tell my side of the story would be going pop-pop-toot-toot.

Anyway, my typical day begins with scanning of news reports from a host of wire services. Update, revise, expand, or tweak not just occasionally, but continuously, is the tune we sing at the portal. It is a tough act... err... song to follow. Nevertheless enjoyable too.

The principal task of web editor is to present the news as it unfolds, and hopefully be the first one. My experience at India's top news portal, *timesofndia.com*, has given me a special insight into sighting a story and breaking it right there. Call it web feat or otherwise, you guys can click the mouse and see it happening 24x7x365. *Times of Oman* portal is very proud to have a strong netizens base in Oman, the Middle East, subcontinent in particular, and the world in general.

If politics, sports, entertainment, business, human interest isn't enough to slake your thirst, you should try our interactive segments with poll questions, discussion boards amongst others.

While print media is geared toward the masses, interactive content relies on understanding the one-to-one nature of the World Wide Web. Lest I forget, there is also *Times of Oman* epaper, a very popular one, and mind you it is the first in the Gulf region.

As for the Hindi bit in the beginning of this piece, en route to discovering Oman, I noticed people's fondness for all things Hindi – movies and songs. Having realised that everyone knows to speak Hindi, I made no bones about wanting to use a word or two. Sorry for the inconvenience I may have caused a minority.

With *Times of Oman* turning thirty, a lot has been said about our ever-growing paper and its journey.

Clearly, the guy who has helped us in this journey is walking that street, climbing that stair, sitting on that chair, now wherever he is, our hats off to him and our heartfelt thanks. You have made it happen for us!

In the pre-Internet days, the average reader had to wait for the hard copies to arrive at their doorsteps every morning.

But now the incredible channel of communication has changed all that.

Times of Oman has paid glowing tributes to its readers by providing them the alternative to reach through the Net. The dotcom may not have travelled all the way with the paper, but I must pronounce this marriage vow has indeed been wow!

News? Yes. Views? Yes. Scrutiny? Yes. Analysis? Yes. Sporting encounters? Yes. So go ahead and continue to say yes to *Times of Oman*, and of course *www.timesofoman.com.*

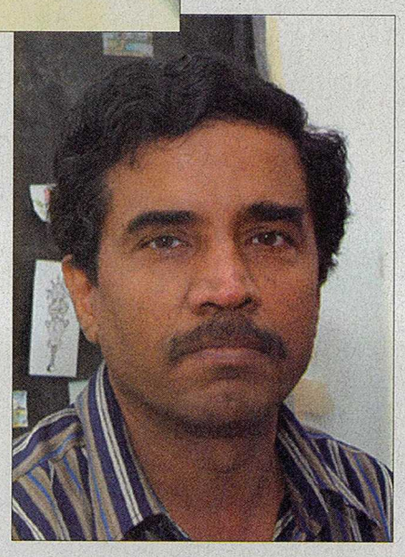
In Focus



Shafi Ur Rehman Shaik
Financial Adviser



Rekha
Secretary at chairman's office



Rajasekharan
Pre-press artist

Integral part of my time



I HAVE seen the *Times of Oman* grow like the girl next door — from a tabloid to a full-fledged newspaper today – Not knowing that I will have a relationship with it at some point of time!

In January 1998, I took over as general manager, advertising, and served for six-and-a-half years. It has been my proud privilege to be associated with the *Times*. With confidence I can say — we, the *Times* team, achieved many milestones during the tenure. I feel honoured to say that I was physically present to celebrate the silver jubilee of the *Times* in February 2000 and headed the organising committee.

The *Times* has been an integral part of my time in Oman. *Times* has grown by leaps and bounds, and it was also a big leap in my career. *Times* has always been very close to my heart. I have a very special sentimental attachment to this paper.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the *Times*, my heart is filled with pride and happiness. I would like to wish the management and the entire staff members a very happy 30th anniversary! I hope and pray that the *Times* achieve many more milestones in the future.

I conclude with a poem by Robert Frost,

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promise to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep...

Ashok Suvarna, former general manager, advertising and currently general manager, NPA and executive officer, Cyclone LLC

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We wish
the
TIMES OF OMAN
on their 30 years of sparkling success
and a steady growth to their
golden years

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Good Morning Oman!

Congratulations **'TIMES OF OMAN'** on completing 30 years of excellence in Journalism.

مؤسسة الزبير
The Zubair Corporation

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3 DECADES OF BREAKING NEWS

TIMES OF OMAN

30-Year Special

TIMES OF OMAN SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2005

Times of Oman

Chief Editor : Rana N. Parveze

VOL. 1, NO. 1 MUSCAT, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1975 PRICE BAIZAS 200



"I shall work with every possible haste to make your lives happy in preparation for a better future."
"Our nation in the past was glorious and powerful. If we work together, co-operating on a united front, we shall be able to regain our past glory so as to claim our rightful place in the Arab world."

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID
FOUNDER ARCHITECT OF THE MODERN OMAN.



Dream come true

Today is the happiest day of my life! We, at the Times of Oman, are celebrating its pearl – 30th – anniversary, a dream that I have been nurturing for so many years.

Since the start, I have been encouraged by my close friends to go ahead and bring out the first-ever English newspaper in Oman.

And believe me, it was a great achievement, not just for me, but, for this great nation.

So, on February 23rd, 1975, Oman witnessed the birth of a star! And, we named this little star, the Times of Oman, Oman's first English newspaper.

I am extremely happy to say on this occasion that the Times is shining more brightly than ever, and more importantly, serving as a beacon of hope for thousands of Omanis and expatriates alike.

Without exaggeration, let me say that the Times is at the cutting edge of not just knowledge, it is also the vanguard of service to its readers and citizens by sensitising them about their social needs, their rights and duties and above all, the need for helping our nation grow to be the leader among the comity of nations.

As we all know, back in the early 70's, Oman had no English newspaper. Nor did we have an English FM radio. It was at this juncture that we felt the need to have a viable medium to communicate with the growing number of expatriates.

Above all, we nurtured a spirit of mission, a national mission. A desire had long been burning in our minds to present Oman before the world and to spotlight its glorious heritage, glowing history, replete with centuries of rich traditions and culture.

I am thrilled to say that three decades of grind and toil have borne fruit. Today, Times is flying high with golden wings and carrying with it, messages of love and peace from Oman to the rest of the world.

I say this to highlight the fact that the Times is the first e-paper in the Middle East, which only shows our keenness to keep abreast of the technological developments in the newspaper industry.

And, thanks to our membership to News Direct, the Times has proven to be the best companion to the Omani traveller by being available in almost every five-star hotel in the world.

It is also available on the Norwegian cruise liners.

Today, we have made it a habit to climb newer and newer heights of excellence in journalism, with a deep-seated desire and mission to help the nation in its relentless, glorious march to greater heights.

Among our plans is to expand our activities and cover the AGCC states too!

The future looks rosy and our aim is to see the Times grow day by day to a stage where we may even witness its 50th (golden) Jubilee and beyond!

Happy birthday Times of Oman!

- Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Founder, Editor-in-Chief of Times of Oman

30 Year Special

Times is roving ambassador



His Highness Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq Al Said
Representative of His Majesty the Sultan

TIMES of Oman has played a very positive role in the harmonious development of the Sultanate ever since its inception 30 years ago. It has been a witness and contributor to the development process of Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Being the first Englsih-language newspaper in the Sultanate, *Times of Oman* has been considered as one of the cornerstones of Oman's information and media sector.

It was instrumental in establishing a communication channel among expatriate residents in Oman.

Times is indeed Oman's roving ambassador in foreign countries, thanks to its pioneering efforts to keep pace with modern technology. It now is available almost all the five-star hotels throughout the world.

On this auspicious occasion of its 30th anniversary, I wish *Times of Oman* all the very best in its march to serve the Sultanate and its people, and hope it will reach new horizons by hard work and commitment, two qualities its readers have already appreciated.

Integral part



His Highness Sayyid Shabib bin Taimour Al Said
His Majesty's Adviser for Environmental Affairs

ON the occasion of the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman,* being the first English newspaper to be published in Oman, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the board of directors, its editors and all members of staff who have made it possible to attain the achievements and success that the newspaper enjoys today.

Times of Oman is among the integral part of the media that covers matters local and global and has become a reliable feature in reporting news. This is conducted in a manner committed to the ethics and professionalism of a very high standard bearing its responsibilities to its readers.

It supports and contributes to the achievements of the Renaissance and its march during the prosperous era of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, thanks to his leadership and his wise policies. We pray to Allah the Almighty to allow and assist you in maintaining the success and accomplishments of your mission in the best possible light.

Pioneer in newspaper journalism



His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Said
Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan

IT is my pleasure to join *Times of Oman* in its celebration of 30 years as the first English-language newspaper of Oman, right from the early years of the Renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Part of the media renaissance, *Times of Oman* has been playing a pioneering role in publishing the Sultanate's political, social and sport news to the readers. This is a happy occasion to praise the increasing role of the Omani media, which is well-known for its objectivity and neutrality in handling internal, Arab and international issues.

I would like to congratulate brother Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, editor-in-chief of *Times of Oman,* and praise his great efforts as a leading media personality in Oman from the early days of the Renaissance. I also praise the staff of *Times of Oman* who have contributed their best towards making the *Times* the leading newspaper among Omani journals. I wish them further success in their mission of providing useful information to readers inside and outside Oman.

Cornerstone of Oman's information media



His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said
Minister of National Heritage and Culture

ON this day, I would like to congratulate the Muscat Press and Publishing House (SAOC) on celebrating the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman.*

Inspired by the sense of patriotism, *Times of Oman* has played an undeniably great role in the Sultanate's harmonious developments in the past three decades since its inception, and sailed through the miracles of achievements by covering those developments and the prosperity in the Sultanate by the guidance of its wise leader His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said who is truly the prime inspirer of the Sultanate of Oman's Renaissance.

Times has been dedicated to reflecting events at home and abroad.

It has played a big role in the turning point of the literary life of its readers by truly demonstrating a practical expression of the hopes and aspirations, values and principles of the Sultanate and its culture which are deeply rooted in its Arabic and Islamic heritage origin.

It also can be considered fairly as the cornerstone of the Sultanate's information media being the cradle of its English language newspaper.

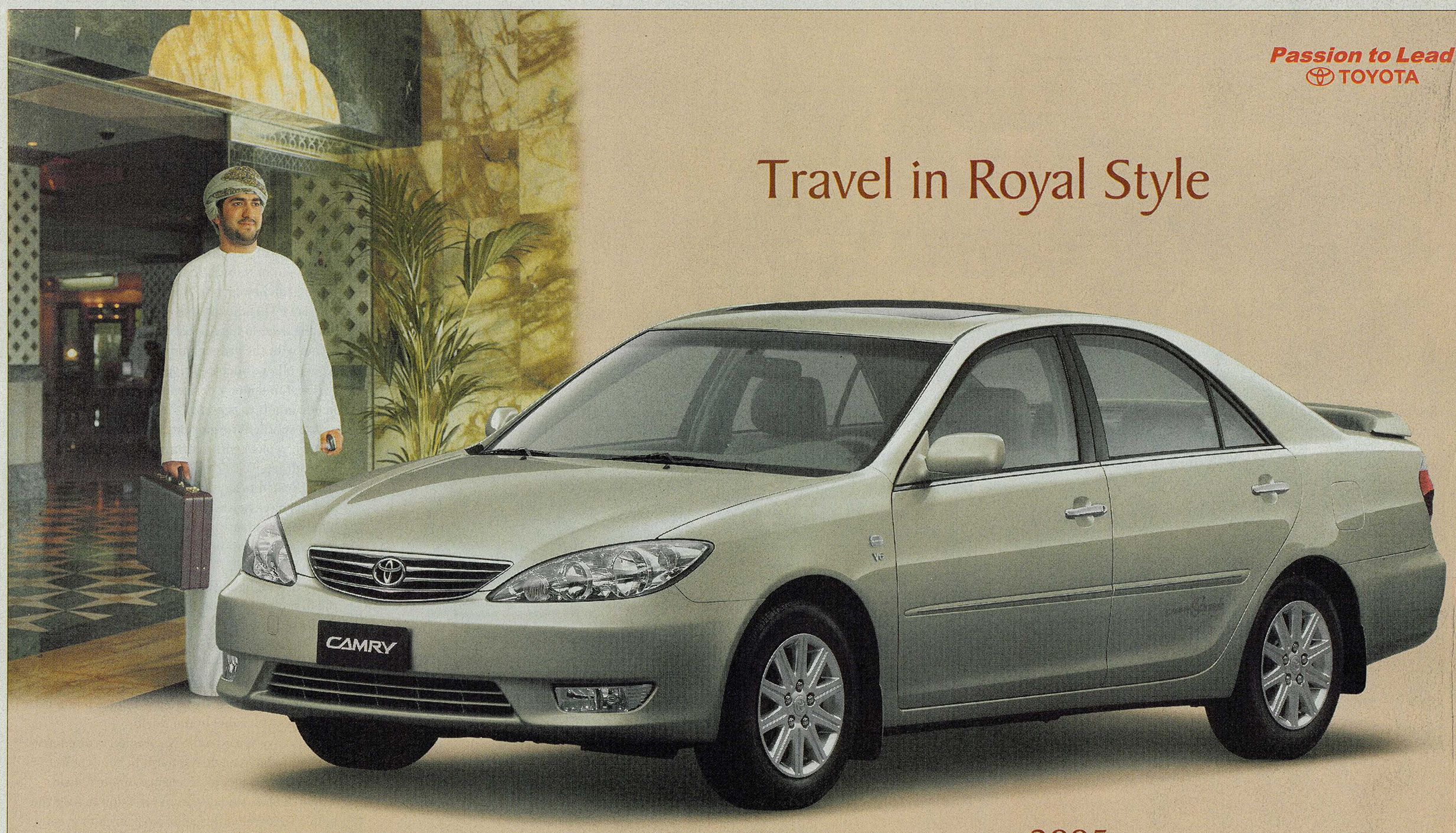
Times caters to all age groups by its vast daily circulation (*Leisure* tabloid, *Thursday* the family magazine, *et*, *Times Business, Times Sports*), this has proved its ability to give its readers the latest developments in all fields of interests.

Adding, *Times* has offered distinguished journalism and useful information in the stream of knowledge to its readers; highlighting the rich cultural heritage and arts of the Sultanate locally, regionally and internationally including other aspects such political, literal and financial.

I hope that *Times of Oman* will continue its commitment by its energetic management in its creative effort to serve the Sultanate and its leadership and citizens especially in this challenging world of journalism technology, and wish it the best in reaching new horizons by the hard work which is enriched by the trust shown by its readers.

Passion to Lead
TOYOTA

Travel in Royal Style



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Positive contributions to development of media



Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki
Minister of National Economy and Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council

I WOULD like to extend my congratulations to *Times of Oman*, the first English-language newspaper in Oman, on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.

I would like also to extend my appreciation to the Muscat Press & Publishing House, under the umbrella of which *Times of Oman* is issued.

The Muscat Press & Publishing House is one of the pioneers in the area of mass media in the country, and has contributed positively and instrumentally to the development of information in the Sultanate.

Something for all



Mohammed Al Zubair
Adviser to His Majesty for Economic Planning

FOR the past three decades *Times of Oman,* our oldest English language newspaper, has been bringing us groundbreaking international and local news.

Up until recently it was the only non-governmental newspaper produced in English. Founded by Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali in 1975, at the dawn of Oman's Renaissance, it was the first private initiative of its kind.

Originally it began its long life as a weekly tabloid, in 1990, and due to its popularity, it became a broadsheet daily newspaper providing something for all.

It provides much more than news and sport with its *Leisure* section and *Thursday* magazine, and actively encourages reader participation.

We commend the founder and editor-in-chief and all the team who bring us this popular newspaper on their 30th anniversary and wish *Times of Oman* and its Arabic language sister *Al Shabiba* continued success.

Vital mission



Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah
Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs

I AM delighted to offer my warmest congratulations to *Times of Oman*, the editor, and all the staff, as you celebrate the 30th anniversary of your first publication.

Over these 30 years *Times of Oman* has fulfilled a vital mission in its role to ensure that the English-speaking community in Oman is kept well informed of important developments both here in Oman, in the region at large, and internationally.

Your contribution has been valuable in disseminating news, in encouraging economic development through business news coverage, in increasing international understanding with foreign news, and in helping social development here at home with a wide range of content of educational value.

I very much wish you all the best in carrying on the good work for many years to come.

All the best — for this century and the next



Maqbool bin Ali Sultan
Minister of Commerce and Industry

CONGRATULATIONS on reaching the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman,* the first English language newspaper in Oman.

The *Times*' reporting of news, current events and other things of interest over the last 30 years has heralded the progress and development of Oman.

The inception of *Times of Oman* roughly coincided with the birth of the first Five-Year Plan, and we are now nearly completing the Sixth Five-Year Plan.

During the 30 years, *Times of Oman* has covered the events which have lead to making Oman the country it is today. We would like to thank *Times of Oman* for its support over the past 30 years and we hope that like Oman the *Times* will continue to flourish and grow and be able to cover the development of Oman right through this century and into the next.

Important contribution



Hamad bin Mohammed Al Rashdi
Information Minister

WHEN I was invited to do so by the chairman of the board of the Muscat Press and Publishing House I was delighted to contribute these words to *Times of Oman* on the occasion of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of its appearance as the first Omani-English language newspaper to be published on a regular and continuous basis.

I would like to offer my congratulations to the Muscat Press & Publishing House on this achievement, particularly in view of the fact that *Times of Oman* has made such an important contribution to journalism in the Sultanate since the early years of the Omani Renaissance — a Renaissance that has encompassed the media as well as every other area of life in the country under His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's leadership.

When it was first launched, *Times* offered a new service to English-medium readers — both to Omanis and to others with whom the Sultanate enjoys long-standing cultural and commercial ties.

Thus it has played — and continues to play — an important role in providing information about this country, and in establishing links with other peoples with the aim of boosting cultural and economic exchanges.

This is indeed a happy occasion for Omani journalism which everyone will celebrate, particularly all those who work in the press and media fields.

I should like to extend my greetings to Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, the chairman of the board, who is one of the country's pioneering figures in the field of journalism, and to all who have made the efforts to ensure that the paper continues to convey its message and carry out its mission.

I send you my good wishes for your further success on the journalistic scene, both in the Sultanate of Oman and in the region as a whole.

Great service to nation



Dr Rajiha bint Abdulamir bin Ali
Minister of Tourism

I WOULD like to congratulate MPPH on the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman*, the first English-language paper of Oman. *Times of Oman* has gained approval from many readers thanks to its good quality, its management and journalists who have worked towards progress and development.

Times of Oman deserves all praise and appreciation from its readers. We wish it more progress and prosperity in its march towards becoming an international paper with readers all over the world.

Heartiest felicitations to

the Times of Oman

for completing three decades

of bringing the world

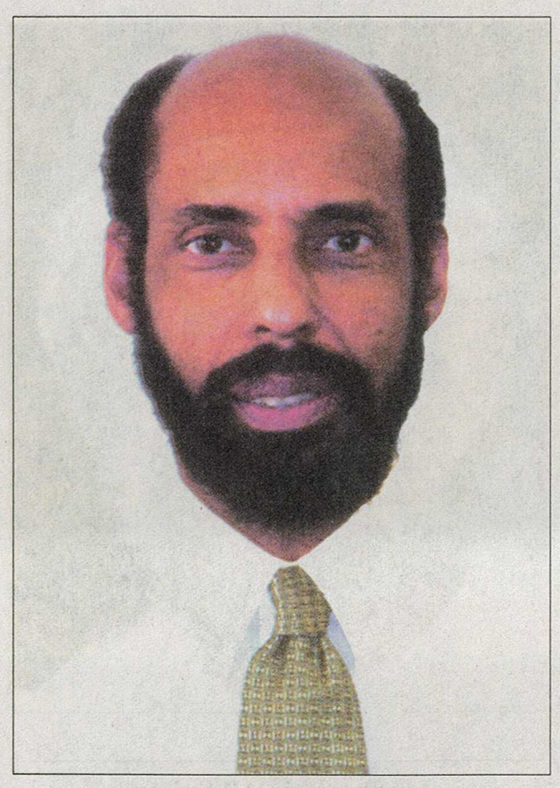
to our doorsteps

Best wishes from all of us at ADINC and Impact.

ADINC
Advertising International Company SAOC

30 Year Special

Editorial on front page is interesting



Richard L. Baltimore III
Ambassador, US Embassy, Muscat

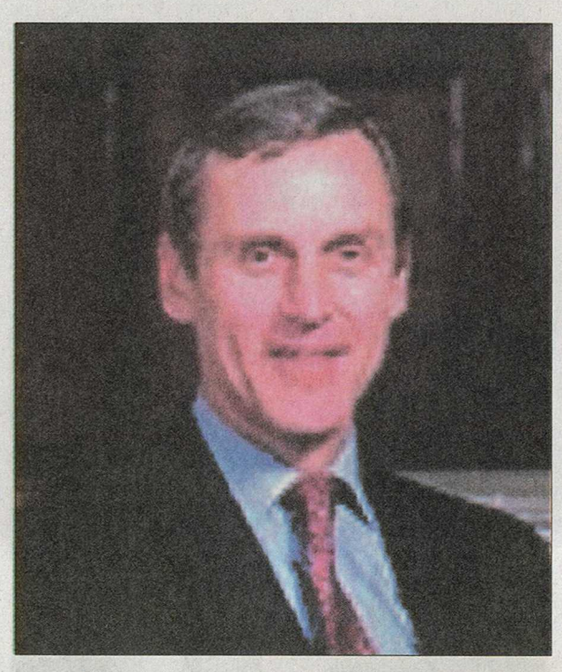
WHAT do I like about *Times of Oman*?

Well, I like the occasional insertion of the lead editorial on the front page instead of placing it in the more conventional op-ed section.

For the three past decades of *Times,* I thought it would be fun to actually go back a few decades but unfortunately it appears that it is not possible to do so via the Internet at this time.

As for three more decades, I seriously doubt whether newspapers, as we now know them, will exist 30 years from now. Perhaps we will get information via some new electronic means that will replace the printed page.

Positive, friendly cooperation



Stuart Laing
British Ambassador

I WOULD like to congratulate Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali on the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman*. The last 30 years have seen tremendous changes in Oman and the newspaper has had the good fortune to be able to chart the country's progress and achievements.

In this period, the paper has itself been able to develop and evolve into a key member of the family of Gulf media productions.

The embassy continues to subscribe to and read *Times* with interest. We enjoy its clear editorials and professional approach and hope that we will continue to see it develop and thrive in the next 30 years.

There has always been positive and friendly cooperation between our press section and the journalist team in *Times*. I particularly remember my own visit to *Times* and my interview with them last year.

The British Embassy passes on their sincere good wishes to *Times* for a successful future!



Marc Barety
Ambassador of France

Bold, original news

I WOULD like to congratulate *Times of Oman* on the occasion of its 30th anniversary and wish many happy returns.

The *Times* and its sister publication *Al Shabiba* are full of interesting information about Oman and the world, presented in a very attractive way.

I also value very much the columns by Sheikh Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, who gives to the readers bold and original views about the region and the world. It is thus a very useful media that I read everyday.

I have been in Oman only a year, but I can see that *Times* has contributed over the years to the impressive development of the country under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Press is an important component of overall development since it brings information and knowledge everywhere, helping to open people's mind and give better understanding of the world around them.

The *Times* has also contributed to the good relations between France and Oman, by reporting all major events, such as bilateral visits and also covering all aspects of cooperation between the two countries in the fields of culture, scientific and technical cooperation, economy and business.

I wish *Times* will keep doing well over the years to come, help in the further development of the Sultanate, and bring us everyday more interesting news and comments.

Celebration of two auspicious occasions



Ashok Kumar Attri
Indian Ambassador

I AM delighted to learn that *Times of Oman* is completing 30 years and would like to commend you and everyone else at the newspaper for all your achievements.

I am particularly pleased that you are celebrating your milestone in the same year as India marks 50 years of diplomatic ties with Oman. During the last three decades, *Times of Oman* has been one of our most important and supportive vehicles for reaching out to the friendly people of Oman. My best wishes also for much success in the future for a newspaper, which is our daily reading.

Outstanding and unique



Faisal Al Humoud Al Malik Al Sabbah
Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Muscat

IT is my pleasure to convey to Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali my sincere greetings and congratulations on the 30th anniversary of *Times.* Judging by its history, the *Times of Oman* has secured itself in the English Gulf newspapers.

I would like to praise the pioneering and current in-charge of this outstanding and unique media forum.

I greet you as you work continuously to reveal the truth and defend the nation, Oman, and give adequate attention to the Arab causes.

Wishing

TIMES OF OMAN

for their excellent
track record for
30 years

We
wish them all the best
in the future

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الأفضل

Unique *Times*

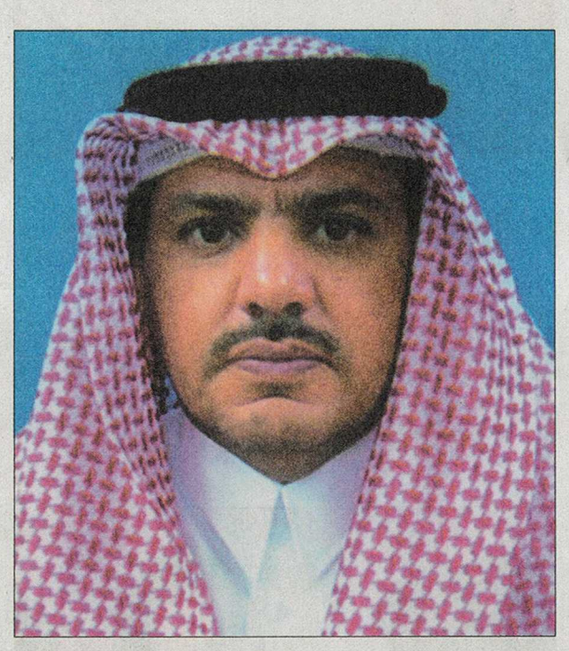


Abdulla Mohammed Al Suwaidi
Ambassador, Embassy of the United Arab Emirates

THE most significant thing I noticed in *Times of Oman* is the wide coverage of important events happening in every country all over the world. The general layout of the paper, dedicating separate pages for different region/countries, makes it easier for the readers to make selective reading when they are short of time to cover the whole paper in a short time. Moreover, the additional features that cover tastes of readers of various interests, is an important characteristic of *Times*. To my understanding, *Times of Oman* is the most popular English daily in Oman.

Though I am new to Oman and did not have the opportunity to read *Times* of the past three decades, I noticed the uniqueness of *Times* when compared to other English newspapers of Oman. Being one of the first English dailies in Oman that has probably the largest readership, I am sure the growth of *Times* shows the popularity of the newspaper among the readers. With the excellent past, a very wide readership, and the urge to grow, *Times* will have a very bright future in serving the readers of Oman and abroad in the next three decades and more.

Rich information



Abdulla Saad Al Mana
Ambassador, Embassy of the State of Qatar

I WOULD like to extend my sincere congratulations to *Times of Oman*, the editor, all the staff, and to Muscat Press and Publishing House, under the umbrella of which *Times of Oman* is issued.

On the occasion of its 30th anniversary, *Times of Oman* which is considered as the first English newspaper has played a great role in covering many important events during the past three decades, and has taken full responsibility, reflecting progress and development of the Sultanate under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Times of Oman was able to catch the eyes and hearts of its readership through publishing so many variety of political, social and cultural news. Moreover, it gained the minds of all the ages with rich information and credibility of the mass supplements it offers.

Congratulations once again and with my best wishes for more success and progress in the future.

3 DECADES OF BREAKING NEWS — TIMES OF OMAN

30 Year Special



How Times began to tick

If it were not for the Muscat Oman Saudi Arabia telex, the *Times of Oman* would not have happened, says the man who gifted *Times of Oman* to the Sultanate, our much-loved and highly respected Editor-in-Chief ESSA BIN MOHAMMED AL ZEDJALI. Here he turns the clock back to 30 years

THIRTY years of *Times of Oman*! Huddle up and listen to the real story behind 30 years of the *Times*.

The man who gifted the first-ever English newspaper to this country, Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, unveiled this story during the 25th anniversary celebrations of the *Times* on February 23, 2000. Here we invite our readers to take a stroll, again, down memory lane.

It is a long and exciting story, dating back to the early 1970s when Essa Al Zedjali, the *Times* founder and editor-in-chief, was a government servant.

He was working as a director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and he had under him five departments: Counsellor department, protocol department, finance, administration, security and coding.

In April 1974, Essa received a telex from Singapore from a company called Flying Tiger Corporation.

This company was based in Los Angeles, USA. But the telex came from Singapore asking for overflight permission. This company was specialised in freight by air. They sent the telex to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressing the country as, 'Muscat Oman Saudi Arabia'.

Essa fumed when he saw this telex and it put him off for the next few days.

"When I received this telex and read the text, I was very much annoyed and upset with the content and the name of the country. So I decided not to reply to the telex and kept it for three days without taking any action.

"As I was the director of the counsellor department, it was one of my duties to give permissions to commercial flights, military flights and personal flights flying over Oman. When I received such requests, I used to coordinate with other departments concerned. And when the approval from the concerned departments came, I used to send it to the party.

The development of Times of Oman has been commensurate with the advancement of the country.

The *Times* has always respected the demands of our readers...

The weekly tabloid began with 12 pages, gradually increasing to 20. In those days, printing was a laborious process as the matter had to be handset.

And as the country advanced, the *Times of Oman* also grew. It converted to a daily on January 1, 1991. There was a tremendous change. It had a new press to enable it go daily and soon the number of pages, from the initial 12, was increased.

Today we have a 24-page broadsheet daily along with a *Leisure*, and *Thursday*.

In 1998, the *Times* began its Friday edition. Staff strength increased - from 12 to 75 in Times of Oman. And 250 under the Muscat Press and Publishing House, which was formed in 1996, merging *Times of Oman* and *Al Shabiba* under one banner.

Essa points out that all of these are clear signs of development. The *Times* has attempted to cover all events, locally and internationally, to include political news, social news, business and finance, sports, culture, entertainment, etc., and the readers are happy with the product. But, it is a newspaper that is quite open to criticism. "This paper belongs to our readers. I am only a humble servant. We are always looking to offer our readers new and interesting things. *Times of Oman* is marching with the times."

"But in this case (Flying Tiger Corporation), I kept the message for three days. I was thinking what to do. I was upset. I was annoyed. I didn't know how to respond and my blood pressure had shot up!"

After three days, Essa did some soul searching: "I asked myself: Should we blame them for making this error in writing the name of our beloved country, or was it due to some mistake on our part?

"Why blame this company for, as you are aware, we were in the 1970s where there was no TV station, no radio station and no English newspapers. There weren't many embassies too. So after three days I sent them a telex-reply, granting them permission. And that is how the concept of *Times of Oman* germinated in my mind."

There was a gap and Essa was filling it.

"If we had a TV station or radio FM service or English newspapers, we could have introduced our country to the outside world. Therefore, I thought that I should go for an English newspaper. My reasoning was that it would help expatriates to read and to know how big our country is. And to our subscribers outside, it would act as a roving ambassador. As such, Oman has a long evolved civilisation, deep history and rich heritage.

"So when I thought of this newspaper, I contacted the minister of information in the same week. The minister then was His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, the former minister of foreign affairs. I contacted his office and took an appointment. I met him personally and conveyed my idea of an English newspaper to him. I told him the aim of the newspaper was to introduce my country to the outside world. His Highness encouraged me. He said, 'Mr Essa, we will support you morally, financially and technically!'" That was a very big boost.

"I received total support from the government through the Ministry of Information. They offered me moral, financial and technical support. I will never forget the words of the minister of information, who told me, 'We bless you and will support you in every possible way!'"

Since Essa owned the Oriental Printing Press, it proved to be easy for him to start the newspaper. The OPP was the second press in the country then. Mazoon Printing Press had started around 1968 and OPP followed in 1973.

Essa began his preparations for the newspaper and it took him about 10 months. In those days it was very hard to get editorial staff. "I contacted my friends like Sheikh Abdallah bin Sakhr Al Amri, who was the first secretary at our embassy in Jeddah, to send me bio-datas of people interested to work here.

"And in the meantime, I spread the word that we were coming out with the first-ever English newspaper and so we slowly built the anticipation."

Time ticked on until the D-Day, February 23, 1975, Oman witnessed the birth of the *Times of Oman*, the country's first English daily, in an all-exciting tabloid format!

"And I owe all this to the telex from Flying Tiger Corporation, who mentioned the country as Muscat Oman Saudi Arabia. So if it were not for the Muscat Oman Saudi Arabia telex, the *Times of Oman* would not have happened," Essa says.

"For I had no journalistic background and was not in contact with anybody in the field of media. I have a contracting company, trading company, pharmaceutical, livestock, etc., but had no inclination about the newspaper business," Essa candidly notes.

Now, February 23, 2005, is a day of great significance for Essa. Any creator would want to have his creation have an everlasting life. But, after 30 years it all seems like a dream. A dream, that came true, though.

Although, the newspaper has had its share of trials and tribulations, it has been able to weather any storm and sail in this media ocean, always ahead.

We Congratulate TIMES OF OMAN on their 30 Years of

speedy and precise delivery

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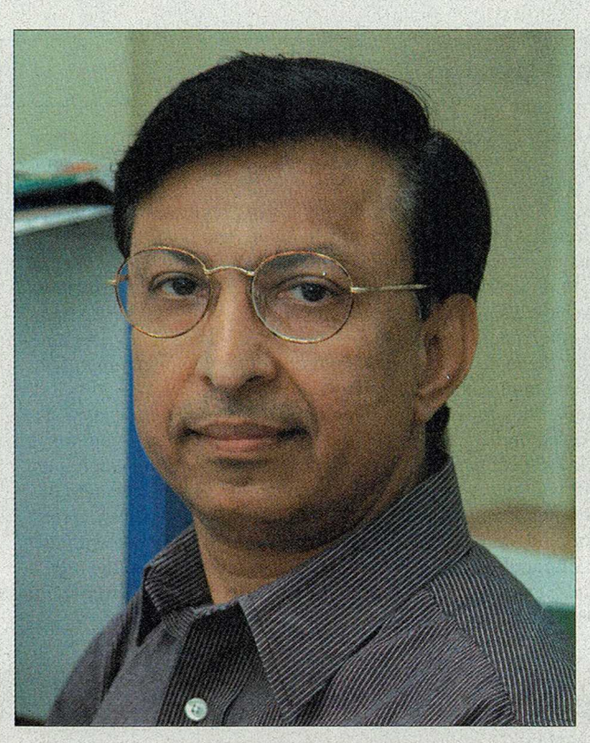


Time to toast our success

Oommen Kuruvilla
Assistant Editor

THERE must obviously be some very important events, aka milestones, in everybody's life. Some people celebrate them, some just watch them glide by, some are focused on casting a cynical eye on them and some consider them as stage posts on the way up.

Well, I think I belong to the second laidback category. I know it sounds a touch naff to admit that this group wouldn't be the one a mom would tell her child to emulate.

But I, for one, am prone to yank myself away from the rough and tumble of real life and watch those milestones pass by. And what's more, things like my birthday or wedding anniversary or, for that matter, any personal landmarks hardly stick in my mental disc.

No wonder, last month, all of a decade quietly slinked by since I started my first column in the *Times of Oman* which was entitled 'This World' — though for the last several years I have been focusing on a mite serious stuff, as the readers might well know.

Nevertheless, there might be occasions when I feel impelled to jog my memory a trifle and get jolted out of my languid mindset. One such occasion is when I am asked to share with the readers some snatches of my pretty longish association with Oman's most successful newspaper, the *Times of Oman*.

I am glad to say that on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the *Times of Oman* I would be more than willing to come out of my self-made box of the rather pedestrian category I spoke of and park happily in the last, more ambitious segment and proudly fly the flag of our newspaper.

Even to give a sanforized version of my association with the *Times*, it would require reams of paper. So I would better spotlight what is currently flashing through my mind.

Let me take a few paces back in time. To be honest, when I stepped foot on the Sultanate's soil over a decade back, I felt like a fish out of water. But as I started popping around, this incipient uneasiness gave way to a tranquil feeling. The view around me appeared, quite simply, divine — a picture-book landscape with undulating but august mountains, bijou buildings, quaint *wadis*, and above all, neat roads. I felt it was the best place to set a romantic novel.

But that feel-good mood dissipated when I met a gentleman by name Sam, the hubby of a friend of my wife. I was supposed to give him a small parcel sent by his wife who was working in Dubai. I handed it over, and in between the usual catechism of questions and badinage, he queried why I left *Khaleej Times* in Dubai, and if I had some personal reason, why then couldn't I join the rival paper across the road. He then went on to make a not-so-good prediction about our paper.

Of course, I felt a bit down, but managed a disconcerting smile. Somewhere inside me a voice murmured in quiet confidence, the line I read sometime back, which goes like this: "The best way to predict our future is to create it".

Years rolled along, and today, the *Times of Oman* is widely recognised as the leader in the field. And we in the *Times* have every right to toast its success.

No, I don't claim to be a vital cog in the wheel of success of the *Times*. In fact, I want to disabuse of that impression if I have generated such a feeling through these jottings. All the same, I like to take pride in being just an ordinary cog in the wheel.

Perhaps it is better to say that all of us, of different nationalities, under the able guidance of the management, commingled to create a top-flight newspaper. It's indeed a team effort. Undoubtedly, we all take pride in having chipped in with our bit to make the paper tip-top in quality.

If Sam is around, —I hope he is — he must surely be an avid reader of the *Times*. Now, don't I have the right to chuckle at the turn of events, and indeed, at the tongue-in-cheek question he threw at me years back?

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the *Times of Oman*, what bulks large in my mind is our founder editor-in-chief and chairman Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, who has been an inspiration for me and all others, every step of the way through the thick and thin. I count myself lucky to have a boss like him who can spot talent, recognise their worth and inspire them not only by his words but, most importantly, by his own example.

I am sure the *Times of Oman* will continue to fly high and reach even greater heights.

30-Year Special



Latest news, good presentation

Sandakumari Karunaratne
Second Secretary, Sri Lanka Embassy

I APPRECIATE *Times of Oman*'s presentation of articles, news items and supplements on special occasions in a remarkably high standard.

Since June last year, I have had the experience of reading *Times of Oman*. During this short period, I found that the *Times* has most of the qualities of a popular newspaper, such as providing readers with latest news items on time, publishing special magazines like *Thursday* weekly and business news, etc.

I hope *Times of Oman* will achieve world-class standard of an English daily in the near future and many more readers will join the way of success.

My sincere best wishes on the 30th anniversary of *Times of Oman*!

All the best for next 30 decades and beyond



Khayyam Akbar
Charge d'affaires, Embassy of Pakistan

I FEEL that *Times of Oman* tries to do justice with the global journalistic traditions.

It gives ample coverage to all shades of Omani society and tries to cover a variety of news and activities, both from within Oman or outside.

All marks to the *Times* and those who burn their "midnight oil" to bring it every morning to our doorsteps.

There is, however, a space to add more analytical and original articles on issues concerning us as human beings. I enjoy reading it every day, as also some of its sister newspapers from Oman, and feel the *Times* is doing a great service to the Sultanate.

I would, nevertheless, wish to see, in the coming years, more meat in its skeleton. And better coverage of the world around us, near or far.

I see a future where *Times of Oman* would graduate further and join the best newspapers, not only in this region, but also around the continent. My sincere wishes to the whole team for the continued success of the newspaper, for the next three decades. Well, why not thirty decades … and beyond.

Reader-friendly layout



Saipul Anuar Abd. Muin
Malaysian Ambassador

TIMES of Oman features broad coverage on Oman's local contents as well as international affairs. Its layout is reader-friendly, systematic flow design and can be easily accessible through the Internet. Compared to other mainstream publications, *Times of Oman* is more articulate and provides a more comprehensive analysis of Oman's economy and business. Moreover, it has a dedicated column for local readers and international opinion which turned to be very informative and enlightening.

Times of Oman has illustrated a remarkable growth within a short span of time in the print media realm in Oman. The style of reporting has improved tremendously that touched every corner of the Sultanate. The coverage has also changed from local concentration to regional and international limelight.

I foresee a bright future for *Times of Oman* in years to come in its reporting as well as shaping the readers. *Times of Oman* would continue to grow and mature ultimately. And I have strong confidence that *Times of Oman* would soon become the key source of information in fostering the knowledge society in Oman.



Anees Issa

Just read it!

Anees Issa Zedjali, deputy editor-in-chief

FROM a weekly to a daily, from a little baby to 30 years – this is something that everyone should be proud of and I am extremely proud of this great achievement of *Times of Oman*!

It is a far cry today of what it was 30 years ago and it has matched the breathtaking pace of Oman's developmental strides and is in line with the progress made.

The paper has developed in every way, it has more colour, great features and the best part of the *Times* that I really admire has been its ability to rope in the Asian segment of the expatriate population in Oman.

It has been successful in this front and thanks to the efforts of the able *Times* team, we are number one today and hope we will remain so.

The strength of this paper lay in its ability to disseminate information in a totally neutral manner, yet give due coverage to issues that mattered. Its ability to present a true and honest depiction of a subject or event has been its hallmark.

It is interesting to see how the *Times* will fare in the future…With the press playing a bigger role in disseminating information and it being freer, faster and wider in reach, I would say that now the time has come for the *Times* to join hands with the government and jointly support the push for Sultanate to be a great country.

Press plays a pivotal role in the developmental progress of the country, much beyond its standard role of merely disseminating information and it is this role that the *Times* has taken with a passion and a will to succeed.

The future of the newspaper lies in these key words: "Times of Oman"!

Just read it!



Ahmed Issa

Fruit of great vision

Ahmed Issa, CEO

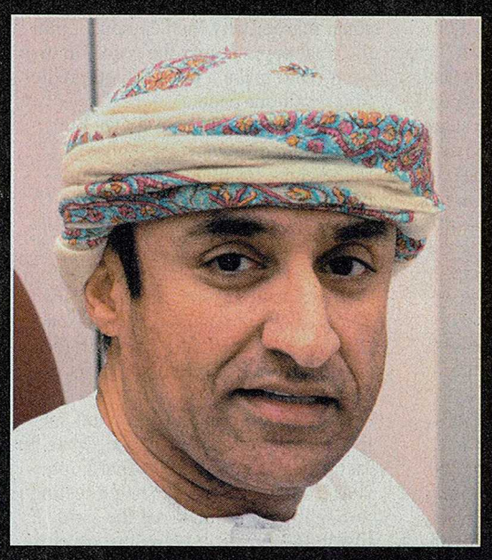
TIMES of Oman is the fruit of the vision of the chairman and the editor-in-chief to highlight Oman's name abroad. The idea germinated in the mind of the chairman in the early 1970s when he received a telex from a company called Flying Tiger Corporation, which wrongly addressed Oman as 'Muscat Oman Saudi Arabia'.

This prompted the chairman to do everything possible to introduce Oman to the outside world — and what better way can that be done than to have a full-fledged newspaper. It is this vision that has borne fruit — the *Times* — and it is this vision that has been our driving force for the last 30 years, making it one of the top newspapers in Oman and also making it the biggest news media here.

Today, with our entry into NewsDirect and our e-paper, the *Times* has crossed borders and reached every nook and corner of the world.

Being a local paper with an international outlook and reach, I am sure we will play a pivotal role in reaching the valued messages of Oman to the world and also at the same time promote Oman abroad.

Whatever we do today, and in the future, will be in line with the vision of our chairman. And we will continue to maintain the high standards, enjoyed by this newspaper and also make full efforts to raise it to better standards.



Faiq Issa

Higher and higher

Faiq Issa, COO

INDEED, it is a great feeling to be part of *Times of Oman*. We will make all efforts so that it could continue to make ripples in all aspects of newspaper business.

More importantly, the *Times* has served to be a great vehicle for Oman-based news to the outside world and to promote the distinct Omani culture and tradition abroad. Thanks to the *Times* the world has come closer to the Sultanate, a great nation under the able leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

As for the *Times*, it is a paper that enjoys the number one status in Oman and I am sure that in the future too, we will maintain the status and, in fact, go higher and higher.



Mohammed Issa

Ready for next step

Mohammed Issa, director

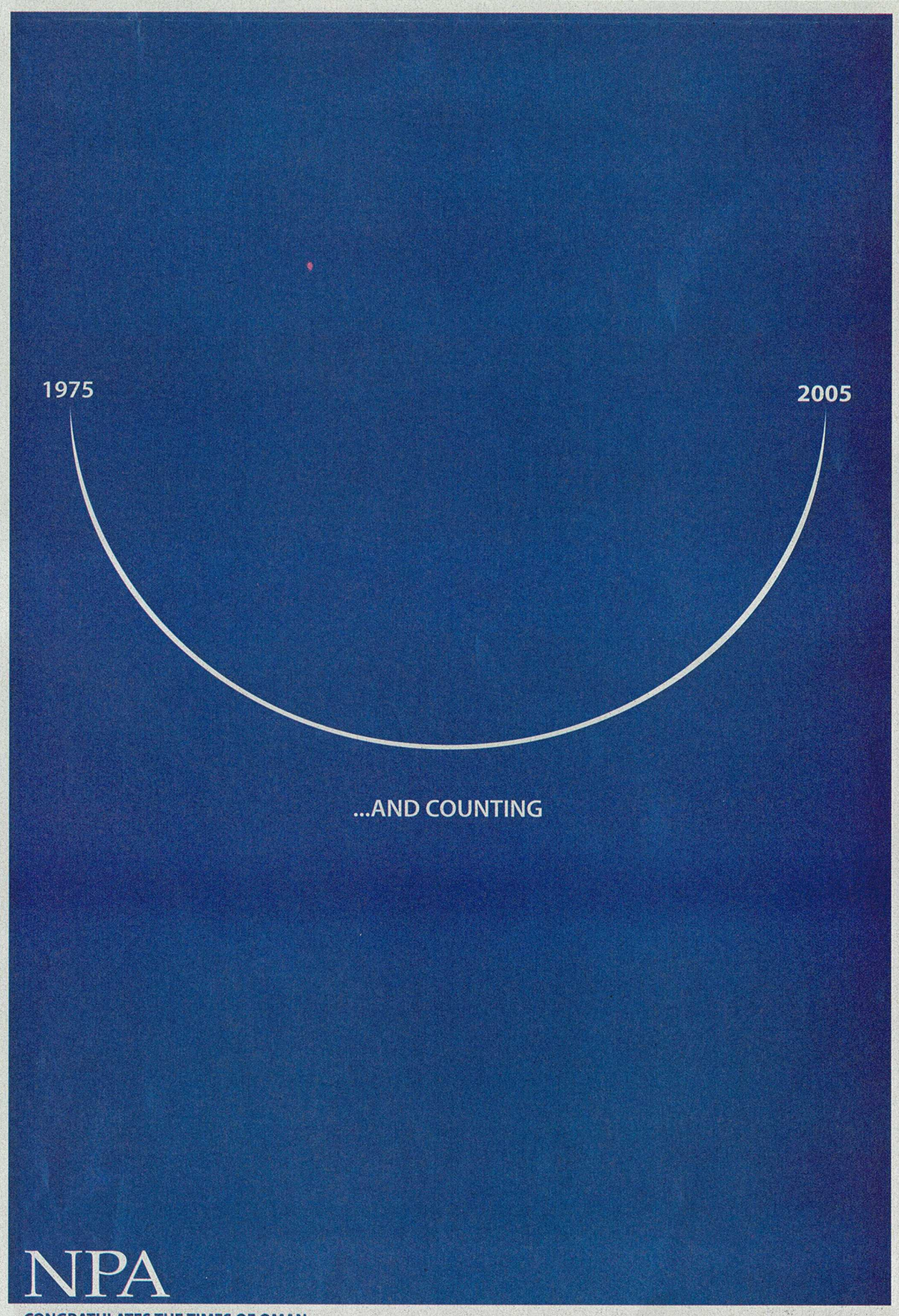
TIMES of Oman should be credited for bringing Omanis and expatriates closer. It has played a very significant role in this regard.

I remember in the early 70s, there was no English newspaper and the *Times* managed to blaze a trail in print journalism. At the same time, it managed to narrow the gap between Omanis and non-Omanis.

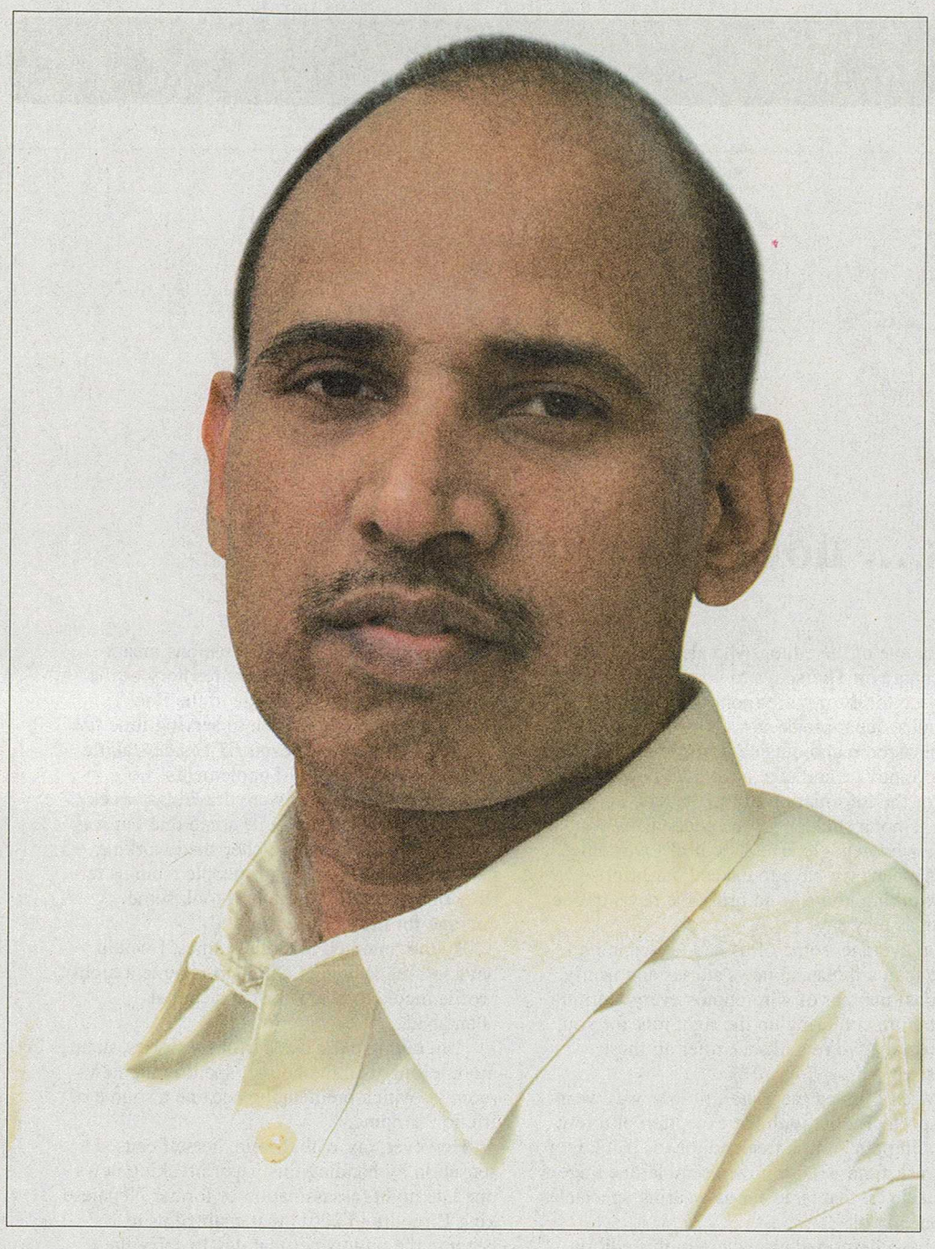
Times has also managed to promote and sell Oman abroad.

Today, we are facing a very competitive market and, therefore, the next step for the *Times* is to embrace the new GSM and IT culture too, so that we are able to cater to this growing segment in a bigger way.

This way we will reach the pinnacles of journalism in Oman!



My *Times* of Heaven



Prasad Panicker
Editor

1991

ARTHUR Cushing, the editor of *Times of Oman*, was in the newsroom, bidding farewell to his team.

An emotional occasion.

A little later, he took me aside and whispered: "I don't know where I have brought you to, hell or heaven."

Don't worry, I'll manage, I assured him.

I was the newest member of Team Desk — the others were a lady — from Bombay — and three guys, one from Bombay, one from Calcutta and the third from the Philippines.

Things were not easy. It was a shock for me. From the spacious, busy desk at the majestic Express Towers at Nariman Point in Bombay to a small, sleepy room with just four colleagues. The first few days were difficult. I thought of taking the next flight back to Bombay.

I didn't. And here I am, with all praise for the place that has provided me with bread and butter for 14 years.

I'M the only 'surviving' member here of Team Desk of 1991 associated with the Great Changeover — from a weekly tabloid to a broadsheet daily. The other four members of Team Desk are now in four different parts of the world — one in Dubai, one in Sydney, one in Canada and one in the Philippines.

Team Editorial consisted of, apart from Arthur Cushing, just seven — five on the desk and two in reporting. Slowly and steadily we expanded, in strength and space.

More sub-editors, reporters and proofreaders have joined; more staff have come in advertising and circulation; the office has been shifted to a new, spacious building. Teleprinters have been replaced with computers.

Expansion of the office and staff resulted in the expansion of the paper, both in popularity and the number of pages. The broadsheet babe did experience growing-up pains, yet it took "one step at a time, like a baby beginning to walk..." as our Editor-in-Chief, Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, would so often tell us those days.

And then it was time for me to move on. To pastures green and woods fresh. By that time, the *Times* was on the right path, grown from an infant to a child — an unpredictable child though, sometimes well-behaved, some times mischievous. And I too was still young, adventurous and eager to see the world.

Dubai and *Khaleej Times* were a totally new experience, but I was addicted to *Times* and Muscat. I made calls to the guys at the desk and reporting, and pined for what was not.

And then the guy from Calcutta, Owen Bouche, who was then editor, called me.

Come over, he said.

All ready, I said.

Great, so come before I'm gone.

What!

Yeah, I'm going.

Goodbye, I rather would go to Qatar.

I had an offer from Qatar. A new paper coming out from there, in fact. I always liked new ventures and the risks and challenges they presented.

Qatar or Oman? I was in two minds. I love Oman. But most of the oldies were gone.

Owen's departure announcement was the last nail. I knew the place, but faces are all new.

Qatar or Oman?

Owen called me again. *Times* is really set to take off, he said. Come, you could make it happen, he dangled the carrot.

The indecision began to melt. It evaporated as I talked on phone with Mr Anees, deputy editor-in-chief, who came to the UAE for a visit. Also, I was thrilled to become editor at the age of 30 — pretty young to take up such a responsibility, as the then director of The American International School of Muscat would tell me, quite admiringly, in his first visit to our office to meet Team *Times*.

1995

I landed in Muscat in the evening. Owen had already left. Still there were familiar, friendly faces.

I stepped in to the office the following day, confidently. This is the place I know more than anyone else here. I would know a tale or two more than the new faces I would encounter would care to remember.

Yet Muscat looked slow and dull. The first few days were difficult. And then things fell into place: it felt quite, peaceful, serene …

IT'S a decade since I came back. So much has happened in these 10 years. Gone is my thick, black hair. Gone are the pumped-up muscles. Gone too is much of my ego. Much, not all, yes. But the enthusiasm still remains.

Times has seen tremendous growth in the last 14 years. From 12 pages, it has now 24 pages everyday. Many days of the week the number goes up to 30 or more.

And *Times* has given birth to quite a few cute little things: *Leisure*, *Thursday, et (entertainment times)*, *ICE Times*…all adorable offspring.

Teleprinters have given way to satellite dishes for news reception. From just a handful of news agencies, we now have correspondents in key cities and tie-ups with major syndications and newspapers of the world: *Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, New York Times, Nature* magazine, *Daily Express (*of Britain*), The Independent,* the *Indian Express* of India, to name a few.



PEARL NOW: Gold in 20 years.

Times have changed, and the *Times* has kept pace with.

I have had no contacts with Arthur Cushing ever since he left Muscat. I wish I could tell him it was heaven he had brought me to.

Times of Heaven!

IN my career I have enjoyed two rare honours. One is working for the Bombay edition of the *Indian Express* when Ramnath Goenka was calling the shots from the penthouse of the Express Towers at Nariman Point. I was part of the *Express* when Mr Goenka made, and broke, politicians and prime ministers, from Rajiv Gandhi to V.P. Singh to Chandra Sekhar. My salute to the doyen of India's fearless journalism.

The second is, you guessed it right, working under Mr Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali, our editor-in-chief. His commitment and his passion reminds me of Mr Goenka.

IT is nearly 10 years since I became editor of *Times of Oman*. A long period of time, considering the fact that during the last 14 years of the *Times* of broadsheet the share of my predecessors was four years.

But I owe a lot to all of them. I had worked under, or with, all of them, from Arthur Cushing to Bala Menon, from Olimpo to Arif Ali, from Dara Kadva to Owen Bouche. Each one of them has contributed to polish up this 'pearl'.

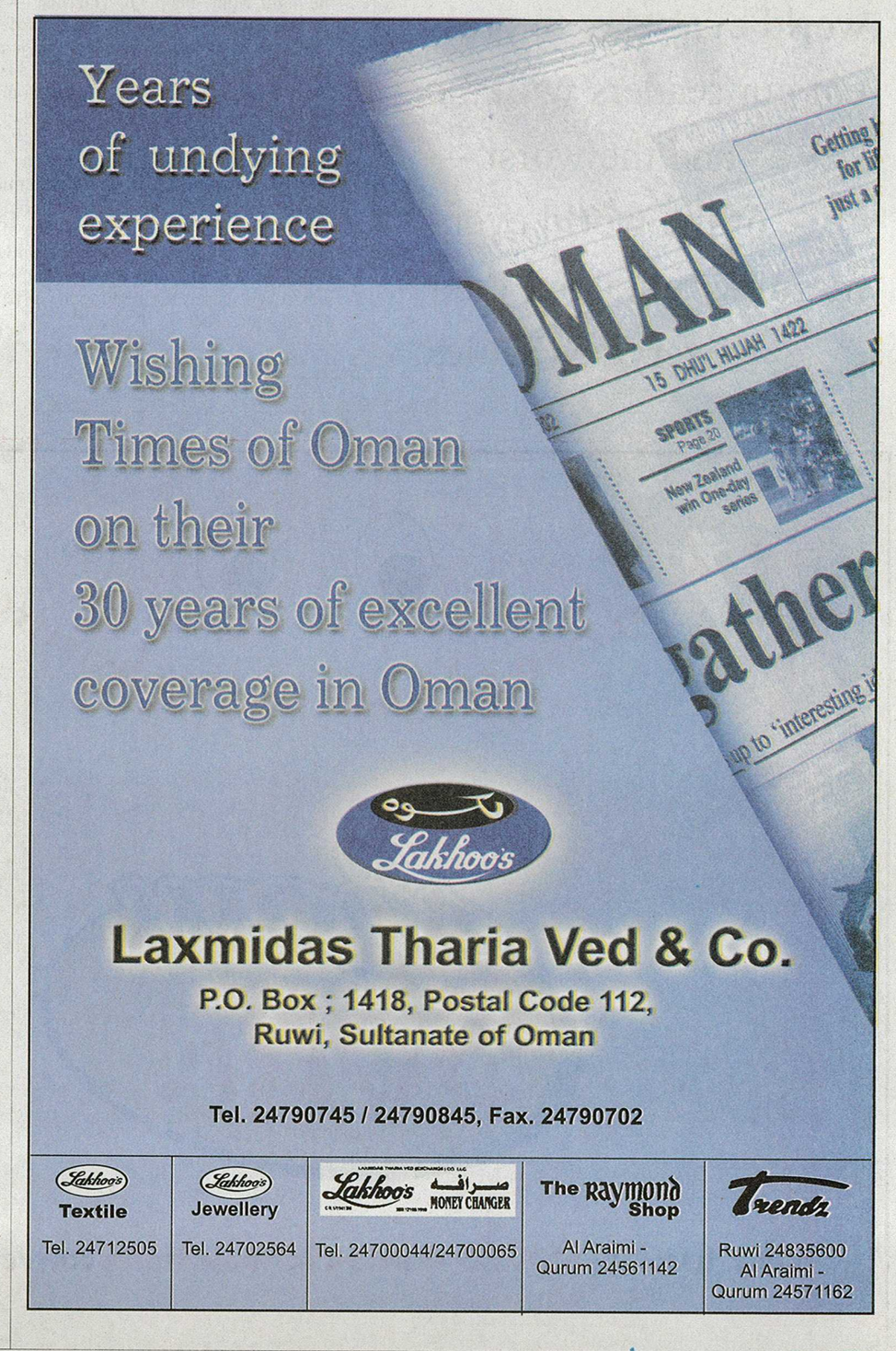
In sport, they stress the role of a good captain. I don't agree, or disagree, with them totally. A captain is as good, or as bad, as his team — I owe a lot to Team Editorial, the members of which are ever ready to meet any crisis or challenge.

Bad management could finish off even a great team and team spirit. This is another area Team Editorial has been blessed with — an understanding and appreciative management.

And then you — our dear readers — the biggest asset of the *Times of Oman*. With constructive criticism, unreserved appreciation and undying enthusiasm, you have provided us with unwavering support and confidence all these 30 years.

It is your support that is going to help us climb new mountains, reach new goals and stride towards 50.

From pearl to gold.

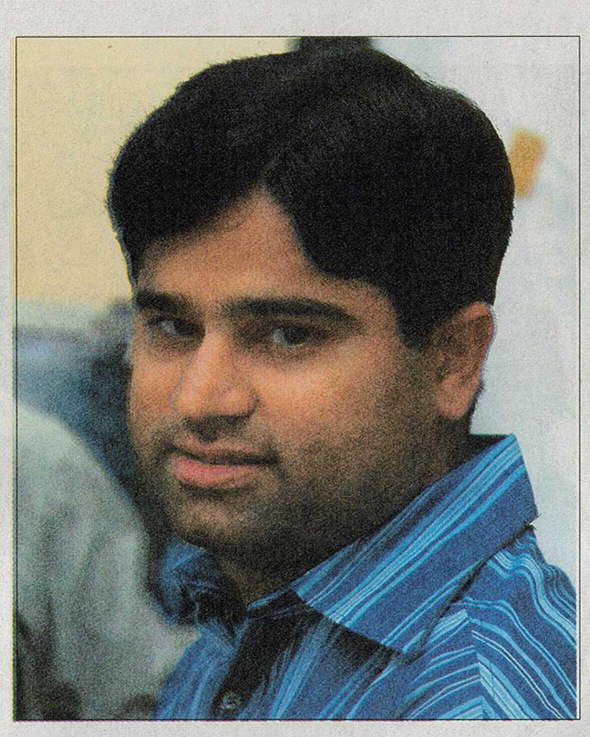




30 Year Special

Global View

All the world has become a village, thanks to information technology. Global happenings affect the lives of the people, no matter which part of the world they occur or where you are. That is why one needs to know what's happening around the world. Here, our staffers who keep an eye on the world everyday to present our readers with the best — and the worst — of the world every morning tell about their everyday battles



Kamran Rehmat
Senior sub-editor

What you see is ... not what you get

THERE is a standard joke about our late working hours. You know who else prowls the night, right? People of The Mist — for, that is, when time is ripe for the oldest profession!

Those late hours make our social lives virtually redundant — as if inundated by a tsunami. Yet, like a bright night out, it makes our day if we manage to beat the odds in doing a story that, literally, makes a headline.

For the more obsessive amongst us — and there are a few — after a while even our dreams come in column sizes with bold or light headlines — depending on the theme of the dream. Given that some pages scream with their headlines at you in the morning, you would be excused for thinking it's a (terrible) dream come true!

On a serious note, after clocking time in a few newspapers, journals, a news agency, an advertising firm and electronic media before finding my feet in the *Times of Oman* (now what would all this make me out to be — a dinosaur?), I have an admission to make.

To suspecting puritans (a fast disappearing breed), my fulminations may come across as lightening strikes of a Shahid Afridi but what to do — got to call a spade a spade and not, gravel. Let's get to the nitty-gritty then.

If you have a balanced mind and a sharp learning curve, after sometime, editing skills assume a clerical bent. With the availability of fine wire services like AFP, Reuters, AP, etc., which provide all the beef, I think real work at the desk — call it juice, if you will — has been reduced to a two-part enterprise: (a) alluring headlines and (b) appealing layout.

Personally, that's what I have endeavoured to do at the *Times*. To the lasting credit of the editorial management, they have been ever willing to serve half-volleys to allow the trusted cast to literally launch into them like feather-bed bullies!

I have had the privilege of dishing out an enchilada of stories on the Front Page five days-a-week for nearly eight years under the roving eye of the editor, who also handed over the charge on Thursdays to yours truly, setting the pace for even more room to experiment. His subsequent praise as well as of all those in the newsroom and outside it, made it easier for me to innovate and take a crack at new styles.

For the information of the readers, the Front Page is not a stickler for the adage *what you see is what you get*. The labour of love sometimes means we have to exceed our brief — and working hours — to bring the news in one piece, as they say!

On average, some of us end up scanning more than a thousand news stories and nearly an equal number of wire photos every working day before conjuring up the right mix for you. Amazingly, we're still sane after all these years!

When I joined the *Times*, no-one was wearing spectacles but with the exception of a few, including our fitness freak editor (or is it editor for freak fitness?), all now resemble one huge spectacle … that is, as far as wearing spectacles is concerned!

I have described elsewhere in this edition how we managed to beat the odds, stay sane and deliver — in that order. But truth to tell, we have always enjoyed and benefited from a relaxed working atmosphere. This is what enabled me to take wings even though at the age I joined in 1997, I was only the baby of the team!

Work requirements and situations meant yours truly traipsed into every territory of the paper — from the Front Page to the Back (Sports) in the main edition to serving time for *Leisure*, *Thursday* and even *ET* besides taking guard for National Day Supplements!

Finally, the curtains were drawn last week. It was in the works for quite sometime but it is a measure of how much I cherished working here with one big family of people (sounds terribly obese, doesn't it?) that it took some courage for me to call it *time*.

By the time you read these lines, I would have left the shores of Oman to assume a high-profile media role in Pakistan's capital Islamabad.

I'm taking back wonderful memories, none more telling than the hours I spent in the newsroom — which predictably, became a source of friction at home.

However, my wife, Maria, herself caused a sensation by handing this paper breaking news one late night (assassination of former Nepalese king Birendra in 2001) that enabled us to become the only paper that day to carry the news story!!!

I don't know if she was being sarcastic or the news bug had just reached home.

Hasta la vista!

● *Kamran Rehmat has just left Times to settle back in Pakistan*

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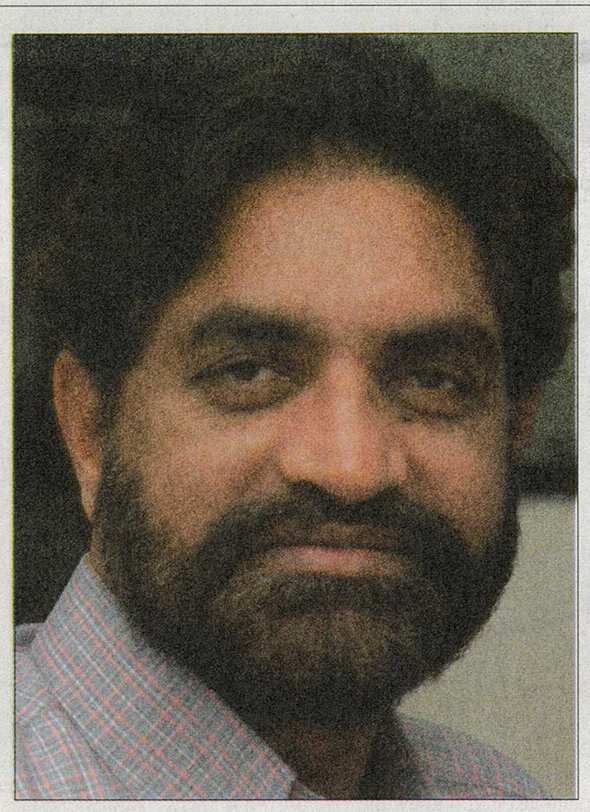


Clarence Rufin
Sub-editor

From the newsroom — no holds barred!

EVERYTHING related to the treatment of news begins in the newsroom, within a certain timeframe, without stepping on the deadline. The deadline is a sword hanging over the head of each sub-editor who has been assigned responsibility for the page or pages designated to cover a certain country or continent.

My past work experience has required me to travel extensively within Pakistan and to 14 countries (some of them more than six times in 10 years) in Asia, the Far East, Europe and the US. This has exposed me to diverse peoples, their cultures, personal needs, social and political systems. Doing various pages for *Times*, therefore, which have included Pakistan, the Americas, Late News, and Features (on certain days I have had to do, the UK, the Philippines,) is like refreshing my memory and reconnecting with the wonderful peoples and places I have known over the years.

PAKISTAN PAGE: The majority of the expat community in Oman comprises Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. Most of the Indians here hail from the South while the Pakistanis are from the North. The weather, both within and without, may be different. But their motherlands – Pakistan and India — after being cross for several years, are encouraging their citizens to mend the fences. In view of these positive signals *Times* is making a conscious effort to maintain a reconciliatory and uniform complexion throughout the India-Pakistan pages.

THE AMERICAS: The United States of America's overall prosperity and foreign policy has crucial relevance to the rest of the world. Whether it is about aid or trade, freedom or democracy, life and living or burying the dead. For some reason, some countries are suspicious of these gestures by the US. What transpires in the South American countries too is newsworthy. These are not very enlightened states. The power of darkness prevails in the form of drug trade and financial and moral deficiency. Such sensitivities are being taken into consideration and need regular mention on The Americas page.

LATE NEWS: No news to too late for the late news page: After midnight, when the countdown is nearing the end, tension mounts in the newsroom. At that time, the last men standing deal with 'Page One' and the 'Late News'. You continue to browse wire agency stories and collect the important ones which have been ignored or missed by other pages. The pressure of deadlines has taken over. Even at this late juncture, 'Late News' accepts overflows from the 'Local Pages' and 'Page One'. Often you dress up stories and then they get abrogated by latest updates. This excerise of making, breaking and remaking the page can be frustrating. But that is what the Late News page is all about.

Too much too little: It is generally believed that there is an abundance of news being fed by the wire services to the newspapers. But this happens neither every day nor all the time. If Pakistan is one hour ahead of Oman, America is nine to 12 hours behind. So dating and updating of stories is an ongoing process. It is always a race against time. We cannot remain indifferent to such time differences.

No news is bad news. And there are dry days too. Saturdays and Sundays in the case of the Americas and for Pakistan any day can be dry when there are one or two stories or none, especially in terms of photos are missing. So Internews, the Pakistani news service, comes handy.

Good news is no news. This notion is wrong. Health and history-related discoveries; moderate and major achievements awe the readers. These are received with wonder and admiration.

Shock and awe phenomena: Newspapers are not just loud-hailers. We feel that by printing such news we are acting both as a cushion and as shock absorbers to the events that lead to difficult and dangerous situations — the tsunami tragedy or September 11 terror attack are cases in point.

Some stories are built on theory and not authenticity, speculations and not facts. And there are others that possess honour and deserve honour, especially while editing and giving headlines. We prioritise real stories which relate to people, places and things and which would foster peace and help improve the quality of life of the reader.

Headlines and deadlines: In some newspapers, headlines often tell one story, while the fine print relates another. The headlines appear bold and beautiful. In the case of headlines, bold is not always beautiful. And the emphasis is on making the captions and headlines catchy and attractive at the same time avoiding the use of gaudy and garish colours. However, the introduction of colour to Pakistan and the Americas pages has brought colour to the pages literally. This has contributed to a fundamental improvement in the general look of the paper.

Layout and pagemaking play a major role in forming the character of a page. The use of pictures, meaningful and careful cropping with a pinch of sophistication, has been admired by readers with mature thought.

Post-edition evaluation, and the day-after discussions analysing the balance in the pages is a regular feature.

Space and treatment given to American elections, nuclear proliferation, calamities, glitterati and literati are some of the subjects with are critically assessed.

We intend to preserve our current preferences and continue to publish stories that cater to the needs of the Asian and Western communities in the Sultanate, particulary the enterprising Omani peoples.

Talk of the Town

The main difference between a paper from any other neighbouring country of Oman and one from Oman is ... local coverage. It is, in fact, on this count the *Times* beat off the competition from the region in the late '90s. In those early years of growth, the *Times* has been blessed with a few young men who relentlessly probed the local scene to come up with never-before-seen stories and great displays. We blazed a trail with bold steps. These young men have grown mature over years, but their enthusiasm is still young. Share with them their local spirit.

A VISITING American professor at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) once asked a *Times of Oman* journalist a query on what basis local stories were done. "Don't you guys report on crime and politics?" the gentleman asked the reporter.

The gentleman-reporter smiled and replied gently: "Look, our editor-in-chief has a policy. I think similar queries were addressed to him and this was his reply: 'If a fruit basket was kept before you, what would you choose from it? Would you take the unripe or the rotten and the spoilt ones, or the ones that are ripe and juicy looking? We adopt the same policy when it comes to reports, especially local reports. We choose the ones that are good, that reflect a positive ambience and are able to showcase the richness of this country. We don't go digging for worms!'

"So, Sir, I hope you've caught our drift and oh, to complete your question, we don't cover crime and politics because these are two non-existent issues here. So, why should we cook up something that is not there? That is not journalism!"

Well, that is not journalism and there are things and issues here that are not under the journalistic purview. In other words, there are issues which are strictly off limits to journalists here and that is the way it goes!

Very few that complain about journalism, as it is practised here, are aware of the rules and regulations governing journalism here and think that Oman would allow anything to go into print *a la* tabloid journals. Not so.

There are rules and regulations and we, in the media, follow the rules. There are no two ways about it.

We have an editorial policy which is totally in line with the journalism policy of the country and we follow it to a 'T'.

Predatory journalism is not allowed. Nor, do we go overboard with any topic. There is a well-defined line of control (LOC) and we don't go beyond, of course, we do stretch it at times.

What is a newspaper that does not report on local crime, local politics? Good question, but why can't we look beyond that? Why should someone else's rules be applicable here? Surely, we can be different. And we, are different. Different from those that report only on local crime and politics. We march to the beat of different drum. And unlike other countries, Oman is one big family, and why should some of the personal, family matters be displayed to the public, to the world...? This is the policy that we take. This is the policy that we abide by.

We are of the opinion that you, we, us, are all newsmakers...So, we speak about the newsmakers, we speak about you, we speak about us...

At the same time, whenever there has been an issue, we had fronted it, raised it, waved it like a matador... But, unlike that bull killer, we have not hurt anyone, at least, not deliberately...

But, as far as local stories are concerned, we have seen it, we have done it...Some of the issues that readily come into our mind are the campaigns that we have done. Right from the start we have been involved in many campaigns: against rising traffic accidents, against vandalism, against bad health conditions in local eateries, against pollution, against health problems, against high school fees in schools here, against high fares by India-bound airlines...we have even brought out issues of non-payment of salaries to employees and, most importantly, we have championed the cause of the poor, the down-trodden, those in need...

Not a single campaign on this front has ever failed. For instance, we are known to bring out the plight of various expatriates who have been struck by the vagaries of fate and have fallen into bad times...we have brought out these issues into the open by which so many readers have been moved to contribute their mite to such causes...

In the sense, we have helped, we have contributed our mite to society by all these means...

But don't get us wrong! We are not an expatriate-oriented paper! It is just that more expatriates read our newspaper than the Omanis and naturally we need to cater to them too.

But the point to stress here is that we are rooted in Oman, with Omani values and flowing with Omani tradition... this is strongly evident in the in-depth coverage we have accorded to pertinent national issues like Omanisation, environment and health, and here also we have been on the forefront in highlighting the need for better access for those with special needs...

But, why get into details? We were, we are and we will be a newspaper that cares for the local populace here and for that we will continue on this path ... chronicling as well as championing causes.

Of course, we will have our own editorial policy, even on the local segment, but will never stray from the path that we had mentioned before.

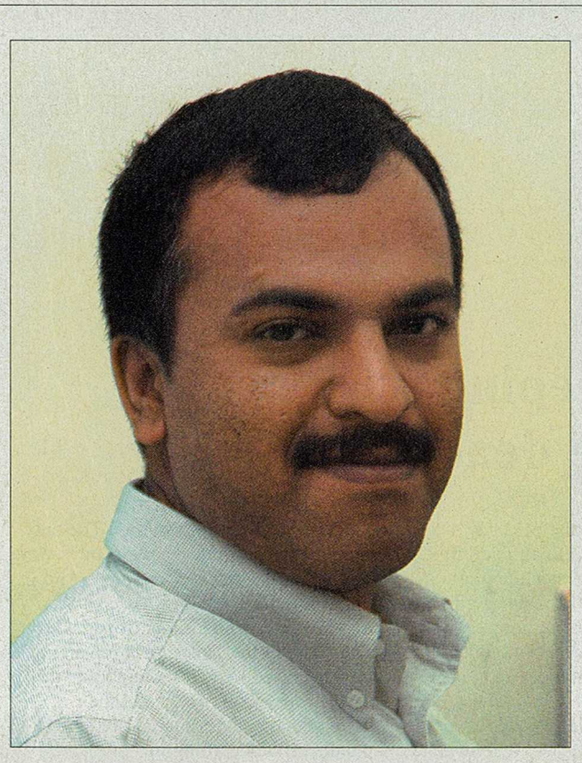
At one point in time, we did get into local school politics and we almost had our nose rubbed on the ground. That was fun, though.

But, again, let us reiterate that we will not pick up rotten fruit!

And even if do, we are not going to eat it!

We will not eat, or offer, rotten fruit!

Global View



Alienation of affection

Manoj
Sub-editor

QUIET, please ladies and gentlemen!
Fasten your seat belts. Turn on the pages and read on ... This special edition comes to you as part of a *cause célèbre* and this is a *causerie*: Your 'Good Mornings' began with *Times of Oman* for the last 30 years and this personal account comes to you as an attempt to highlight the behind-the-scene happenings on our 30th birthday. This is also the time to take a count back.

However, this trip — taking a leaf from travel glossary — could be Tvm-Koc-Dli-Chn-Bng-Mct which took a little over a dozen years to land in this package. To confess, it was a thrilling experience all the way.

As said, the trip was no direct flight and did face turbulence. On the way, met countless number of people including couple of prime ministers, ministers, state chief ministers, sportspersons, film personalities, musicians, authors, witnessed proceedings in Indian parliament one of the largest democracies in the world, legislative assemblies in a couple of states and, yes, even turncoats. Travelled far and wide in quest of knowledge and worked in state and national capitals as part of noble professions of reporter and sub-editor.

At *Times*, things were the same as in my first newspaper, M.J. Akbar-edited *Asian Age* — which is the first multi-edition newspaper from the subcontinent with editions from as far as London, Africa, and in the US, or briefly with *The Statesman*, New Delhi, and later with *The Indian Express*, Kochi, and Thiruvananthapuram for long before taking up the offer from *Times of Oman*.

At *Times*, the only additions were page-makers and proof-reading departments. Editing stories for the *Philippines*, *Americas*, *Times Sport, India, Times Business*, *Late News*, *UK,* (on and off) *Local* pages, on a couple of occasions for *Page 1* and of late for *Leisure* was cool. One of the most memorable events was reporting the Oman-India World Cup football qualifying match in Kochi, Kerala, my home state, last year.

Travelling on an Oman Air flight to Kochi with the Oman's football team, who just became national heroes after their performance in the Gulf Cup, Doha, was an experience, especially the chat with Badr Al Maimani, the nimble-footed striker. Milan Macala, the burly former national team coach who was angry and seemed to be a man in a hurry.

The Kochi visit did clear — both to the national coach and national team — doubts about India as only a cricket-loving nation. They were pleasantly surprised to see nearly 50,000 spectators, including a sizeable number of Omanis, at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, the India-Oman match venue. Oman also won the hearts of soccer-loving crowd and the Oman delegation was 'bowled over' by the warmth of both the crowd and the organisers. Journalist friends were snooping around wanting to know which side I was rooting for and more about Oman. I held the 'court' and gave them inputs and more.

Until the Oman team left the Kerala shores, and report was dispatched, I was treated as part of the Omani delegation.

The assignment kick-started my month-long holidays, including my much-awaited marriage.
Thus, I still feel Oman team's 'big flight' began from Kochi and I'm glad I was witness to it.

The report was the lead on *Times Sport* despite the 'mother of all battles' — cricket Test match between India and Pakistan — was also on.

Working on the news and sports desk of your favourite newspaper was equally enchanting. Right from the start as one touched down at Seeb International Airport, the warmth touched the right chord.

The new life at new place in the small but awesome newsroom, as they say, is business as usual now, bringing out pages within the deadline.

The initial hiccup with drawing dummies since it was not part of the schedule in other newspapers where I worked before is now a distant memory.

However, now it is like a duck taking to waters. This is also time to thank all for all good things and wish it remained so...

30 years of news, information and entertainment.



Oman Arab Bank congratulates
the Times of Oman on their
30th Anniversary and wishes them all success in the future.

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