





# Juma presides over Oman LNG anniversary celebrations

**SUR** — Dr Juma bin Ali bin Juma, minister of manpower, yesterday presided over the 10th anniversary celebrations of Oman LNG Company yesterday.

As part of the celebrations, five agreements were signed by the Oman LNG and Ministry of Manpower.

Representing the Ministry of Manpower, Dr Juma signed the agreement while chief executive of Oman LNG signed them for the company.

As per the agreement, the company will finance training projects worth RO536,117. The agreements also include financing of a commercial centre project at the Nizwa Technical College and IT projects at the technical colleges in Salalah and Ibra.

Dr Juma also presided over the inaugural ceremony of a grand conference hall at the Educational College in Sur.

Oman LNG financed RO179,000 for this project.

Boat races, with the participation of 26 small boats (*Howris*) and four boats of Oman LNG, and folk song and dance programmes were held as part of the celebrations. At the end of the event, Juma distributed prizes to the winners. — *ONA*



**INAUGURATION:** Dr Juma bin Ali bin Juma inaugurating the event by cutting a ribbon. Right, Dr Juma signing one of the agreements. — *ONA*



**CELEBRATIONS:** A folk dance is being presented as part of the celebrations. Right, a team taking part in the boat race. — *ONA*



**DEPARTURE:** Dr Rajiha bint Abdul Amir bin Ali leaving for Pakistan yesterday. — *ONA*

## Rajiha leaves for Pakistan

**MUSCAT** — Dr Rajiha bint Abdul Amir bin Ali, minister of tourism, left for Pakistan yesterday; heading a delegation.

The visit is at the invitation of her Pakistani counterpart Nilofar Bakhtiar and is aimed at reinforcing joint cooperation in the field of tourism.

The minister was seen off by the charge d'affaires at the Pakistan Embassy and the Tourism Ministry officials.

Dr Rajiha is also expected to participate in some cultural and tourism activities in Lahore, including Basant, a popular spring festival, during her visit. — *ONA*

## Global conference on tumour begins



**ADDRESS:** Dr Ahmed bin Abdul Qader Al Ghassani, centre, addressing the conference yesterday.

**MUSCAT** — Dr Ahmed bin Abdul Qader Al Ghassani, health affairs undersecretary at the Ministry of Health, yesterday at Crowne Plaza Hotel, presided over the opening of the first international conference on tumour at Royal Hospital under the motto 'Towards new standards in cancer treatment'.

In his speech, Ghassani highlighted the ministry's efforts in making use of the modern scientific techniques in cancer treatment. He also pointed to the facilities available in various health institutions in the Sultanate for the early detection of cancer.

Dr Ghazi bin Omer Al Zubaidi, director-general of the Royal Hospital, delivered a speech in which he shed light on the developments and services provided by the National Tumour Centre since its inception. A total of 200 participants from the Sultanate and AGCC states are taking part in the conference. Some 22 research papers will be presented during the conference. — *ONA*



## UAE to buy \$918.2m military equipment

**ABU DHABI** — The United Arab Emirates announced that it had ordered \$918.2 million in military equipment at an arms fair that ended yesterday, just half the value of contracts awarded two years ago.

Contracts awarded yesterday, the last day of the five-day IDEX 2007 in Abu Dhabi, amounted to \$317.4 million, IDEX spokesman General Obeid Al Kotbi said, quoted by the official Wam news agency.

The \$918.2 million total awarded compares with \$1.85 billion worth of defence systems ordered during the previous fair, in 2005.

During the fair, the air force signed a memorandum of understanding with European aerospace group EADS for the purchase of three military Airbus A330 MRTT (Multi Role Transport Tanker) refuelling aircraft.

Kotbi said on Monday that the air force had been looking at both the A330 MRTT and the US-manufactured Boeing 767.

EADS confirmed the agreement and said delivery would start in 2011. IDEX, the Middle East's biggest arms fair, opened on Sunday with hundreds of manufacturers displaying state-of-the-art weaponry. — *AFP*



**ON SONG:** Noted Pakistani singer Azra Jehan presenting a concert, 'Tere Ishq Nachaya', at Al Falaj Hotel yesterday. Right, a section of the gathering. — *Photos by Rodolfo Alfonso*



## UN urged to stop Israeli excavation near Al Aqsa

**JEDDAH** — Islamic states urged the UN Security Council yesterday to stop Israeli "violations" in Jerusalem, including controversial excavation work near Al Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest site.

Foreign ministers or representatives from 29 members of the 57-strong Organisation of the Islamic Conference also urged the international community to end an aid freeze clamped on the Palestinian government since Hamas came to power a year ago.

The Muslim officials condemned the "works and excavations carried out by Israel, 'the occu-

pying power' (in east Jerusalem), that threaten the holy Al Aqsa mosque and its surrounding area," demanding that they cease immediately, said a statement issued at OIC headquarters in Jeddah.

They urged the Security Council to "intervene to take the necessary measures to protect Al Aqsa mosque."

The OIC delegates accused Israel of committing "grave violations" of international law in Jerusalem, including "the persisting settlement activity inside Al Quds" and "isolation of the city with an apartheid wall." — *AFP*



**FUN:** Two children watching a fountain in the refurbished Corniche area in Muttrah yesterday. — *Photo by Rodolfo Alfonso*



### Prayer Timings

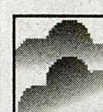
Dhuhr .....12.25pm  
Asr .....03.44pm  
Maghrib .....06.12pm  
Isha .....07.22pm  
Tomorrow  
Fajr .....05.18am

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### OMAN RADIO

06:00 Opening, Royal Anthem, The Holy Quran, Preview of Morning Programmes, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies on Duty, Headlines, Preview Update  
06:15 Good Morning Oman  
06:30 News Headlines — Weather  
07:00 News Bulletin  
07:10 Stocks And Shares  
07:20 Good Morning Oman  
08:00 News Roundup  
08:02 Good Morning Oman  
09:00 Headlines  
09:02 Piano Music  
10:00 News Highlights  
10:02 Instrumental Music  
11:00 News Headlines  
11:03 Light Classical Music  
12:00 News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Preview of Afternoon Programmes  
12:05 The Holy Quran  
12:15 Islam & Peace/I read for you  
01:00 News Headlines  
01:03 The Selector  
02:00 News Bulletin  
02:10 Oman This Week  
02:20 Oman This Week  
03:00 Headlines, Preview of Evening Programmes, Weather Forecast  
03:02 Windows on Oman  
03:15 Easy Listening Music  
03:30 Health Is Wealth  
04:00 Headlines  
04:02 Weekend Wind Down  
04:02 News Headlines, Weather Forecast, Pharmacies On Duty  
05:02 Weekend Wind Down  
06:00 News Bulletin  
06:10 Jam Night  
07:00 Headlines  
07:02 Jam Night  
08:00 Headlines  
08:02 Jam Night  
09:00 Headlines  
09:02 D.J. Choice  
10:00 News Bulletin  
10:15 D.J. Choice  
11:40 News Summary, Pharmacies on Duty  
11:45 The Holy Quran  
12:00 National Anthem, Close Down

### WEATHER



Clear to partly cloudy skies over Musandam, Al Buraimi and Muscat and regions of Al Dahirah, Al

Dakhliyah and Al Batinah and mainly clear skies over rest of the Sultanate and chances of early morning fog over regions of Al Wusta and Al Sharqiyah.

**Winds:** Over the coastal areas of Gulf of Oman winds will be north-easterly light to moderate during day becoming variable light at night and over the rest of the Sultanate winds will be southeasterly light to moderate.  
**Sea state:** Slight over most of the coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

**Muscat**  
Maximum today: 26C  
Minimum tonight: 16C  
Relative humidity: 50 to 85 per cent  
Sunrise 06:34am — Sunset 06:07pm

**Salalah**  
Maximum today: 29C  
Minimum tonight: 21C  
Relative humidity: 20 to 70 per cent  
Sunrise 06:45am — Sunset 06:28pm

**Temp** .....Max Min  
Seeb .....26 .16  
Khasab .....25 .16  
Diba .....25 .15  
Mad'ha .....25 .12  
Buraimi .....26 .11  
Ibri .....27 .12  
Fahud .....28 .10  
Sohar .....25 .13  
Suwaiq .....26 .13  
Rustaq .....28 .14  
Sumail .....29 .15  
Nizwa .....28 .14  
Saiq .....20 .07  
Jabal Shams .....14 .05  
Bahla .....27 .12  
Adam .....29 .13  
Mudhebi .....27 .15  
Ibra .....28 .14  
Sur .....29 .18  
Ras Al Hadd .....28 .19  
Masirah .....29 .18  
Duqm .....27 .18  
Haima .....29 .15  
Marmul .....28 .12  
Mhout .....26 .17  
Thumrait .....30 .14  
Salalah .....29 .21  
Qairoon Hairiti .....23 .16  
Mina Salalah .....28 .20  
Al Halaniyah .....27 .20  
Jabal Samhan .....21 .14  
Jabal Qamar .....21 .14  
Muscat 24, Abu Dhabi 22, Dubai 23, Sharjah 24, Ras Al Khaimah 25, Doha 22, Manama 20, Riyadh 27, Makkah 33, Madinah 30, Jeddah 31, Kuwait 23, Sanaa 26, Aden 29, Mukalla 28, Baghdad 20, Beirut 18, Amman 17, Damascus 19, Cairo 32, Ankara 11, Geneva 10, Brussels 09, Frankfurt 10, Paris 11, London 10, New York 01, Tokyo 12, Rome 14, Amsterdam 10.



PAKISTAN

Grieving families take custody of train blast victims



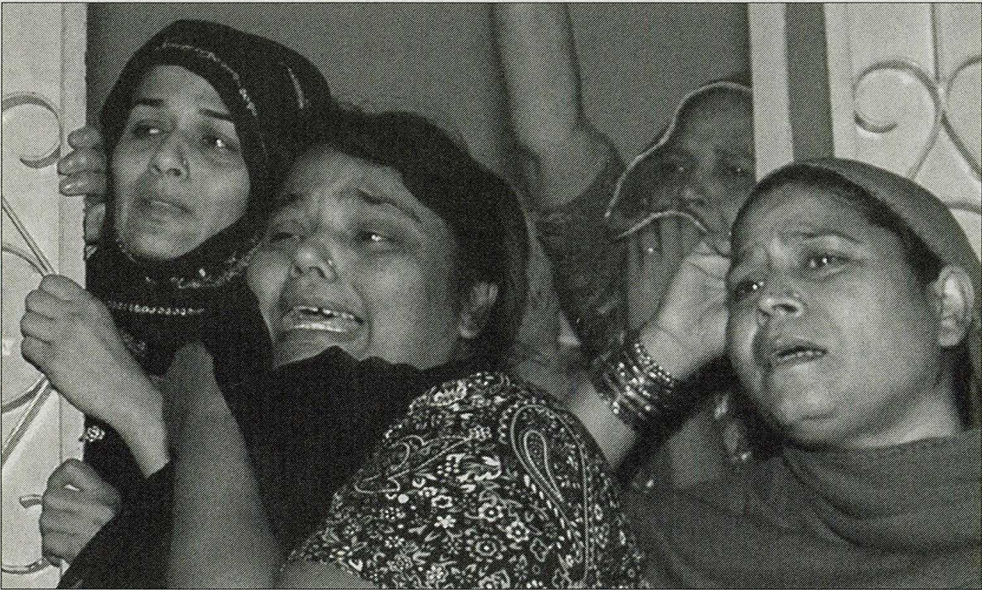
**WAGAH** — On nights silence reigns at this border post, but cries rent the air yesterday as Pakistani families accepted the bodies of loved ones killed in deadly Indian train blasts.

The ‘Friendship Express’ train was headed to Pakistan at midnight on Sunday when explosions in two carriages killed 68 people, mostly

Muslims travelling home after visiting relatives in India.

About 15 relatives had waited for several hours just over the border in Pakistan, when Indian security forces arrived with a truck bearing coffins containing the remains of their family members.

The families, pale-faced and tearful, did not cry until



**AGONY:** Officials, left, paying floral tributes on a coffin of a ‘Samjhauta (Friendship) Express’ train victim after Indian officials handed it over in Karachi yesterday. Top, relatives weeping as the bodies of blast victims arrived home. — **AFP**

troops on the Indian side handed over the coffins to their black-clad Pakistani counterparts in a procedure that took less than half an hour.

Then all at once, as the bodies touched Pakistani soil, the women broke out into grief-stricken wailing, two of them fainting as the coffins were laid out, said a reporter at the scene.

“If people die on Indian soil or on Pakistan soil, both the things are painful for us, since most of our relatives live in India,” said Ishaq Ali, a bespectacled man in his 50s whose sister, Rajia Sultan, was among the dead.

“This is all destiny, we just thank Allah that we are able to bury our martyrs, the people who have been taken away from us, in our own soil.”

The bearded Ali’s eyes were moist as he expressed gratitude that his sister’s body had been found.

“We did not even know if our relatives would be identified or not. We are glad they came back to us, but our sorrow is that they did not return alive,” said Ali, in a choked voice, who had come from the city of Karachi.

The bodies were handed over in two lots, seven of them well before dawn and the remainder after sunrise.

Six women, four men, and two children — a boy and a girl — were among the dead.

Officials of the Indian Railways who were present gave the families Rs85,000 (\$1,920) in cash for each person lost in the terror attack.

Pakistan will not allow interrogation of its nationals injured in the train tragedy by the Indian officials, Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam told a private news channel.

The spokeswoman said it would be a very twisted mind that could implicate the ill-fated persons whose whole families were burnt alive.

— **AFP**

Missing journalist traced

From A Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD** — Tribal political authorities on Wednesday recovered *Daily Express* Resident Editor Sohail Qalandar and his friend Niaz Mohammed from Bara in Khyber Agency after 53 days in captivity, newspapers reported yesterday.

“The kidnappers kept me in a mountainous area and also tortured me. I was asked to sign an agreement to stop writing against kidnappers, smugglers and anti-state elements in NWFP and FATA,” Qalandar told a gathering of politicians, social workers, journalists and artists, who had gathered at the Peshawar Press Club to welcome him.

The kidnappers, Sohail said, had time and again asked him to guarantee that he and other journalists of Peshawar would stop highlighting the cases of kidnapping for ransom, smuggling and other anti-state activities.

“I did not bow to their demands. I told the kidnappers I would not compromise on my professional duties even if it costs me my life,” he said. Press Club Action Committee Chairman Shamim Shahid said Qalandar and his friend were sized from a house in the Shankor area with the help of Mehsud Scouts on Wednesday.

Telecom fastest growing sector: PM

**ISLAMABAD** — Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has said that telecom remained the fastest growing sector of Pakistan’s economy, as should be evident from a whopping investment of \$ 9 billion attracted by the sector, thanks to deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation being followed by the government religiously.

The prime minister was talking to Mohammed Hasan Imran Al Shamsi, chairman, Etisalat International Pakistan, who was here to attend the Euro-Money conference. Shaukat Aziz said the telecom sector constitutes 2 per cent of the GDP, which is expected to rise further, adding the country boasts the presence of 50 million phones, including cellular and fixed lines, and the tele-density has surged from 4 per cent in 2003 to 35 per cent in 2007.

Musharraf directs govt to check price hike to help common man

From Arif Ali

**ISLAMABAD** — President General Pervez Musharraf has directed the government to control price hike and inflationary trends for the benefit of common man and stressed the need for sustaining the economic growth rate through regular monitoring.

He was speaking at a presentation by the Ministry of Finance, also attended by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, to prepare a ten-year roadmap for the country’s economic development.

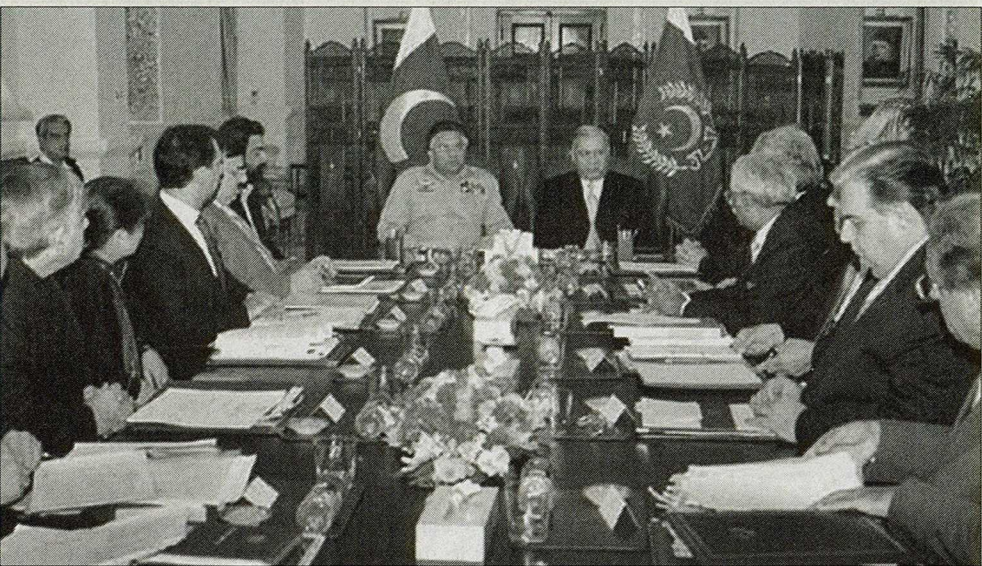
The president directed that steps be taken to further bring down prices of essential items and called for regular monitoring of food inflation.

The meeting was informed that with the increased availability of essential food items like onions, potatoes, pulses and tomatoes their prices were declining.

The meeting was informed that since December the inflation has dropped from 8.9 per cent to 6.6 per cent while the food related inflation has declined to 7.7 per cent from 12.7 per cent due to increased supply situation.

President Musharraf expressed satisfaction on the overall economic development and directed to sustain the momentum for transferring the economic gains at the grassroots level.

The president directed to diversify country’s industrial sector by developing the engineering sector and “viewing the industry beyond textiles.”



**TALKS:** President Pervez Musharraf addressing finance experts in the presence of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz yesterday.

He also called for developing the livestock and dairy sector through value addition.

Shaukat Aziz said the Foreign Direct Investment was likely to touch the \$6 billion mark in the current year that was far higher than the \$3.8 billion last year.

He said the foreign investment companies were looking at Pakistan as a lucrative market and cited the acquisition of Paktel by China Mobile and said several foreign banks were trying to merge with local private banks.

Dr Ashfaq Hassan, adviser on Economic Affairs later told newsmen that the government would be able to achieve its growth target of around seven per cent during the current fiscal year. He said the interna-

tional financial agencies were upbeat about Pakistan’s economic growth even higher than seven per cent.

He said the president directed the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs to prepare a comprehensive 10-year economic development plan and directed for sustaining the growth rate at about 8 per cent in the next decade.

He said under the 10-year roadmap new targets will be set for achieving higher growth rates and reforms and policies will be finalised to achieve these goals.

He said the projected growth rate of 6-8 per cent could help double the per capita income, generate more economic activity, help allevi-

ate poverty and improve quality of life.

Dr Ashfaq was optimistic that the country’s agriculture sector would sustain the 4-5 per cent of growth rate over the next ten years.

The meeting was attended by Minister for Industries and Production Jahangir Khan Tareen, Minister for Food and Agriculture Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance Dr Salman Shah, Minister of State for Finance Omar Ayub Khan, Governor State Bank of Pakistan Dr Shamshad Akhtar, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission M. Akram Sheikh, secretary general Revenue Division Abdullah Yousaf and senior officials.

Recall 73 crew members for poor appearances and English, says SC

From A Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD** — The Supreme Court (SC) has directed Pakistan International Airlines Corporation (PIAC) to reinstate 73 of its women crewmembers who had been suspended because of deteriorating appearances and poor English.

The court asked the PIAC management to give three months to the complainants to make up for their deficiencies before sending their cases to the Suitability Board. Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry made it clear that the reasons mentioned in the notices did not justify termination.

The chief justice had taken notice on the complaint of six women cabin

crewmembers who had sought the court’s intervention against orders of the PIAC management, forcing them to retire because of their “dull and poor appearance, scars on the face, gap in front teeth and the age factor affecting their looks”.

The plaintiffs had requested the chief justice to direct the airlines to renounce the “insulting remarks” and recall them to their duties.

On February 13, the SC directed PIA Chairman Tariq Kirmani to explain the “derogatory and insulting” treatment of the women staff by the corporation.

The plaintiffs have said the administration is recruiting women from Japan, Thailand, Kenya, Russia and Greece in their place at a monthly remuneration of

\$5,000, while they are being paid Rs15,000 to Rs20,000 for the same job.

Having heard the plaintiffs and the counsel for the PIA, the chief justice ruled: “Cabin crew as well as persons on ground duties to whom notices have been issued shall be taken on duty immediately. Initially, a period of three months will be provided to them to make up the deficiencies, which have been provided.

In the meantime, cases of the cabin crew will be sent to the ‘Suitability Board’ to examine the discrimination pointed out by the applicants. Subsequent thereto a report shall be submitted to this court after three months. However, their services shall not be terminated for the reasons mentioned in the notices.” The case was adjourned to May 25.

‘Dead man’ kicking around

From A Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD** — “I am alive,” shouted a 38-year-old man, much to the bewilderment of his marooned relatives and friends busy mourning his death.

According to a report, Irfan, called Billa out of love, reached his residence in Lahore on Wednesday evening only to find his family members wailing over a dead body and preparing for his funeral.

The daily quoted eyewitnesses as saying that Billa’s family members, besides a good number of local residents, gathered at his residence minutes after his father reached there along with the dead body of an electrocuted man. The father identified the man, who was killed at Lower Mall Road, as his son Irfan.

According to rescue workers, a man was killed shortly after he fell down from an electric pole when he was trying to capture a stray kite at Lower Mall on Wednesday afternoon. “He received severe electric shock and fell down on the road, shortly after he touched the wires and died on the spot,” Ahmed Hassan, a vendor, was quoted as saying.

Police sources said that a mutilated, unrecognised body, identified as Irfan alias Billa, was handed over to his father Mohammed Ikram without autopsy. In the words of the father, his son, working as a helper at a furniture shop, was mentally retarded and he often used to disappear mysteriously.

Billa’s wife and other family members were crying over the dead body when Billa, in his usual casual self, appeared from nowhere to invite his two small children to shout out of sheer joy “Papa is here, Papa is here.”

Pact signed with UAE for electrification in 700 Balochistan villages

**ISLAMABAD** — Electrification of 700 villages of Balochistan will start in the next four months under an agreement, to be signed next week between the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan.

Minister for Water and Power Liaquat Jatoi has informed the Pakistani Senate that the project included electrification of the villages and setting up of three grid stations.

He said these would have a capacity to provide 24,000 domestic, 1,600 commercial, 16 industrial and 200 tube-well connections.

Jatoi said that the Tribal Electric Supply Company (Tesco) had Rs64 million dues outstanding against the people of the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and these were a hindrance in the way of development work in the region.

The minister also said that government’s focal point was to provide electricity to rural areas, which would help a triggering development there.

Around Rs16 million were already spent during the last five years for the purpose, he added. To another question Jatoi said that the government was exploring all possible opportunities for increasing power generation to meet the growing energy needs of the country. — **Internews**

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5.	Isuzu 4WD Pick-up-Double cabin	1995	1 No.
6.	Subaru Legacy	1994	1 No.
7.	Subaru Legacy	1998	1 No.
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WORLD

Iraqi children make a living in garbage dump

**BAGHDAD** — Sitting amid mounds of rotting garbage in a rubbish dump in Baghdad, 13-year-old Huda Hamdan is the human face of a new UN report that says a third of war-torn Iraq's 26 million people live in poverty.

The teenager, wearing a black veil, is taking a break from scavenging for aluminium cans and glass bottles that she sells for a few Iraqi dinars. She tries not to gag from the stench of the decomposing household refuse surrounding her.

She and her six brothers and sisters compete with scores of other diggers, many children and women, made homeless by sectarian violence that has forced them to flee their homes and seek refuge in the sprawling slum of Sadr City.

Scores of displaced Shiite families have made the rubbish dump their home — living in unsanitary conditions in tents, crude shacks made from oil cans or squatting in an empty building — and trying to eke out the barest of livings.

A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and an Iraqi government agency released on Sunday found that 5 per cent of Iraqis live in extreme poverty, with Baghdad the least deprived area, and the southern



**UNFORTUNATE:** Iraqi boys walk in a rubbish dump in Sadr City, Baghdad, yesterday. — Reuters

provinces the worst.

The report said a third of Iraqis overall were living in poverty. It gave no comparison with previous years.

But the UNDP said the study "showed a deterioration in the living standards of Iraqis" since Iraq was a thriving middle-income country in the 1970s and 80s. Four years of war, following a decade of UN sanctions in the 1990s, has paralysed the economy and fuelled soaring unem-

ployment.

"It shows the failure of the state authorities to provide adequate services to the population," UNDP said in a statement that also blamed Western-backed efforts to transform the economy into a free market for "exacerbating deprivation levels".

Hamdan said she and her siblings fled Fallujah, a Sunni insurgent stronghold west of Baghdad, after a US sniper shot dead her mother, leaving

them orphaned. Now they live with her grandparents and uncles in Sadr City.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are 1.6 million Iraqis displaced inside the country, including 425,000 who fled their homes after the bombing of the Samarra shrine in February 2006 unleashed a wave of sectarian violence.

"We are poor people. We have nothing," Hamdan says

softly.

Holding up her right hand, she takes off a blue and white woollen glove that helps protect her injured hand against the filth and carefully unwraps a surprisingly clean bandage.

Her little finger was severed by the tailgate of a rubbish truck as scavengers crushed around it, desperate to search it before it dumped its load on to the rubbish heap.

Illness and infections among the diggers are common. Looking around the dump it's not hard to see why. Men, women and children, their clothes caked in thick grime, wade through fetid pools of water or climb mountains of garbage, poking through the rubbish with long, curved metal rods to hook the cans.

Fifteen-year-old Saif has struck lucky. "I found these," he said, holding up four flat breads. "We'll clean them and then eat them for breakfast. We have no money to buy food."

Nearby, Ali Al Yateem, who looks older than his 10 years, heaves a large white canvas sack of cool drink cans on to the scale of a local scrap merchant, who pays him 2,000 dinars (\$1.50) after checking he has not weighted the bag with bricks.

Jawad Habib, 21, was

forced from his home in Abu Ghraib, a Sunni stronghold on the western outskirts of Baghdad. He took a job as day labourer in construction, but when a suicide bomber blew up among a group of labourers he came to the dump.

Even there he has found danger lurking in the rotting debris. "I found a grenade and called the police." He was lucky. Other diggers say a young girl was killed in an explosion.

The plight of Ali, Huda, Saif and Jawad is the result of a "deeply complex political and security crisis with no quick apparent solution", the UNDP said in its report.

"I've been in conflict zones for 22 years. Iraq is unlike anything else on earth," UNDP country director Paolo Lembo said in an interview from Amman.

He said the Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 Gulf War, international sanctions and the chaos that followed the 2003 US-led invasion had delivered a series of hammer blows to Iraq's economy that had created "a kind of deprivation that is unique".

"Will the situation improve in the immediate future? No, I don't think so, but that does not mean I am not optimistic. This country has an enormous wealth of resources." — Reuters

Cult singer back on tour in France after 34-year exile

**PARIS** — An eccentric 1960s rock-star known for his trademark blond frizz and white sunglasses is about to embark on his first French concert tour in 34 years after half a lifetime in exile in the United States. The return of 62-year-old Michel Polnareff for a series of 40 performances starting next week is being hailed as France's showbiz event of 2007, with generations of fans anxious to discover the reclusive musical prodigy in the flesh. An accomplished instrumentalist whose father wrote songs for Edith Piaf, Polnareff had a string of melodic hits from 1966 such as *La poupee qui fait non* (The doll who shakes her head), but he left France for Los Angeles in 1973 after he was cheated by his manager and unable to pay his tax bill. He retained the adulation of a large fan base thanks to intermittent albums over the years, but the long-promised return to the stage has never materialised till now. Polnareff's anti-conformist reputation was established early on when his song *l'Amour avec toi* was banned from broadcast till late at night because it contained the words, "I just want to make love to you". In 1972 he was prosecuted and fined for revealing his buttocks on an advertising poster. In recent years Polnareff has been living in Palm Desert, California, dividing his time between body-building and song-writing.

Cardinal tells car-mad Germans to think green

**BERLIN** — The head of the Catholic church in Germany called on his compatriots yesterday to give up their beloved cars for Lent to make a personal contribution to preventing climate change. Cardinal Karl Lehmann said in *Bild* newspaper yesterday that the period of 40 days before Easter in the Christian calendar "requires us to rethink our lifestyle." "Far too often, we do things that are harmful to our fellow citizens and the environment. "Let us use Lent to make a personal contribution to improving our climate by having car 'fast.' "Preserving creation is a duty which falls to all of us," Lehmann, the chairman of the German bishops' conference, said. Germany — home to luxury car makes BMW, Mercedes and Porsche — this week announced plans to tax vehicles not by engine size, but according to how much carbon dioxide (CO2) and other dangerous emissions they produce. A UN report said this month that global warming was almost certainly caused by humans, and carbon pollution disgorged this century would disrupt the climate system for a thousand years to come.

Computerised babies cry, burp at Mexican teens

**MEXICO CITY** — High school students in the Mexican state of Chihuahua are being made to care for screaming, hiccupping baby dolls that run on computer chips to try to bring down the state's soaring teenage pregnancy rate. Pairs of teenage boys and girls aged 13 to 17 have to spend two or three days tending to the computerised babies, programmed to cry for food, burp and wake up screaming at night until they are rocked back to sleep. "You have to change their diapers, feed them and slap them on the back so they burp. They laugh, they get colic. They simulate the behaviour of a real baby," said state education official Pilar Huidobro, who is in charge of the programme. "The aim is to have a more novel way of getting young people to be really conscious of the risk of becoming fathers or mothers at a young age." The northern border state of Chihuahua suffers from one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the country, with 20 per cent of babies being born to mothers aged 19 or younger, Huidobro said. Some of the dolls can show symptoms of withdrawal from alcohol or drugs, as if they were the offspring of addicts. The uncannily lifelike plastic dolls, called RealCare babies, are also used in programmes in the United States and Britain. In Mexico, Toluca-based company Sucisa also sells them to health clinics in other parts of the country. Students in Chihuahua are mostly horrified at the amount of work involved in looking after a baby, which they take home at night, Huidobro said. "There's been a good response," she said. "They all agree it's not the right time for that kind of responsibility."

Israeli defence minister faces media mockery

**JERUSALEM** — Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz may have looked the proud commander surveying his troops during key war games this week but he could not have been more in the dark about the manoeuvres. Photographs splashed across the country's two major newspapers yesterday, showed a rotund Peretz, lips set in concentration, face tilted to the light and eyes glued to binoculars... with their black lens caps still firmly on. Alongside him, his right-hand man, army chief Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, kitted out in battle dress, expertly adjusts his own binoculars to watch troops going through their paces on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. "The outlook is dark for Peretz," joked top-selling daily *Yediot Ahronot*. Peretz, a former trade union chief whose own military experience is limited to national service, has been vilified in Israel for his perceived mishandling of last year's war in Lebanon. A vast majority of Israelis want him to resign from the Defence Ministry on the grounds of chronic incompetence and military inexperience.

Chile orders probe into ad offering Aids-tainted blood

**SANTIAGO** — Chilean authorities have launched a probe into an internet advertisement offering to sell blood contaminated with Aids, officials said. The ad, posted on the Latin American Internet sales site, offered "blood with Aids for sale, 100,000 pesos (\$185) for five millilitres (0.2 fluid ounces)." The tainted blood was "ideal for suicide," said the ad, which was posted for nine days and received 45 web hits until police discovered it. Police identified the ad's author as Carlos Fajardo Zamora, who lives in Quilque, west of Santiago. Authorities searched his home but found no trace of contaminated blood. Fajardo told police it was all "a joke among friends," but authorities are investigating whether he established contact with potential buyers via e-mail. Fajardo remains free during the investigation.

Man pulled off plane for joking about bomb

**MANILA** — Police at the Philippines' main international airport yesterday arrested a Frenchman and pulled him off a plane after he made a joke about carrying a bomb in his bag. Michel Christian Joseph Brionne, 66, was arrested and whisked off the Cebu Pacific plane bound for Bangkok after he allegedly made several jokes to a stewardess and seat-mate about a bomb in his hand-carried bag, airport police said. The pilot of the plane cancelled the takeoff and taxied the plane to the side of the runway for a security check after hearing about the jokes of the Frenchman. — AFP, Reuters

Iraq faces threat from 'dirty bomb'

● From Page 1

But daily bomb attacks on civilians continue, and the use of chlorine and anti-aircraft tactics has underlined what US commanders say is the insurgents' main strength — an ability to rapidly adapt their strategy.

"One of the things we see as we deal with this is that, as one technique works in one part of the country, we tend to see copycat attacks in other parts of the country," said US spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Chris Garver.

On Tuesday, a truck carrying chlorine gas exploded in Taji, just north of Baghdad, killing six people on the spot but also poisoning scores more as the toxic gas spread through the area, overcoming women and children.

On Wednesday, the dirty bombers struck again, in the suburbs of Baghdad, in an attack that killed two people and ignited panic. "The material used is poisonous," said Abdulwahab. "During the explosion it changes into a mist that spreads through the air, causing poisoning in the breathing system, breathing difficulties and acute coughing."

"It's the first time we have seen such poisoning cases," he said, comparing the injuries to the internal burns suffered by children who drink chlorine-based cleaning products.

Kadhimiya Hospital treated 90 patients poisoned in Tuesday's attack — seven of whom died — and 21 more on Wednesday, Abdulwahab said.

The Martyr Mohammed Baqir Al Hakim Hospital in Shula treated 66 cases after the Taji blast, and all survived, said medical official Abu Murtadha.

Lieutenant-General Raymond Odierno, the number two US commander in Iraq, told reporters in Washington via videolink that US forces had found chlorine in a raid on an insurgent carbomb factory near the city of Fallujah on Tuesday. — AFP

181 nominations for Nobel Prize

**OSLO** — A total of 181 people and organisations have been nominated for the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Institute said yesterday, with former US vice-president Al Gore and Malaysia's ex-premier Mahathir Mohammed known to be on the list.

"This is the third-highest number of nominations we have had," the secretary of the Nobel committee and head of the institute, Geir Lundestad, said.

In 2005 a record 199 nominees were put forth, and in 2006 there were 191. Out of the 181 nominations this year, 46 are for organisations.

The five-member Nobel committee never reveals the names of the nominees, and keeps its list secret for 50 years.

However, those who are entitled to submit nominations — a wide-ranging list including parliamentarians, former Peace Prize laureates, current and former Norwegian Nobel committee members — are free to reveal their choices.

As a result, Al Gore is known to have been nominated by two Norwegian MPs for his efforts to limit global warming, while four Bosnian civil groups have nominated Mahathir Mohammed for helping Bosnia after its bloody civil war.

Bolivian President Evo Morales has also been nominated by Indian and Latin American organisations.

Speculation is already rife in Oslo as to who the others on the list could be.

According to the head of the Oslo Peace Research Institute, Stein Toenneson, possible names include former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, a negotiator of peace treaties in Aceh and Kosovo, and Chechen human rights activist Lidiya Yusupova.

Others include Rebiya Kadeer, a leader of China's Uighur Muslim minority, who lives in exile in the United States, and Thich Quang Do, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk fighting for democracy while living under house arrest.

Yet other names circulating are Taiwanese activist Shih Ming-Te, the US talk show host Oprah Winfrey and UN Aids envoy to Africa Stephen Lewis.

The EU is also seen as a possible winner, as the organisation celebrates the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rome treaty that established the organisation.

Lundestad has suggested in previous years that the EU would be a good recipient of the prize. However, current difficulties with the EU constitution may hurt the organisation's chances.

The winner of the prize will be announced in October. — AFP

Pregnancy rate among under-16s up in Britain

**LONDON** — A think-tank has criticised the government's teenage pregnancy policy after new figures showed a rise in the number of under-16s becoming pregnant.

A total of 7,462 under-16 girls in England (a rate of 7.8 per 1,000 girls) conceived in 2005, up from 7,181 (7.5 per cent) the year before, provisional figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed yesterday.

The Family Education Trust, an independent trust, said it showed the government's strategy was "failing to make any real inroads".

Its director Norman Wells added that the government's emphasis on sex education and handing out contraception to young people without their parents' knowledge "may be giving the green light to sexual experimentation".

Children's Minister Beverley Hughes said she was disappointed at the increase, but added that "there will always be fluctuations in statistical data when they are looking at relatively small numbers".

The Department of Health has made lowering the rate of teenage births a key target after figures showed Britain has the highest rate in Western Europe.

It has adopted a multi-faceted strategy aimed at halving under-age pregnancies by 2010, including a multi-million pound "safe sex" advertising campaign.

Hughes took encouragement from figures that showed the teenage pregnancy rate in England, which includes under-18s, was pushing "in the right direction".

These had dropped from 41.5 per 1,000 girls in 2004 to 41.1 in 2005 — even though the total number of pregnant teenagers rose from 39,593 to 39,683 during the same period. The overall rate recorded a decline of 11.8 per cent since 1998. — Reuters



**BALANCING ACT:** Artistes perform a balancing act on a bicycle during an acrobatics show in Beijing. Acrobatics, dating back to more than 2,000 years, is one of China's oldest art forms. — Reuters

Data about planets surprises scientists

**WASHINGTON** — Scientists have gotten their best look ever at the composition of planets outside our solar system, but were more surprised by what they didn't see than what they did see.

Three teams of scientists described on Wednesday data collected by NASA's orbiting away — one in the constellation Pegasus and the other in the constellation Vulpecula.

The scientists had been confident of finding water, in the form of vapour, in the atmospheres of the two planets. They were wrong.

And one of the planets had evidence of small sand-like particles, called silicates, in the atmosphere, suggesting it is wrapped in high, dusty clouds

unlike any planets in our solar system. Spitzer observed for the first time enough light to figure out signatures of molecules in the atmospheres of planets from outside our little corner of the universe.

"It's actually rather momentous," Carl Grillmair of NASA's Spitzer Science Centre at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena said in an interview. "It's a step in a long chain of events that hopefully will eventually lead us to discovering life on some other planet." These two planets — terrifically hot gas giants whizzing around their stars in alarmingly close orbits — are unlikely to harbour life as we know it, Grillmair said.

But scientists hope to use

similar techniques to scour smaller, rocky planets more like Earth for indications of life, perhaps in the form of oxygen or possibly chlorophyll. Teams led by Grillmair, Jeremy Richardson of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre and Mark Swain of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory studied the spectrum emitted by each planet. The findings appear in the journal *Nature* and the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

A spectrum is produced when radiation is split into its component wavelengths, like when light passes through a prism and is split into the colours of the rainbow. In this research, the scientists split up the light in the infrared region. — Reuters

Libya quadruples wages to spread oil income

**TRIPOLI** — Libya will raise the wages of government employees and workers in state-owned companies up to 275 per cent, the son of President Muammar Gaddafi said yesterday.

Gaddafi has repeatedly urged the government to improve the living conditions of the population and spread oil revenues more fairly.

Islam said the minimum monthly wage for civil ser-

vants would rise 110 per cent from next month. The minimum stands at 200 Libyan dinars (\$155).

Salaries of Libyans working in state-owned oil companies will jump 275 per cent. Libya is an Opec member.

Saif Al Islam, Gaddafi's son and most trusted envoy, made the announcement during a meeting of top government officials, underlining his role in influencing Libya's domestic

policy even though he has no official government position.

He has repeatedly called for bold political and economic reforms, including raising wages, to free the country and its five million population from the shackles of what he calls the "Libyan mafia" that controls power and wealth.

Most of Libya's workers are civil servants, estimated at 800,000. Thousands of them are "shadow employees", get-

ting monthly salaries without going to work for years, according to government officials who spoke privately.

Social welfare allowances will increase between 45 per cent and 100 per cent depending on the number of family members. Almost half of Libya's 1.2 million families get such allowances which could total up to 300 dinars per month for an average family of five, officials said. — Reuters



INDIA

Boat tragedy exposes chinks in water transport system

From Our Correspondent

**KOZHIKODE** — The boat tragedy that took place at Thattekkad bird sanctuary in Ernakulam district has exposed the chinks in the water transport system in the state. According to the figures available, there are nearly 2000 boats operating in various tourist centres and half of them do not have proper licenses. The cabinet on Wednesday had decided to take a strong action against the boats that did not have proper licenses and equip the Inspectorate of Boats to take stern actions against erring boatowners. With the school excursion boat tragedy coming as a grim reminder of the poor state of water transport safety in Kerala, the state government decided to crack down on unlicensed ferries, boats and cruises and take a "critical look" at the prevailing rules and regulations. Chief Minister V. S. Achuthanandan said the departments concerned had been instructed to show no leniency towards operators whose boats did not conform to safety parameters or fell short of fitness standards.

Neglected aged parents may land children in jail

**NEW DELHI** — Children neglecting their aged parents, beware. Government proposes to come hard on them and they could even face jail. A measure that seeks to set up tribunals at district level having wide-ranging powers to provide need-based maintenance to the senior citizens is on the anvil. Under the provisions of the bill, a person who was responsible for the upkeep of parents failed to take care of them, can attract punitive measures like three months imprisonment and a fine of Rs5,000. Besides, it also provides for option to revoke the will. The proposed bill would provide effective care and protection to the senior citizens and would provide speedy and inexpensive legal framework to grant maintenance to them. A meeting of the union cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave its approval to the measure.

Mumbai sails into big league with international boat show

**MUMBAI** — India's financial hub yesterday joined a select league of upscale waterfront cities around the world with the launch of its first international boat show — a four-day event that will open a new frontier for the boating industry. With the Mumbai International Boat Show (MIBS), the city that is home to one of the world's oldest yacht clubs will soon boast of its own 'Big Blue' along the Arabian Sea coast. MIBS is aided by the Maharashtra government, British Marine Federation, Mumbai Port Trust and global marine groups. With the inauguration of the show, Mumbai, which has more millionaires per-square-mile than Manhattan, joined the league of cities like Cannes, Sydney, Miami and London. The event was inaugurated by Indian Navy Chief Admiral Suresh Mehta and attended by state government officials and international and national leisure industry personalities.

Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth win Crossword Book Awards

**MUMBAI** — Authors Vikram Chandra (*Sacred Games*) and Vikram Seth (*Two Lives*) have won top honours in the 2006 Hutch Crossword Book Awards here. Chandra bagged the award in the English fiction category and Seth in the English non-fiction segment. *In a Forest*, *A Deer* by C. S. Lakshmi (translator Lakshmi Holmstrom) and *Kesavan's Lamentations*, by M. Mukundan (translator A. J. Thomas) were adjudged joint winners in the Indian language fiction translation category. Man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai bagged the Hutch Crossword Popular Book Award for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* — selected on the basis by SMSs sent by readers. The winners were presented the awards by writers Krishna Sobti and Reema Anand on Wednesday. London-based Desai was not present to receive the award.

Govt urged to overhaul creaking tourist facilities

**NEW DELHI** — India needs to improve its creaking infrastructure and slash taxes and red tape, a major tourism industry body said. The call came from the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), which released a 280-page report called *Total Tourism India*. "India needs to accelerate its efforts to improve and expand infrastructure (particularly airports and roads), broaden its product range (especially in accommodation) and increase its competitiveness," said PATA president Peter de Jong. New Delhi's spending on travel and tourism, including immigration and airports, is projected to rise by about six per cent in 2008.

Duped brides, abandoned abroad, to get financial aid

**NEW DELHI** — India is to give financial aid to women who are duped into marriage by men of Indian origin claiming to have successful careers in the West, only to be deserted — often once a dowry has been pocketed. Women's groups say thousands of non-resident Indians from Europe, North America and the Middle East come each year to India in search of a bride, or simply to make a quick buck. While most are honest, many lie about their jobs and their economic and marital status to flatter families in search of a good match for their daughter. Complaints have been rising.

90 men accused get first bail chance in five years

**NEW DELHI** — Nearly 90 Muslim men accused of triggering one of India's worst religious riots are to be allowed to seek bail after nearly five years in jail without trial, India's Supreme Court ruled. The 87 men were accused of starting a fire on a train in February 2002 in Godhra, a town in Gujarat, in which 59 Hindu pilgrims died, sparking a month of deadly communal violence. They were charged and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota), but have remained behind bars even though the act was subsequently repealed.

Hollywood actress Scarlett arrives on charity mission

**NEW DELHI** — Hollywood actress Scarlett Johansson is in the country visiting projects to help the poor, the international aid agency Oxfam said. The actress arrived in the country on Monday and met children in slums and schools in New Delhi, Oxfam spokeswoman Aditi Kapoor said. "We are delighted that Scarlett is supporting Oxfam and our work to help end global poverty," the agency's south Asia director Ashvin Dayal said. — *PTI*

Manmohan sets up special cell to monitor inflation

Prices will moderate in coming days: Chidambaram

**NEW DELHI** — Concerned over sky-high prices of essential commodities, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has set up a special monitoring cell to keep a daily watch on the situation and asked state chief ministers to come down heavily on speculators and hoarders.

In a letter to state chief ministers yesterday, Singh said the special cell in the Cabinet Secretariat would keep a daily watch on the price situation and provide support to state governments.

He said the state governments have an important role in checking the rise in the prices of essential commodities through a set of administrative and regulatory measures.

"You may like to put in place an appropriate mechanism for regular intensive monitoring of the prices of commodities in order to promptly detect any short-term fluctuations and take necessary corrective action," the prime minister said.

He said the state governments can play a major role in checking prices by curbing malpractices, profiteering and hoarding.

The Forward Markets Commission has already banned trading in pulses like urad and tur but there is a need to strongly monitor the activities of anti-social people who may indulge in speculation and profiteering, Singh said.

The prime minister also advised the states that an efficient Public Distribution System (PDS) would ensure availability of essential commodities to low and middle-income consumers who are particularly sensitive to any rise in prices.

"The needs of below poverty-line families have to be met, and if they are able to get their requirements under PDS with ease, it would provide immense relief to them," Singh said.

"The impact of rise in prices on the low and middle income groups, who have to spend a large portion of their income on essential purchases, is a major cause of worry for us," he said.

The prime minister sought personal intervention from

chief ministers to help control prices and ensure adequate supplies of essential commodities to consumers.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said yesterday he expects the inflation rate to moderate as supply shortages ease in coming days. "Supply of sugar has improved.

thanks to rising arrivals in wholesale markets and export control by the centre, officials said.

Wholesale prices in India's largest onion-trading hub, Lasalgaon in Maharashtra, have eased to Rs880 a quintal, from Rs1,500 just a fortnight ago, they said.

(NAFED), said.

"And then prices will come down further," he said predicting wholesale onion prices could fall to Rs650 a quintal by early March.

Easing prices of onion should come as a relief not just to poor and the middle class, but also to politicians trying to control rising inflation in a country where onions have often impacted election results.

Rising exports curbed local supply as Indian farmers cashed in on an output short-fall in major onion-producing countries, especially China and Pakistan, and exported a record 95,000 tonnes between April 2006 and January 2007.

This, coupled with a fall in local cultivation, crimped supply and boosted prices. In response, the government sought to curb the flight of the vegetable by raising the minimum prices at which onion could be exported.

It raised the minimum export price (MEP) in stages to \$345 a tonne, compared with \$265 in the first week of

January, he said.

"Export orders decreased immediately after the government increased MEP," Holkar said.

While the current softening in onion prices were largely confined to western India, those in northern India would fall once arrivals increased in the first week of March, he said.

Farmers felt firm prices in the past several weeks had enabled them to recoup the last year's losses when a bumper crop had pushed down prices to abysmal levels, Satish Bhende, additional director, National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation, said.

This prompted many to move over to cash crops and led to a fall in onion acreage. India's onion production is expected to fall to 5.5 million tonnes in the year to March 2007, from 6.2 million last year.

"With the bumper crop last year, prices had tumbled to Re1 per kilo. Then, nobody helped us," said Namdev Karale, a 78-year-old farmer.

"With good prices now, we are recovering last year's losses." — *PTI, Reuters*

Police interrogate couple 'suspects' in train blast

**JAIPUR** — The police who refuse to divulge any details yesterday interrogated a Mumbai man, resembling the sketch of one of the suspects in Samjhauta Express blasts.

The man, who was picked up along with his wife identified as Soro from Bikaner last night, was being interrogated by Haryana police and security agencies, Rajasthan Director-General of Police A. S. Gill said. The woman was also being questioned.

Gill refused to divulge the identity of the man whom he said resembled one of the sketches of the two suspects who were said to have got down from the train before the blasts at Deewana on Sunday night killing 68 people.

The duo was detained at Naya Sahar locality of Bikaner following a raid by

police.

Five persons were detained last night for questioning in a coordinated raid by security forces in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Old Delhi in connection with last Sunday's blasts in Samjhauta Express.

Pakistan today hoped India will share with it the outcome of the probe into the Samjhauta Express blast before the March 6 meeting of Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism so that "meaningful contribution" can be made to the fight against terror.

A day after his talks with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Pakistan Foreign Minister Kurshid Mehmood Kasuri told some TV channels here that he had been assured by his Indian counterpart that all the information regarding the investi-

gation will be shared either before or during the anti-terror mechanism meeting in Islamabad.

"That will be two weeks (from the blasts) and hopefully information will be shared before so that they can make a meaningful contribution (in fight against terror)," he said.

The issue of Samjhauta blasts dominated the meeting between Mukherjee and Kasuri, which were primarily convened for joint commission.

"It is a very important case in which both countries have suffered. So I would like that the government of India shares results of investigations," Kasuri said, noting that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had already assured his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz that it will be done. — *PTI*

Pakistani families touched by sympathy

**NEW DELHI** — Having travelled thousands of kilometres to identify their dead and provide succour to their injured kin, weary Pakistani relatives of the victims of Samjhauta Express bombing have only grateful words of praise for the love and support they received from Indians.

"It was not a happy journey I had to make to India, but I was touched by the love, affection and sympathy I received from locals," said Hukumuddin, who arrived at Safdarjung Hospital here from Multan to visit his brother-in-law Kamruddin, who was injured in Sunday's two blasts on the trans-border train.

"Indian authorities had hastened the processing of issuing visas and other essential documents. Security was provided to us right from the time we touched Indian soil and now I only hope and pray that I can return home with Kamaruddin after he recuperates," he said.

Good samaritans at the hospital provided food, water and tea to the Pakistanis, some of whom had lost more than one relative in the bombings that claimed 68 lives.

"These people have suffered extreme grief and they are guests in our country. To see to their wellbeing and comfort is our duty," said trader Ashok Randhawa.

Rana Liaquat Ali, the brother of Rana Shaukat

Ali who lost five of his children in the terrorist attack, said people from the two countries have truly been united in grief.

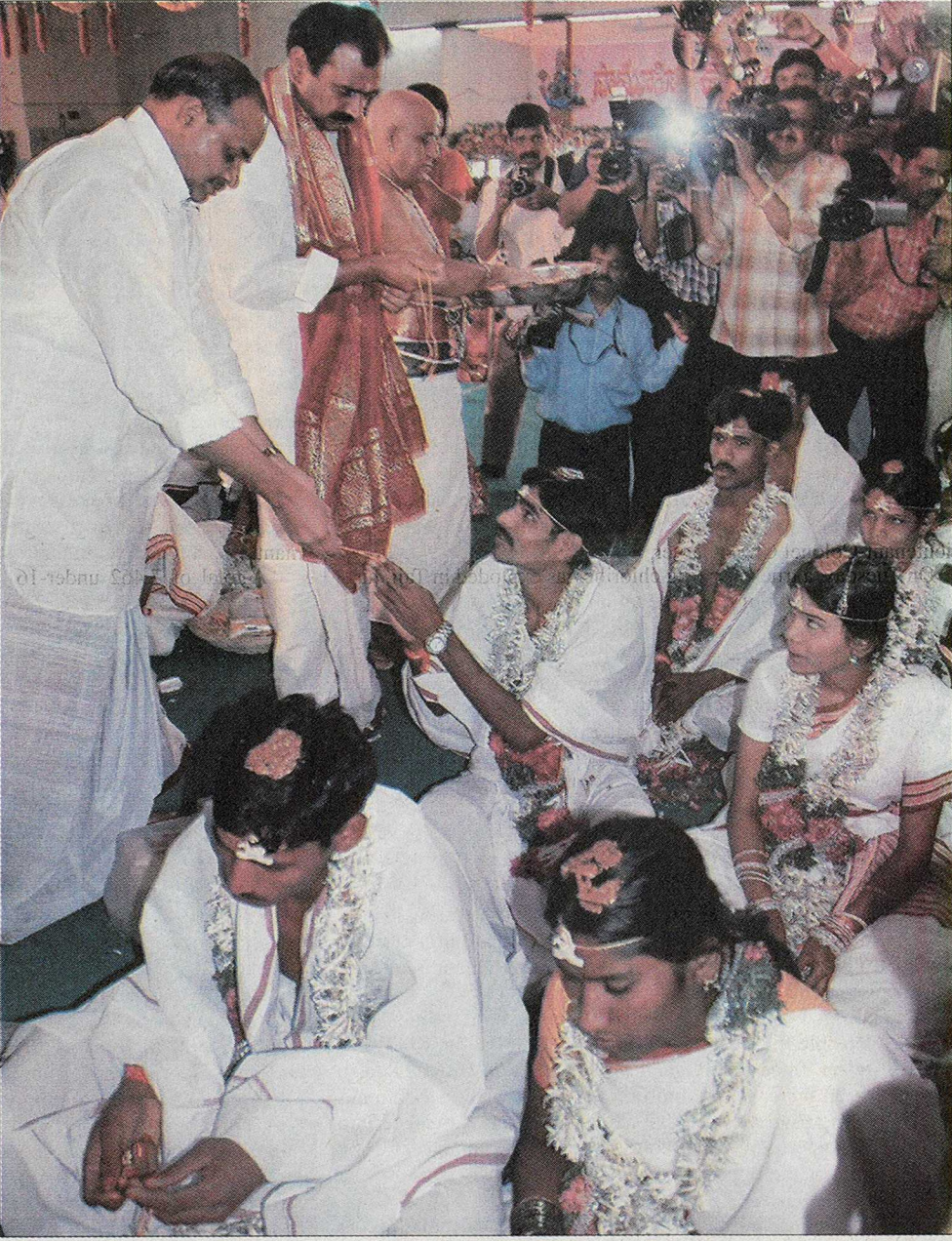
"*Yehi chahte hai ki aman bana rahe* (peace should prevail between the two countries)," Liaquat said. Hukumuddin, who lost two of his relatives Yunus and Omardin in the blasts, said he was satisfied with the treatment being provided to his surviving kin at Safdarjung Hospital.

Weary from sleepless nights worrying for his relatives and stressed by the long travel, Liaquat said he was thankful "for the hospitality that the locals provided at the hospital".

Hidden amid the anger and frustration of Pakistanis who lost their loved ones in the Samjhauta Express blasts, is a letter in a leading daily here which praises a call from the Indian High Commission to a family which lost four of its members.

A letter to the editor of *Dawn*, written by a neighbour of the victim's family, says the unexpected call from the High Commissioner's office offering condolences was very comforting.

With many relatives of passengers who boarded the train still clueless about the fate of their dear ones, Railway Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has claimed that Indians have not been cooperating. — *PTI*



**MASS-MARRIAGE:** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy hands over 'Mangalyasutra' to the bridegroom at the mass-marriage organised by TTD in Hyderabad yesterday. — *PTI*

No need for president's rule in UP: CPM

**JAIPUR** — Hailing the announcement of assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, CPM general secretary Prakash Karat yesterday said there is no need for imposition of President's Rule in the state.

"I met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after he sought our party's view and made it very clear that Article 356 should not be enforced in the state that has an elected government," Karat told reporters at the party's office here.

"Every elected government should be allowed to prove its majority on the floor of the house if there is any problem under the anti-defection law," he said, adding the inter-state council is called to discuss the article's applicability and use-misuse.

"The CPM is against it (President's Rule) and we will not encourage the Congress or the UPA to take such action against the Mulayam Singh government."

Karat said Samajwadi Party withdrawing support to the UPA government would not affect the coalition as the Congress and the SP had always maintained a distance from each other.

He also ruled out the CPM forging any alliance in the

Uttar Pradesh polls. "We will do it alone," he said.

Despite announcement of elections in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav will try to prove his majority on the floor of the assembly on February 26 to "silence his detractors", his supporters say.

The assembly is currently in session and the announcement of the assembly polls "will have no bearing" on its schedule, principal secretary said. Yadav's decision for a floor test on Monday is to "to silence those gunning for him since Supreme Court disqualified 13 breakaway BSP who played a vital role in formation of his government in 2003," Samajwadi Party leaders and

workers said here.

They said it was also to pre-empt any move by the Congress-led UPA at the centre to dismiss his government.

"If the chief minister is able to prove his majority, he will be able to say he has the numbers and yet his government was dismissed," they said. They said if he recommended adjourning the house *sine die* without proving majority, his detractors might try to claim victory.

Another factor in the numbers game is the status of the other 24 BSP rebels, with Speaker Mata Prasad Pandey saying he would take a decision after going through the apex court judgment and consulting legal experts. — *PTI*



**TALKS:** Former prime minister and BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee shakes hands with Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri during a meeting at Vajpayee's residence in New Delhi yesterday. — *AFP*

ABSCONDING

	<b>Name</b>	: Jayapalan Jayakumar
	<b>Nationality</b>	: Indian
	<b>Passport No.</b>	: F 6104016
	<b>Profession</b>	: Cleaner
	<b>Absconding date</b>	: 13/2/2007
	<b>Sponsor</b>	: Oman International Group L.L.C

He who employs Mr. Jayakumar shall bear the legal consequences. The absconding has the right to report the inaccuracy of this statement to any of the labour office within 15 days from now.



OPINION



**TIMES OF OMAN**

ESTABLISHED: 1975

# Iraq war again evokes ghosts of Vietnam

By Matt Spetalnick

NO matter how much the White House dreads it, the Bush administration can't seem to escape the analogy of Iraq as another Vietnam.

The latest echo of that other unpopular war four decades past came from US Vice-President Dick Cheney, who said on a visit to Japan on Wednesday that the United States wants to finish its mission in Iraq and have its troops 'return with honour'.

Cheney's words underscored a recent shift in US President George W. Bush's stated justification for staying in Iraq — not so much for the once-vaunted goal of military victory but to avert a nightmare scenario they say would be unleashed should the United States leave.

Bush's increasing emphasis on the threat to US credibility from any retreat from Iraq evokes to some extent the face-saving arguments put forth by the administrations of presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon during the Vietnam war. Nixon, in particular, repeatedly pledged to achieve 'peace with honour'.

Democrats now controlling Congress are deeply sceptical, insisting that Bush's decision last month to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq masks a failed policy that has proved incapable of preventing a slide into sectarian civil war.

The Vietnam comparison is never far away, as evidenced in an exchange between Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, of Nevada, and CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Sunday. Reid: "This war is a serious situation. It involves the worst foreign policy mistake in the history of this country ... We need to find a way to dig out of it." Blitzer: "So maybe I misheard you, but you are saying this is the worst foreign policy blunder in American history?"

Reid: "That's what I said. Blitzer: "Worse than Vietnam?" Reid: "Yes."

The administration contends there are few parallels. Today's war in Iraq is fought by an all-volunteer army, the US body count is much lower and there is nothing like the anti-war protests that caught fire in the 1960s. But more and more Americans see Iraq as the kind of quagmire that Vietnam became for an earlier generation.

And Britain's announcement on Wednesday it would withdraw almost a quarter of its troops in coming months will only add to Americans' sense of going it alone in Iraq, as they felt in Vietnam when few Western allies joined it.

The Iraq war has pushed Bush's approval ratings into the low 30-per cent range, comparable to Johnson and Nixon during the Vietnam war, and polls show a majority of the US public thinks it was a mistake to go into Iraq in the first place.

Compounding Bush's troubles, the new Democratic-led Congress now confronting him over his Iraq policy appears to be taking a page from their Vietnam-era predecessors.

After the House last week rebuked Bush for his troop buildup, Democratic lawmakers threatened to seek restrictions on future funding in Iraq and to rescind congressional approval that helped lay the groundwork for the 2003 US-led invasion.

Such a challenge is not without precedent. Amid mass protest during the Vietnam War, Congress rescinded the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that Johnson used to justify escalation in southeast Asia. As Nixon scaled back forces, Congress in 1973 cut off funding for 'offensive' operations in Vietnam.

## Common ground

A RECENT poll suggesting that the people advocating Islam-West common ground outnumber their friends claiming 'clash of civilisations' is reflective of the growing international dissatisfaction with war and violence.

The poll goes on to show that most people hold political reasons responsible for the East-West disconnect of sorts, which has been growing since the Afghan and Iraqi wars began. It also shows that an increasing proportion of the international community is coming to terms with the fact that it was hoodwinked into extending support for these conflicts on false pretences. They were meant for the political gain of a few at the expense of the lives of many.

It bears noting that much of the recent hype surrounding the supposed clash of civilisations now seems a carefully employed tactic to fuel extremist passion when vested interests needed war to further their ambitions. Most, if not all faiths practised in the world today have more or less the same moral underlining. Practically all advocate peaceful coexistence, all shun needless bloodshed and infighting. To use an element as sacred as one's religion to motivate exactly the opposite attributes has been one of the bigger victories of those trying to keep the international order trapped in chaos.

The new poll shows that even as most governments find themselves helpless in halting the theatre that plays host to this clash of civilisations, it is the international community as a whole that will have to rise and be recognised. Governments march on people's choices and decisions and international efforts including widespread war need common consent and thorough public approval.

Now that more and more people are asking for common ground, calling for what is shared to provide for a platform for improvement and advancement, the protagonists of war and bloodshed will find it difficult to defend their positions.

Perhaps it is in this way that things will start to improve, especially in the troubled Middle East, where people continue to fight and kill on a scale unbelievable for the present day and age. It is only for more people to realise what, as people, we all have in common. Surely more will come round to admitting that it is far easier to build for mutual benefit, than to destroy no matter what. — *Khaleej Times*

## From Our Archives

February 1992

### Oman's healthcare 'impressive'

MUSCAT — The Sultanate of Oman has healthcare which is comparable if not superior to medical cover available in Europe or the United States.

This is the opinion of a senior American businessman, currently on a visit to the Sultanate, Richard Salzar, is the International Business Manager for IMED, a leading infusion management company operating out of the San Diego in California.

While talking to this reporter, Salzar was all praise for the remarkable strides that Oman has made in the clinical facilities that it offers to its people.



**KEEN:** Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete, left, listening to European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso during a meeting in Brussels yesterday. — Reuters

# Plan that moved Pyongyang

By Philip Zelikow

The Washington Post

IN 2006, the headlines from North Korea were depressing. Pyongyang was headed down the path of escalation: missile tests in July, testing a nuclear weapon in October. Now, 2007 has opened with encouraging news — a breakthrough in Beijing.

In effect, the agreement announced last week was answering the bomb test with a successful test of diplomacy. But this deal makes more sense if we understand the broader strategy, set in motion some time ago, that is starting to play out.

In 2005, the United States energised its flagging North Korea efforts on two tracks. One was diplomatic, the other defensive. The diplomatic strategy was never just about North Korea. The Korean Peninsula has repeatedly been a battleground for the great powers in northeast Asia. The United States, particularly Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her deputy, Robert Zoellick, saw a way to break this mould: China, Japan and Russia were flexing new diplomatic muscle. The North Korean problem could be an opportunity to unite potential rivals in common effort, an enterprise without precedent in northeast Asia.

The defensive approach responded to North Korea's outlaw strategy for economic survival. Protecting the integrity of the international

financial system was just one of the ways to show the North's leaders that trafficking in contraband was not a sustainable solution to their problems.

By late 2005, both policies had been set in motion. In September, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill and his counterparts from South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan and Russia had negotiated a joint framework for comprehensive diplomatic action.

Meanwhile, enforcement actions that had been pending against North Korea's partners in money laundering, such as Macau's Banco Delta Asia, were rolled out.

Then the Bush administration paused. It had been preparing to follow up with new diplomatic initiatives, but the administration was uncertain and divided about how much further to go until North Korea moved. As for the North Koreans, they were indeed hit hard as members of the international financial community became increasingly reluctant to handle their suspect transactions. Furious, they boycotted the six-party talks and tried to advertise their own strength, a course that culminated in the nuclear test last October.

After that test, Rice leaned hard on the regional diplomatic relationships she had nurtured. First — and fast — came UN Security Council Resolution 1718, the most potent action against North Korea that the United Nations had taken since 1953, when

the Korean war was suspended.

Having shown the North that it had underestimated regional solidarity, the United States next moved to change the dynamic, to break the cycle of escalation. That month, Chinese President Hu Jintao and US President George W. Bush came to a strategic understanding about North Korea. They agreed that diplomacy needed to be given another chance. But the diplomacy couldn't just be a gloss, busywork that only gave the appearance of action.

To turn this strategic understanding into policy, Rice developed a two-stage strategy. First the six parties would move quickly to offset the nuclear test with unprecedented commitments from the North Koreans to stop and reverse their nuclear development and to bring back the system of monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Some called this an 'early harvest' — testing whether the ground could yield anything fruitful.

If it did, then in the second stage the six parties would follow up. But rather than returning to the old, painful pattern of piecemeal nuclear bribery, the diplomacy would have to move simultaneously on multiple fronts: scrapping the nuclear programme, building normal economic cooperation, tackling the normalisation of relations and — perhaps most engaging — getting at the unresolved issues of the Korean war.

Thus, later in October, Rice shuttled across northeast Asia to reassure allies and win support for this diplomatic design, especially in Beijing. Pressure had its place. So did diplomatic ingenuity. One Chinese official said to Rice, "It is better to play with two hands." And talking with the North Koreans would not be a problem, Rice concluded, if doing so did not undermine the vital regional foundation and if the North Koreans actually had something to say.

Last week's deal, skillfully negotiated by Rice and Hill with their counterparts, delivers a plan for the 'early harvest'. A 'good, initial step' was Rice's careful phrase. The broader context in which the agreement was reached helps explain what she meant. The United States and its negotiating partners have successfully carried out a diplomatic test.

The next two months will show whether the design remains valid. Rice has agreed to a six-party meeting of foreign ministers, including the North Koreans. We will see whether the Bush administration and its counterparts can launch the second stage, when the desired outcomes to be produced from this diplomacy may finally come into view.

● *Zelikow is a history professor at the University of Virginia. From 2005 until 2007, he was counsellor of the US State Department.*

# Giuliani as US foreign policy guru

By Jonathan Chait

Los Angeles Times

THE normal rule in US politics is that if you run for president and your experience comes at the state level, most people will assume that foreign policy is your weak point. You can overcome that political vulnerability — as George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and other governors did while getting elected. One would presume that this applies even more to presidential candidates whose highest office reached is mayor. And yet we have the strange case of Rudolph Giuliani.

Giuliani's presidential campaign is starting to win a cult following among conservatives. It's not his position on domestic policy that's doing it — he has nothing to say about that. The Almighty knows it's not his social issue positions, which even his strongest backers acknowledge are his political weak point. No, he has somehow built a record as a foreign policy guru despite having no experience beyond the municipal level.

What are Giuliani's credentials? Everybody knows the basics. On September 11, 2001, he rolled up his shirt sleeves and gave reassuring speeches. He has a tough guy persona. He expresses extremely strong disapproval for enemies of the United States. (For instance, Giuliani has bragged about asking President George W. Bush to let him personally execute Osama bin Laden.) All this makes Republicans swoon. Sometimes literally. Conservative pundit Danielle Crittenden recently penned a Valentine's Day poem to Giuliani. One section summarised his foreign policy skills thusly: "A man who's locked out Ararat/And thrown vagrants into prison won't cringe before a Democrat/Or allow Iran nuclear fission."

I'm no poetry critic, but I do know that a tough policy against the homeless is not a good proxy for the conduct of foreign policy. If having a macho swagger and talking tough about bad guys were enough to make a good commander in chief, we wouldn't have the worst foreign policy disaster in US history on our hands right now in Iraq. And,

need I remind anybody, one of the reasons Giuliani hasn't been able to fulfil his Bin Laden execution fantasy is that Bush allowed the Al Qaeda leader to escape at Tora Bora by using Afghan proxies instead of US ground troops.

As I noted recently, conservative foreign policy consists increasingly of abstract notions divorced from reality. In preparing for last week's House debate over the Iraq troop surge, the Republican leadership instructed its members in a memo: "The debate should not be about the surge or its details. This debate should not even be about the Iraq war to date, mistakes that have been made or whether we can, or cannot, win militarily. If we let Democrats force us into a debate on the surge or the current situation in Iraq, we lose."

So they're strong on foreign policy, except insofar as it involves actual policy. They tend to be much better, however, at comparing themselves to figures such as Winston Churchill or Abraham Lincoln. They make such comparisons incessantly. Last week, Giuliani said that Lincoln had "that ability that a leader has — a leader like George Bush, a leader like Ronald Reagan — to look into the future".

A few days later, the *New York Times* revealed that the 2002 post-war plan for Iraq envisioned a broadly representative Iraqi government, an intact Iraqi army and just a handful of US troops remaining. I would say this is not a good job of looking into the future. I'm sure Giuliani and his fans would dismiss such slip-ups, and there have been many, as mere detail. The important thing to them is leadership — Bush has it; Giuliani has it. Giuliani raked in millions after 9/11, appearing at motivational seminars, where anybody with \$49 could listen to him recount his 9/11 heroics and also take in speeches by such foreign policy titans as Zig Ziglar and Goldie Hawn. Giuliani also wrote a book promising to show 'how the leadership skills he practices can be employed successfully by anyone who has to run anything'. But if anybody who buys his book can acquire the same leadership skills, why do we need Giuliani?

## Italy — an echo of the bad old days

THE victory of Romano Prodi's 'Olive Tree' coalition over Silvio Berlusconi last year was always rather slender. Berlusconi refused to recognise his defeat for three weeks after the polls closed. Meanwhile, Prodi was struggling from the outset to hold together a perilously broad coalition, ranging from hard-line communists to former Christian Democrats. With a majority of just two in the Senate, this was always going to be a difficult, if not impossible, task. And so it has proved.

After just 10 months of government, Prodi submitted his resignation to Italian President Giorgio Napolitano after losing a crucial vote in the Senate. This does not necessarily mean Italy will plunge into new elections. The president will hold talks with other top office holders of state to decide what to do next. A 'technical government' dedicated to implementing reforms over which there is a broad consensus is a possibility.

Alternatively, Prodi could try a risky confidence vote. It is to be hoped that some alternative to divisive national elections can be found. For all his egregious faults, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi did inject a degree of stability into Italian politics. This col-

lapse is a daunting echo of the bad old days for Italy, when governments would last just a few months, if they were lucky. It was a similarly fissiparous left-wing coalition that ended Prodi's first period as prime minister in the 1990s.

Moreover a return to such instability is the last thing Italy needs at present. The economy remains in dire needs of reform. Unemployment is high. Economic growth is sluggish, although there are signs of improvement of late. The pensions system is unsustainable. And Italy's budget deficit continues to breach EU rules. Prodi had begun to address some of these problems. He needs a chance to see his reforms through.

The coalition has fractured on the issue of foreign policy, after a foolish attempt at brinkmanship by the Foreign Minister, Massimo D'Alema. There is a feeling among the left that Prodi's party has been too close to Bush administration.

And there have been demonstrations in Vicenza over plans by the US to build a second airbase there. But putting distance between himself and Washington now is unlikely to do Prodi any good, as it will only anger the more conservative elements of his coalition. — *The Independent*

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## Blessing in disguise

THE Election Commission's announcement of poll dates for the Uttar Pradesh assembly, earlier than expected, came as a blessing in disguise for the UPA government. The federal government has been mulling to impose president's rule in UP (February 22). Faced by opposition from CPM and lurking fears of President Abdul Kalam returning the government's advice on presidential proclamation unsigned, the UPA government got an unexpected and willing ally in Election Commission, which decided to declare poll dates at least a week in advance, thus setting the ball rolling for the poll code of conduct. Technically, it is no bar for imposing president's rule. However, spreading the election for nearly a month has its own ramifications, though it is primarily aimed at deployment of security forces and help in better conduct of polls. Wise counsel as last prevailed in Congress think-tank, but this scenario is advantageous for BJP and BSP; as the more SP divides secular votes, the more Congress gets affected. This has proved right in Uttarakhnad, where SP has not much say, leading to Congress expected to retain vote share, as indicated in NDTV exit poll results (February 22).

● AS deliberated upon, love of mother tongue is one, which none can erase out, despite becoming citizens of other countries (February 22). In fact, many children born in other countries, for parents of Indian origin, do speak their mother tongue and it has

been a pleasant surprise to interact with such people. Within the native country, like in India which has over hundred spoken languages, most prefer to converse in their mother tongue, though some trends are seen for people deliberating in foreign languages, for obvious reasons.

● IT is beyond one's comprehension as to why one should be deprived of a personal liking, like wearing a nose ring, as long as it doesn't affect tranquillity in the society. Sunali Pillay did not commit anything wrong to wear it (February 22). But for raking up such unnecessary controversies do not really do anything to set right a civic system.

Ushadevi Suddapalli & Dr S. Bhaskara Rao  
Ruwi

## Congrats, 'Times'

CONGRATULATIONS to the *Times of Oman* and its editorial staff on completion of 32 glorious years. I have been a regular reader of this high-class daily and it is really appreciative that the newspaper has withstood the changing times by adding new features regularly.

Martin Joseph  
Qurum

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)



AMERICA

‘Slash and burn’ politics as Hillary, Obama trade shots

WASHINGTON — The 2008 Democratic presidential race took a sharp, nasty turn with Hillary Clinton’s camp ripping into rising star rival Barack Obama as he savoured a million-dollar Hollywood debut.

Hillary’s aides bristled at criticism of their candidate by movie mogul David Geffen, co-host of a lavish Obama fundraiser, and said on Wednesday the Illinois senator was guilty of the “slash and burn” politics he publicly decries.

But Obama, hoping to become America’s first black president, angled the debate back to Iraq, where his team believes he has an advantage over Hillary, who voted in 2002 to authorise President George W. Bush to wage war.

The flap erupted hours after director Steven Spielberg and stars such as Jennifer Aniston and Eddie Murphy reportedly helped Tinseltown glitterati raise more than \$1.3 million for Obama’s White House bid.

With tensions rising 11 months before the first party nominating contests, the row centred on a *New York Times* column on Wednesday, in which Geffen was quoted as branding Senator Hillary overly ambitious and “polarising.”

Geffen also hit out at ex-president Bill Clinton — for whom he once mined Hollywood’s power elite for millions of dollars of vital campaign cash.

“By refusing to disavow the personal attacks from his biggest fundraiser against Senator Hillary and President Clinton, Senator Obama has called into serious question whether he really believes his own rhetoric,” Hillary communications director Howard Wolfson said in a statement.

“How can Senator Obama denounce the politics of ‘slash and burn’ yesterday while his own campaign is espousing the politics of trash today?” Wolfson said.

Hillary herself, at a



SPAR: Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Democratic Party candidates forum in the western state of Nevada, sought the political high ground.

“I want to run a very positive campaign, I sure don’t want Democrats or support-

ers of Democrats to be engaging in the politics of personal destruction,” she said when asked about the controversy.

Obama, questioned during a campaign trip to the key

early voting midwestern state of Iowa, dismissed the Hillary camp’s demand for an apology.

He said he “can’t be responsible for the statements of every individual,” according to a report on the *Des Moines Register* newspaper’s website.

“My suspicion is that the voters of Iowa are more concerned about what both myself and Senator Hillary think about Iraq,” Obama said.

Obama was against the war from the start, though was not in the Senate when Hillary cast her vote in the highly-charged political atmosphere just over a year after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

The Hillary camp appeared to be trying to goad Obama into the kind of campaign scrap he has already rejected, by promising Americans an elevated brand of politics, free of “slash and burn” tactics.

But his campaign, which

has already sparred with Hillary over Iraq, earlier hit back quickly with a barbed riposte.

“We aren’t going to get in the middle of a disagreement between the Clintons and someone who was once one of their biggest supporters,” said Obama press spokesman Robert Gibbs.

“It is ironic that the Clintons had no problem with David Geffen when he was raising them \$18 million and sleeping at their invitation in the Lincoln bedroom.”

The spat was likely to further raise tensions between the two camps in a showdown pitting Hillary’s fear-some political machine against Obama’s emerging grass roots movement.

Geffen was quoted by *Times* columnist Maureen Dowd as doubting Hillary’s capacity to bring Americans together.

“I don’t think that another incredibly polarizing figure, no matter how smart she is,

and no matter how ambitious she is — and God knows, is there anybody more ambitious than Hillary Clinton? — can bring the country together.”

And in another shot at the former first couple, Geffen told the *Times*: “Everybody in politics lies, but they do it with such ease, it’s troubling.”

“I don’t think anybody believes that in the last six years, all of a sudden Bill Clinton has become a different person,” Geffen was quoted as saying of the former president impeached over an affair with a White House intern.

But Hillary Clinton said at the Nevada forum which Obama was the only declared Democratic hopeful not to attend: “I believe Bill Clinton was a good president.”

Asked whether Obama should disown Geffen’s remarks, Hillary added: “I am going to leave that up to the other campaign.” — *AFP*

Britney quits rehab centre again: Report

LOS ANGELES — Britney Spears abruptly checked out of a rehabilitation facility, reports said on Wednesday, the second time in the space of a week she had fled a treatment centre within 24 hours.

The troubled pop princess left the Promises Malibu Treatment Centre early on Wednesday morning, television and celebrity news websites reported, less than a day after checking in for unspecified problems.

*People* magazine quoted a source as saying Britney had left the centre against the advice of staff.

“If she comes back for treatment, Promises will have to assess the situation. Sometimes people come back, but it doesn’t look good,” the source said.

Britney, famous for hits such as *Oops! I Did It Again* and *Toxic*, briefly entered a rehab centre in Antigua last week but checked out after less than one day there, according to reports.

The singer stunned staff at a suburban Los Angeles beauty salon last Friday by walking in and demanding they cut-off her mane of brunette hair extensions.

When staff refused, Britney grabbed a set of clippers and shaved her head to the delight of a crowd of paparazzi who had gathered outside to watch.

Britney has never been far from the media spotlight ever since she announced plans to divorce husband Kevin Federline, the father of her two children, last November.

Entertainment media have followed her every misstep since then, including her appearance in public in a short dress without panties, clearly evident in unflattering photographs which quickly flew over the internet. — *AFP*

ISS astronauts begin six-hour space walk

MOSCOW — Two astronauts at the International Space Station (ISS) began a six-hour space walk yesterday to repair an antenna on a refuelling vessel, Russia’s space flight control centre said.

“The American astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria and his Russian colleague Mikhail Tyurin opened the station’s airlock at 13:27 Moscow time (10:27 GMT) and left the station,” a spokesman at the centre, Valery Lyndin, said.

“During their space walk, the astronauts should fix a problem with the antenna of the Progress M-58 refuelling vessel,” Lyndin said.

The antenna created problems when the vessel docked at the ISS in October and could cause additional difficulties when it departs in April, the spokesman said.

The third astronaut on the station, American Sunita Williams, stayed aboard the ISS during the space walk.

Lopez-Alegria and Tyurin should also activate a new telescope recently installed on the exterior of the station that will track the flow of neutrons in space, Lyndin said. — *AFP*

Joint meal seen as way to reconnect families

NEW YORK — Forget shuttling kids between sports and tutors or enduring a long commute to live near a better school: improving a child’s chance of success may be as simple as a regular, leisurely family dinner.

That may seem a quaint throwback, but parents and organisations are rallying around the family dinner and promoting it in the fight against over-scheduled lives.

“You have people who are basically workaholics and have lost all their priorities. They have lost all touch with what’s important,” said Bonnie Michaels, a work-life consultant. “Kids are over-

scheduled and over-maxed terribly.”

Researchers say piling on kids’ activities to impress college admission boards or working late to advance a career cause family connections to suffer.

“Eating together always provided a grounding for family members,” said Michaels.

A national study of kids between 3 and 12 found that more meal time at home was the single strongest predictor of better achievement scores, ahead of time studying or in church.

Researchers found a strong link between eating at least five dinners a week with a par-

ent and children who are less likely to use drugs and develop good eating habits.

When Stephanie Lally returned to work as a human resources professional after three years at home she took a job with Texas Roadhouse Inc. partly because the restaurant chain was supportive of her efforts to be at home for a regular dinner with her young daughter.

“When we get together, it’s kind of cool that we get the time to share and talk about the day and she tells us about what happened at school,” said Lally.

Family meals declined sharply between the 1970s and

1999, but researchers say that trend has been reversing. A Unicef report last week put America at the bottom among rich nations, with only 65 per cent of 15-year-olds eating the main meal of the day with their parents several times a week. In France, Italy and Russia, the percentage was more than 90 per cent.

Teen-agers who have two or fewer family meals weekly are twice as likely to smoke and drink as teens eating five such dinners a week, according to a study by the National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia.

Michaels says brooding teenagers are not always the

easiest dinner companions. “Set up something special and let them have some input. Maybe a Sunday brunch,” she recommended.

Experts say the best meals are enjoyed at home with the television off and that children should be encouraged to chat, not badgered to eat broccoli or explain poor grades.

Surveys show parents and kids both want more family dinners, and cite work pressures as the biggest obstacle. However, that may be changing. More employers offer flexible schedules and compressed workweeks to encourage staff to engage with their kids. — *Reuters*

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Reid makes community gun-crime pledge

LONDON — Home Secretary John Reid pledged more support for local communities in the fight against gun crime yesterday, acknowledging that legislation and policing cannot alone tackle the issue.

He was speaking after a gun-crime summit held at 10 Downing Street yesterday attended by Tony Blair, police officers and community activists following a spate of fatal shootings, often involving young men, in south London.

The summit also looked at dealing with gang culture, often linked to gun crime.

The minister pledged an extra £500,000 to “empower local groups to specifically counter gang culture”.

It will form part of a three-pronged approach, which will also look at increased legisla-

tion and the strengthening of police powers.

The proposals included setting up a ballistic database to help track the spread of guns and ammunition, and legislation to ban replica hand guns.

Reid confirmed his intention to lower the age at which someone receives a minimum 5-year jail sentence for possessing a gun to 17 from 21.

“However, the other side is parental responsibility and empowering the community,” Reid said, adding that the government would pursue its Respect policy and look to role models and community figures to play their part.

Reid went on to say that “we need to keep things in proportion”.

“We must not think that we have a broken youth,” he added.



ADDRESS: Prime Minister Tony Blair sits next to Michelle Forbes of ‘Mothers Against Guns’ as he speaks at a meeting on gun crime at Downing Street in London yesterday. — *Reuters*

The fatal shootings of three youths this month have generated a rapid political response and led to heated debate about whether the killings reflect a general malaise in the nation at large.

While gun crime has fallen generally across Britain, Blair has said the apparent rise in the use of weapons amongst teenagers was a “specific

problem ... amongst specific groups of young people”.

He said gang membership should be taken into account when offenders are sentenced and that those prepared to give evidence against gangs should be given proper protection.

In contrast, Conservative leader David Cameron has blamed the rise in gun crime on the breakdown of families and said society was “quite broken and needs to be mended”.

Liberal Democrat leader Menzies Campbell said “politician-led” summits, new laws and longer sentences would not solve the problem.

“We need a community-centred approach to tackling the cycle of deprivation, drug culture and lack of recreational opportunities in inner cities,” he added. — *Reuters*

Margaret Thatcher, Britain’s ‘Iron Lady’, turns bronze

LONDON — A bronze statue of Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister known as the ‘Iron Lady’, was unveiled on Wednesday in her presence.

The seven foot, four inch (2.24 metre) statue has been set up facing World War II leader Sir Winston Churchill in the members’ lobby of the House of Commons.

A joyful Thatcher told onlookers: “I might have preferred iron but bronze will do. It won’t rust.”

She said the Commons had done her a great honour by commissioning “this fine and imposing statue,” which portrays her with her right arm outstretched, as though addressing parliament.

“Above all, I could not ask better company for it — with (David) Lloyd George, (Clement) Attlee and Churchill — three great prime ministers, one of them our greatest ever,” she said.

During debate in parliament, House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin defended his decision to have the statue erected while the former Conservative premier is still alive, a first in British history.

But left-winger Paul Flynn, a backbench member of the governing Labour Party like Martin, complained that this change to parliamentary tradition had been decided in a “semi-secretive” way rather than by the whole House.

“It was agreed by myself that (to unveil) these statues of previous prime ministers, we shouldn’t have to wait until 10 years after their demise,” Martin told a packed House of Commons on Wednesday.

The Conservative Party that Thatcher had won a landslide victory in the



FROM IRON TO BRONZE: Margaret Thatcher stands in front of a bronze statue of herself. — *Reuters*

1979 general elections, making her the country’s first woman-prime minister.

She embarked on uncompromising programme of tough economic reforms that polarised opinion.

Right-wingers hailed her for hauling the country out of the doldrums of the 1970s while the left loathed her for dismantling tradi-

tional industry and, they believed, unpicking the very fabric of British society.

She was ousted from power in 1990 in a leadership contest by her own party, later taking up a seat in the unelected upper chamber of parliament, the House of Lords, as Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven. — *AFP*

Activist ‘spy’ case faces long delay

LUANDA — A British rights activist who faces charges of spying after being arrested on a fact-finding mission to northern Angola may have to wait months for her case to be resolved, her lawyer said yesterday.

Sarah Wykes, a veteran activist for London-based Global Witness, was due in the capital Luanda later in the day after being cleared late Wednesday to leave Cabinda province where she was detained on Saturday.

Wykes had been freed from custody earlier in the day after posting bail of 180,000 kwanzas (\$2,000).

Her lawyer Francisco Lwemba said that Wykes would need permission to leave the southern African country before her case came to court but he hoped that she would not be forced to remain hanging around. — *AFP*

Meacher challenges Brown

LONDON — Left-leaning former minister Michael Meacher said yesterday he would challenge Finance Minister Gordon Brown for the leadership of Britain’s ruling Labour Party when Prime Minister Tony Blair steps down.

Meacher, 67, is the second member of parliament to say he will run against Brown, regarded as virtually unassailable favourite to succeed Blair as party leader and prime minister when he leaves after a decade in office, probably in July.

His announcement prompted speculation that a more heavyweight contender might yet emerge to challenge Brown.

Blair, 53, has given only a lukewarm endorsement to Brown, his close colleague and longtime rival, leading some commentators to believe he is wary of entrusting his legacy to him and may prefer an alternative.

Meacher sketched a left-wing platform at his cam-

paign launch, including ending Britain’s “subservience” to the United States, narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest paid and taking tough action against climate change.

Meacher opposes many of the centrist “New Labour” policies that brought Blair three consecutive general election victories.

He opposes the government’s decision to order new nuclear weapons to replace the ageing Trident system and says he would re-nationalise Britain’s privatised railway network.

“The important thing is that there is a debate on a different direction of travel (for the Labour Party),” he said.

A veteran politician and former environment minister under Blair, Meacher is better known than the other challenger, left-wing member of parliament, John McDonnell, but political analysts say he does not pose a threat to Brown.

Most ministers tipped as

possible candidates, such as Environment Secretary David Miliband, say they will not run.

Interior Minister John Reid has not ruled himself out, but commentators believe embarrassing stories about incompetence in his department have killed his chance of mounting a challenge.

Many Labour Party members have called for a leadership contest, rather than a coronation of Brown, because it will allow a debate and force Brown to define his policies. “We’ve always made clear we would welcome a contest,” said a close ally of the 56-year-old Brown.

Patrick Dunleavy, politics professor at the London School of Economics, said Meacher would “push Brown to put a marker down for the end of the Blair government, to articulate what he wants to do about the environment (and) voting system reform.”

Meacher’s entry could split the left-wing vote. — *Reuters*

Britons shun marriage

LONDON — The number of couples getting married in England and Wales has fallen to its lowest since records began in 1862 according to official records released on Wednesday.

Across Britain as a whole, the numbers of those tying the knot fell by 10 per cent compared with the previous year. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said there were 244,710 marriages in England and Wales in 2005, down from 273,070 in 2004. In 1896 there were 242,764 marriages, the lowest recorded number since records began in 1862. Just 2.42 per cent of unmarried males aged 16 or over got hitched in 2005 — down from 2.78 per cent the previous year. Other findings in the study include that couples are waiting longer to get married: in the 10 years since 1995, the average age at marriage for men rose to 36.2 (up from 35.8 in 2004) and 33.6 for women (up from 33.1). — *AFP*



BUSINESS

Prado takes on the rough

Times News Service

MUSCAT — ‘When the going gets tough, the tough gets going’ so says a popular adage. And there are few who can actually live up to the claim. Except maybe the Toyota Prado! Packed with powerful features and geared up to deliver silky smooth performance, Toyota Prado takes on the rough, with a smile.

One of Prado’s best features is its sheer affordability, plus a unique plethora of benefits, which accompany a 2-year /40,000km free service package, a hamper full of goodies, as well as many other value-added benefits that include 6 years protection, easy financing deals, and more. “I thought I had seen it all, until I drove the new Prado!” exclaimed a 4WD enthusiast while taking a close look at the showroom.

It is available with a choice of highly efficient 2.7-litre petrol engine delivering 160HP at 4800rpm, and the 3L diesel engine developing 101 HP at 4000rpm. The full-time 4WD system with limited slip differential delivers



excellent drive and performance between high and low range setting, depending on the road conditions. Cruise control ensures comfortable long distance travel.

Prado’s comprehensive safety features include ABS (anti-lock brake system) to help reduce the chance of a skid, ventilated disc brakes with load sensing proportioning valve, side impact beams, front, side and curtain shield airbags. Also, an impact absorbing body is provided that effectively helps to absorb and distribute front, side and rear impacts to erase the effects on the driver and passengers. The differential

lock gets activated at the touch of a button, to release the wheels, if the Prado ever is struck. The 2007 Prado features several other sophisticated features like graphic display type field monitor, bluetooth telephone kit, cool box, wood/leather steering wheel and centre cluster, front and rear parking sensors, active height control, electronically modulated suspensions, leather upholstery, seat heaters, moon roof and power seats to name a few.

Indeed, this is the perfect time to discover how easy it is to own the all-new Prado. Its time to head for the Toyota showroom, right away.

Isuzu — a world leader from Japan

Times News Service

MUSCAT — Engines are the heart of Isuzu, an industry leader of over 17 million diesel engines worldwide. Their products, noted for reliability and durability, have stood the test of time. Every Isuzu customer knows he can count on Isuzu for much more than unparalleled engine performance.

Isuzu Motors Limited, Japan’s oldest vehicle manufacturer began car production in 1916 and soon followed with medium and heavy-duty trucks in 1918. Isuzu Motors America, Inc. has been distributing and marketing Isuzu vehicles in the United States since 1981.

For almost 90 years, Isuzu vehicles have been engineered with a passion and dedication to push the limits of capability, while redefin-



ing the perceptions of value. Today, Isuzu is a world leader in the production of reliable medium-duty trucks and is world-renowned for its expertise in engineering, from diesel engines to pickups to SUVs. Since building its first truck in 1918, Isuzu has sold over 26 million trucks in 64 countries. As a result, the Isuzu name is recognised worldwide for its leadership and innovation.

Today Isuzu is proud to offer more than 30 different engine models with power ranges beyond 300HP, for use in both on-and-off-road applications. And, with a growing network of locations and authorised service dealers in several countries across the globe, it’s easy for any consumer to obtain the most advanced, reliable diesel engines in the world, right in his/her neighbourhood.

Even in America, one of the most competitive markets of the world, Isuzu has carved its own success story through sheer performance.

In Oman, Isuzu is brought to you by the OTE Group — the symbol of care... right from the latest in diesel and petrol pickups to the very best N-series and F-series trucks, you name it and it’s available with complete pre-sales finance up to post-sales service support.

Bigger families go with KIA Carens

Times News Service

MUSCAT — Kia Carens has been an instant hit with generous sized families. The 4.5-metre long all-new Kia Carens has been designed in response to active lifestyle of large families that blends the interlocking trends of MPVs and SUVs.

New Carens is an all-new model, only the name of the previous model has been retained. Longer, wider and taller than its predecessor (by 55, 50 and 40mm, respectively), the latest Carens does not share a single panel with the old model and its smoother exterior, with elegant detailing, results in significantly improved aerodynamics.

The 4,545-mm long New Carens’ aerodynamic CD is a highly competitive 0.32 — down from 0.35 for the previous model — despite the latest vehicle’s increased cross-section and frontal area.

Consumer clinics with Carens prototypes confirmed that a significant percentage of today’s compact MPV customers would welcome a larger vehicle that could seat up to seven people — provided that any increase in overall



length was kept to a modest level. Consequently, New Carens is higher and wider than the model it replaces, with a much longer wheel-base (up by 130mm, a 5 per cent increase), but it is only 55mm (or 1.2 per cent) longer, thanks to skillful packaging design.

“With New Carens we are presenting consumers with a surprisingly spacious yet compact MPV. Our Kia teams on several continents designed the new Carens to surpass the escalating expectations of Kia customers. They have created a truly competitive vehicle that is more stylish and more practical, and will complement modern families’ lifestyles however they spend their work or leisure time,” com-

mented Jung-Moon Park, senior executive vice-president and COO of Kia Motors.

“New Carens marks a major advance for our compact MPV model. It incorporates a host of significant improvements in every category — design, comfort, performance, versatility, quality and safety. I am sure that new Carens will certainly have great appeal to new and existing Kia customers across the world,” concluded Park.

Kia expects the new Carens to be a high-volume seller and targets sales of 150,000 units globally in 2007. The Carens is yet another example of the ‘exciting’ and ‘enabling’ characteristics that Kia’s next-generation products are bringing to the brand.



UNVEILED: Canon EOS-1D Mark IIIs at the unveiling ceremony in Tokyo yesterday. The Canon EOS-1D Mark III will be available in Japan from late May at an open price, the company said. — Reuters

Shopkeepers protest as Wal-Mart checks out India

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI — Executives from US retail giant Wal-Mart toured Indian stores yesterday as they work on a deal that could change the face of the country’s \$300 billion retail sector and has sparked fears of mass job losses.

In New Delhi, over 100 demonstrators waving banners and shouting slogans marched on government buildings to protest against the entry of the world’s largest retailer into India.

Some broke through police barricades and burnt an effigy of a dummy with ‘Wal-Mart Down’ scrawled on it.

‘Go back Wal-Mart’, protesters shouted, waving placards saying: ‘Save Small Retailers’.

But there were no protests as Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Vice-Chairman Michael Duke, accompanied by venture partner Rajan Mittal of Bharti Enterprises, visited a mall and a hypermarket in a Mumbai suburb and checked out products on display.

Wal-Mart and Bharti plan a joint venture for cash-and-carry in a retail sector that is dominated by small family-run stores. The sector is fore-

cast to more than double by 2015, and has attracted the interest of other top global retailers such as Tesco plc. and Carrefour. Small shopkeepers fear Wal-Mart could put many of an estimated 40

Sonia Gandhi, head of the Congress Party that leads India’s coalition government, raised her concerns about the ‘Wal-Mart effect’ on retailers in a letter to the prime minister that was leaked by Indian

Wal-Mart, which is also discussing how to provide Bharti with technology support, said it hoped to increase the amount of goods it sources for its international operations from India from \$600 million last year.

Analysts say investments in the supply chain, which is hamstrung by poor infrastructure, from refrigerated trucks to warehouses, would cut the number of middlemen and help reduce spoilage, estimated at nearly 40 per cent of total output. Bharti Retail Ltd, wholly owned by Bharti Enterprises, said earlier this week it would spend up to \$2.5 billion by 2015 to build hypermarkets, supermarkets and other stores.

“Maybe a few years down the line, when they have a bigger presence, we can see the impact, but right now no single firm has the clout to make or break this market,” said one analyst.

Reliance Retail, part of Reliance Industries Ltd, is investing \$5.6 billion in some 700 stores, while ITC Ltd., the Birla group and Pantaloon Retail Ltd — India’s top retailer — are all ramping up. — Reuters



million Indians who depend on retail out of work.

“The earnings from our small store keep me, my younger brother and sister and my parents alive,” said Amrit Prakash, 26, one of the protesters, who owns a small grocery store in Delhi.

“If Wal-Mart comes, they will sell goods at wholesale prices which will be cheaper and I will have no customers. I simply can’t compete with these big supermarkets ... what will happen to me and my family? I’m worried we’ll end up on the streets.” His fears have strong political resonance.

media. Duke was expected to hold talks with government and Bharti officials in New Delhi, but no specific business announcement would be made, Wal-Mart said in a statement.

Duke was in India “to learn more about the market first-hand and to further explore the wholesale cash-and-carry business,” Wal-Mart said, adding it was a routine trip.

“We look forward to partnering (Bharti) to build backward linkages with farmers and suppliers through a robust and efficient supply chain,” the US group added.

Coffee helps Nestle record \$7.4b profit

VEVEY (Switzerland) — Global food giant Nestle announced a 14-per cent rise in 2006 net profit to 5.7 billion euros (\$7.4 billion) yesterday and said prospects for 2007 looked good as it moved further into the health and wellbeing markets.

Sales of the company’s instant espresso coffee brand Nespresso exceeded 1 billion Swiss francs for the first time in 2006, it added. The Swiss-based company reported record full-year profit of 9.2 billion Swiss francs (\$7.4 billion), above analysts’ expectations and boosted by takeovers and product innovations. Nestle also said it was confident of achieving organic growth of 5-6 per cent and a further improvement in pre-tax earnings this year. The price of shares in the group was showing a gain of 2.6 per cent to 476.25 Swiss francs in midday trading.

“The year 2006 was another record year for Nestle. We are seeing the benefits of the group’s transformation into a nutrition, health and wellness company, with stronger innovation and branding, as well as improved efficiency,” said company Chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe in a statement.

Sales rose by 8.1 per cent to 98.5 billion Swiss francs, while pre-tax profit rose by 13.8 per cent at 13.3 billion Swiss francs. The food and beverages division was the main growth driver, contributing 6.7 billion Swiss francs towards the total 7.3 billion Swiss francs increase in group sales. The Nutrition division achieved organic growth of 6.1 per cent in 2006 with sales of 6 billion Swiss francs. It performed well in Latin America and much of Asia and Africa, but its overall performance was held back by China, the company said. The division saw strong gains in the infant nutrition market owing to the international roll-out of a new infant formula product, Nestle NAN HA.

This new product launch comes despite a 30-year boycott of the company by some consumers in protest at its marketing strategies for breast-milk substitutes in developing countries. — AFP



ANNOUNCEMENT: Nestle CEO Peter Brabeck gesturing during a press conference on the company’s annual results at the headquarters in Vevey. — AFP

German firm Allianz’s net profit above target

MUNICH (Germany) — German insurance giant Allianz reported record net profit of 7,021 billion euros (\$9.2 billion) in 2006, well above target, yesterday and said it expected further growth.

“In 2006, we didn’t just achieve our ambitious targets in terms of the result, but surpassed them all by a wide margin,” said Chief Executive Michael Diekmann.

“We’ve delivered what we promised and will do so again in the coming years as well,” he added.

The net profit figure of 7,021 billion euros represented an increase of 60.3 per cent over the previous year’s 4.38 billion euros. In the wake of the positive performance, Allianz planned to raise the dividend payout to 3.80 euros per share for 2006 from 2 euros for 2005.

“By raising the dividend, we will let our shareholders, who stood by us in hard times, participate in the improved results,” said CEO Diekmann. All divisions contributed to profit growth, but the strongest increase was seen in the banking division, which includes the

Dresdner Bank unit. Allianz also saw a reduction in income taxes and lower payments to minority shareholders.

Operating profit topped 10 billion euros for the first time, rising by 29.8 per cent to 10,386 billion euros. Total revenues, which combines both gross premium income and revenues from its banking subsidiary Dresdner Bank, edged up by 0.2 per cent to 101.1 billion euros.

“Our focus on profit growth is paying off,” said Diekmann. “Last year, with the merger of (Italian insurer) RAS into Allianz, the conversion into a European company (SE) and the re-organisation of Allianz in Germany and America, we made a lot of progress. 2006 was a year of systematic chance,” Diekmann said.

Last year was a ‘very good year’ for the property and casualty business, Allianz said.

The so-called combined ratio — which measures the amount of claims paid as a proportion of premium income — improved, falling to 92.9 per cent in 2006 from 94.3 per cent in 2005. — AFP

Yukos stake in Rosneft to be auctioned

MOSCOW — An auction will take place on March 27 for the sale of a 9.44-per cent stake in the Rosneft oil company owned by the stricken former number one Yukos, the state property fund said yesterday.

The starting price for the stake has been fixed at 195.5 billion roubles (\$7.4 billion) and each counter-bid should be at least 260 million roubles above the previous bid, the fund said in a statement in the *Rossyskaya Gazeta* official newspaper. Included in the lot will be promissory notes for the Yukos production arm Yuganskneftegaz with a nominal value of 3.6 billion roubles (\$1.4 million). Rosneft has said it is interested in buying the stake, one of the last assets of Yukos, which was declared bankrupt last August. — AFP

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THE PHILIPPINES

Melo Commission report damns military

MANILA — President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came under intense pressure yesterday to rein in the military after a second damning report implicated top commanders in a wave of political assassinations.

The government inquiry, made public only after pressure from the United Nations, said members of the military allowed and even encouraged the killing of “enemies of the state.”

Local rights groups say more than 800 people have been murdered for political reasons since Gloria took office in 2001, and UN envoy Philip Alston said on Wednesday the military was in “almost total denial” about the situation.

“The government is not in denial,” Gloria said in a statement as the report, compiled by a commission headed by retired Supreme Court justice Jose Melo, was released.

“These killings will be resolved and the armed forces shall continue to be a vanguard for freedom,” she said.

The Philippine military, which is one of the most powerful institutions in the country and has intervened in the past to bring down the government, has repeatedly said the number of victims is inflated by rights groups.

Facing a decades-long insurgency by communist rebels who control parts of this vast island nation, the

military has insisted the victims are often either killed in an internal rebel purge or slain in combat with Philippine troops.

But the government inquiry said there was evidence pointing to the involvement of the army’s former head of counter-insurgency, General Jovito Palparan, and others in the string of deaths.

“General Palparan was said to have left a trail of blood or bodies in his wake wherever he was assigned,” said the report.

“In all probability some elements in the military, among whom is suspected to be General Palparan, are responsible for the recent

killings of activists,” it said.

The Gloria government decided to make the report public after calls from Alston, the UN envoy, who issued the preliminary findings of his own investigation on Wednesday.

Leading military and government figures ridiculed Alston yesterday and repeatedly rejected his comments about the army’s attitude toward the killings, which have attracted growing international criticism.

“We believe that Alston may be in a state of denial himself,” said the head of the military, General Hermogenes Esperon, who said the UN envoy had not investigated charges that the communists had murdered more than 1,000 people.

But the government’s own probe indicated there was nothing to back up what it called the “theory” that the deaths were the result of a purge by the armed wing of the communists, the 7,000-strong New People’s Army (NPA).

While the “circumstantial” evidence might not be enough to draw a conviction in a court of law, it said, there appeared to be little doubt about who was ultimately behind the bloodshed.

“The only other theory left is that certain elements within or connected to some military officers are responsible for the killings,” the report said.

Despite rebel threat, ‘butcher’ walks free

MANILA — When Philippine Army General Jovito Palparan retired from the military last year the communist New People’s Army (NPA) said he was a “dead man walking.”

Palparan later described the threat as an “honour”, coming from the NPA.

He boasted that despite the threat, he still picked up his groceries and went to the movies alone, without bodyguards.

Loathed by the left, who call him the “butcher”, Palparan, now in semi-retirement, is finding himself at the centre of a growing storm over political killings in the country.

The findings of a special government Commission of Inquiry into extra-judicial killings said Palparan “left a trail of blood or bodies in his wake wherever he was assigned.”

The findings of the Melo Commission inquiry said there was “circumstantial evidence” linking Palparan, 56, to the killings of leftists.

But the mild-mannered former general, married to a dentist, with three children, makes no apologies about his headline approach to the country’s 39-year-old communist insurgency.

Others see Palparan as a true patriot defending his country from the scourge of communism.

Even President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo praised him during her State of the Nation address last year when she said: “General Palparan will not back down until the darkness of terror gives way to the dawn of freedom.”

Now her favoured general is finding himself at the centre of a growing storm that will not go away.

Retired Supreme Court justice Jose Melo’s report has rocked the administration and the military, which is out to defend one of its own.

But for rights activists, it has vindicated much of what they have been saying for years.

The Melo report said Palparan and his men could be “responsible for an undetermined number of killings by allowing, tolerating and even encouraging the killings.”

The general, who has fought rebels, rightist military coup plotters and even served a short stint with the Philippine contingent in Iraq in 2004, is now facing one of his biggest battles.

Palparan has denied any wrongdoing, but said the civilian populace in areas where he operated might have been inspired by his example to take revenge on the guerrillas who abused them.

“Many of these people who have been victims or relatives of the victims also desire to exact revenge. They take action by themselves, take the law into their hands because they feel that justice is not coming,” Palparan said.

He directly accused leftist activists, political parties and non-government organisations of being fronts for the rebels, saying “it’s actually ... the militants and the party list organisations who are the ones directing or commanding the NPA.”

The communists hate him because “I confront them in all aspects,” not just on the battlefield but in their intelligence networks, support groups and propaganda campaigns, Palparan said.

After his retirement, Palparan has remained as Gloria’s chief adviser on her campaign to crush the NPA.

The president has repeatedly backed Palparan, and said he was central to defeating the communists before she steps down in 2010. — AFP



CEREMONIAL: President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo, centre; armed forces chief General Hermogenes Esperon, left, and Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita arriving at the National Heroes' Cemetery in Manila yesterday to lead the ceremony marking the 21st anniversary of the 'People Power' revolt that ousted the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. — AFP

People Power anniversary all but forgotten

MANILA — The 21st anniversary of ‘People Power’ went virtually unnoticed in the Philippines yesterday — a far cry from February 22, 1986, when more than a million Filipinos packed the streets of the capital calling for the removal of dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

For President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who placed a simple wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the anniversary has a double meaning as it marked a year since she crushed a military revolt against her administration.

A year on, Gloria’s hold on power has become stronger, much due to the debt she owes to the military, analysts have said.

Twenty-eight officers and soldiers are facing courts martial, possibly at the end of the month, for their part in the failed plot. For former president Fidel Ramos, who broke ranks with the Marcos regime and joined the church-led mass movement that filled *Epifanio de los Santos Avenue* (Edsa), the anniversary appears to have lost much of its meaning to many Filipinos.

“Many of our young people and even elected leaders today seem indifferent to the spirit of what has become known as the Edsa Revolution,” he said yesterday.

“Regrettably, the prevailing view is that Edsa was no big deal ... that Edsa is no longer that important seems more and more the conventional wisdom ... as the event recedes into the fog of history.”

Ramos, who was commander of the former Philippine Constabulary, and Marcos’ then defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile broke away from the dictator on the night

of the 22nd, along with a loyal band of officers and soldiers.

Among them was a young, charismatic colonel Gregorio ‘Gringo’ Honasan, who later went on to earn a reputation as the leader of failed coups and is now awaiting trial for his part in abortive putsches against Arroyo.

Holed up at police headquarters at Camp Crame, just across Edsa from the headquarters of the Philippine military, Ramos and Enrile sent out urgent calls over radio stations for the people to help them.

Hundreds of thousands responded. In the tense days that followed, priests, nuns, ordinary citizens and children linked arms with the rebels and faced down, without violence, the tanks and machine guns of government troops.

That incident sparked what became known as ‘People Power’, or the Edsa Revolution, that installed opposition leader Corazon Aquino as president after Marcos and his family were spirited out of the presidential palace on the night of February 25 and into exile.

However the nation’s attention is now more focused on charges that the military was behind a rash of unexplained killings and on jockeying for the congressional and local elections in May.

In 21 years, little has changed in the Philippines, said University of the Philippines political scientist Clarita Carlos.

“The key players just get older,” she added.

“Edsa was irrefutably a shining moment in Philippine history,” Ramos said. “A people’s collective act of quiet courage, yet powerful resolve.” — AFP

Yunus enters political field with ‘Bangladesh go forward’ slogan

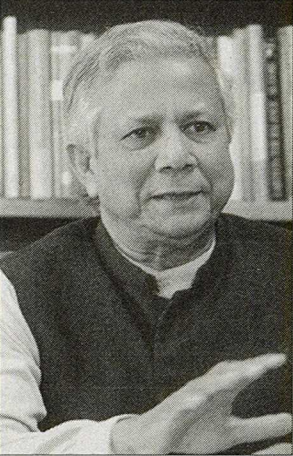
DHAKA — Bangladesh’s Nobel Peace-Prize winner Mohammed Yunus yesterday formally launched his Nagarik Shakti (Citizens’ Power) party, confirming his plans to join active politics by pledging to help “change the fate of the nation.”

“Today I formally announce my party Nagarik Shakti,” Yunus told reporters before leaving for Abu Dhabi on a four-day visit. “The core slogan of my party will be ‘Bangladesh go forward’,” he said.

Yunus won the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his micro-finance scheme that earned him the nickname “banker to the poor.”

Yunus has said he felt compelled to join politics because most of Bangladesh’s current politicians were corrupt.

“We have an age-old tradition of confrontation in politics. My politics will be the



POLITICAL DEBUT: Mohammed Yunus

politics of unity and peace to establish honesty in politics and to change the fate of the nation,” Yunus said.

“These politics will be non-communal, secular and democratic and it will be free

of corruption,” he added.

Earlier this month, however, Yunus wrote an open letter lamenting the state of Bangladeshi democracy and seeking the views of ordinary people on whether he should launch a political party.

“I, like you, witnessed where our political culture has brought the country and how it attempted to destroy the country’s future possibilities,” he said.

The party name was announced at the weekend and Yunus said it would contest all parliamentary seats at the next election, for which a date has yet to be set.

Yunus released an open letter stating his plan to launch a new party for the next general election.

“I have decided to join your endeavour to create a new politics in the country and create a new party,” he said in the letter, addressed to the citizens of Bangladesh.

“Pray for me so that I can fulfil your expectations.”

Elections have been put on hold amid a stalemate between the two main parties, which are bitterly opposed.

His remarks sparked angry comments from politicians, including former prime minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League and leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which is headed by the most recent prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia.

Bangladeshis from all walks of life greeted Yunus’ Nobel prize with joy and national pride, but analysts say it is not clear he can translate his popularity into political power.

A ballot scheduled for January 22 was cancelled when President Iajuddin Ahmed stepped down as head of the interim government and imposed a state of emergency. — AFP, Reuters

Ministry: More South Korean farmers find spouses abroad

SEOUL — More and more South Korean farmers are marrying foreign women because of problems finding local partners, officials said yesterday.

Of 8,027 marriages in rural areas in 2005, 2,885 (or around 36 per cent) were international unions, the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs said. “Our data showed many bachelors in rural farming areas face difficulties in finding spouses at home. They go abroad to find foreign brides,” ministry official Lim Sung-bum said.

An increasing number of men in rural areas have found wives from Vietnam and other southeast Asian countries, partly because of a surplus of bachelors and a shortage of eligible Korean women.

Nationwide in 2005, marriages to foreigners totalled 43,000, or 13.6 per cent of the total — up from four per cent in 2000. — AFP

S. Korean president to quit own party

SEOUL — South Korea’s president said yesterday he would quit the liberal Uri Party to give it a chance to boost its sagging support ahead of presidential elections in December that the opposition looks likely to win.

In contrast, President Roh Moo-hyun accepted an offer by the country’s first woman-prime minister to resign and return to Uri to help with its revival, a spokesman for the Presidential Office said.

Roh, whose approval rating of about 15 per cent is only slightly higher than Uri’s, had earlier offered to leave the fast-frag-menting group if it would help unite liberal forces.

“I hope my quitting the party will provide an opportunity to improve our political climate,” the Presidential Office quoted Roh as saying.

“As long as a few members within the party demand I quit the party, I need to clear the basis of conflict within the group,” he said. Roh’s office said he had verbally accepted Prime Minister Han Myeong-sook’s offer to step down but had urged her to delay her departure until March 6, the spokesman added.

Still with a year left in office, Roh is widely considered a lame duck with few opportunities to influence developments.

Earlier this month, a group of 23 lawmakers quit Uri, saying it had failed. The defections reduced the party, once the largest in parliament, to second-rank status with greatly reduced power.

“I think he doesn’t want to be a burden on the party,” said Yang Seung-ham, professor of political science at Seoul’s Yonsei University.

“His leaving may help himself and the Uri Party to act more freely,” Yang said. Opinion polls show the conservative Grand National Party, the largest group in the one-chamber parliament since Uri’s defections, as clear front-runner to provide the next president. — Reuters

Bangkok film fest postponed

BANGKOK — Bangkok’s flagship film festival has been rescheduled for late July after a row over the festival venue forced delays, the event organisers said yesterday.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), organiser of the Bangkok International Film Festival for four consecutive years, said the fifth festival would run from July 19-29.

“The 2007 version of the festival ... will feature approximately 100 films from around the world,” a statement from TAT said.

The annual event, which organisers hope will eventually eclipse Busan in South Korea to become Asia’s premier film festival, was originally due to take place from January 26 to February 5.

But TAT said “the sudden unavailability of theatres” forced the festival to be postponed.

The event will now take place in cinemas at the vast, newly-built Central World shopping complex in downtown Bangkok.

The rescheduled festival would put more emphasis on Asian films, TAT said, which have been become increasingly popular with international audiences.

TAT said the Bangkok Film Market, a trade show for the film industry, would take place from July 23-25.

The last Bangkok International Film Festival in February 2006 boasted directors Oliver Stone and Terry Gilliam and actors Willem Dafoe and Catherine Deneuve, but was also dogged by controversy.

It was marred by a spat between TAT and the Thai film industry federation, which complained it had not been adequately consulted. Federation members with local distribution rights pulled several films, including the Oscar-winning *Brokeback Mountain*. — AFP

Famed architect launches bid to become Tokyo governor

TOKYO — Renowned architect Kisho Kurokawa yesterday launched a bid to become Tokyo governor, denouncing nationalist incumbent Shintaro Ishihara as an embarrassment to the world’s largest metropolis.

Kurokawa, 72, is best known for designing Kuala Lumpur International Airport and a wing of Amsterdam’s Van Gogh Museum. He recently completed Tokyo’s largest art museum.

If elected in April, Kurokawa said he would work to repair relations with China, a frequent bugbear for Ishihara, and scrap the governor’s bid for Tokyo to host the 2016 Summer Olympics.

“Mr. Ishihara’s unrestrained, almost disdainful attitude towards China is extremely embarrassing,” Kurokawa told a press confer-

ence.

“I would stress relations with the United States, China and Russia,” said Kurokawa, adding that he personally knows Chinese President Hu Jintao.

“Mr. Ishihara and I differ very widely at the international level.”

Ishihara, a novelist-turned-politician, stormed onto the political scene in the 1980s by bashing the United States.

He has since regularly courted controversy for remarks such as using ethnic slurs to deride Chinese and Koreans and suggesting that women past childbearing age were “hags” who should die.

Ishihara’s blunt style, including tough talk on crime, propelled him to two landslide victories. But his ratings have slipped in recent months due to a nepotism scandal

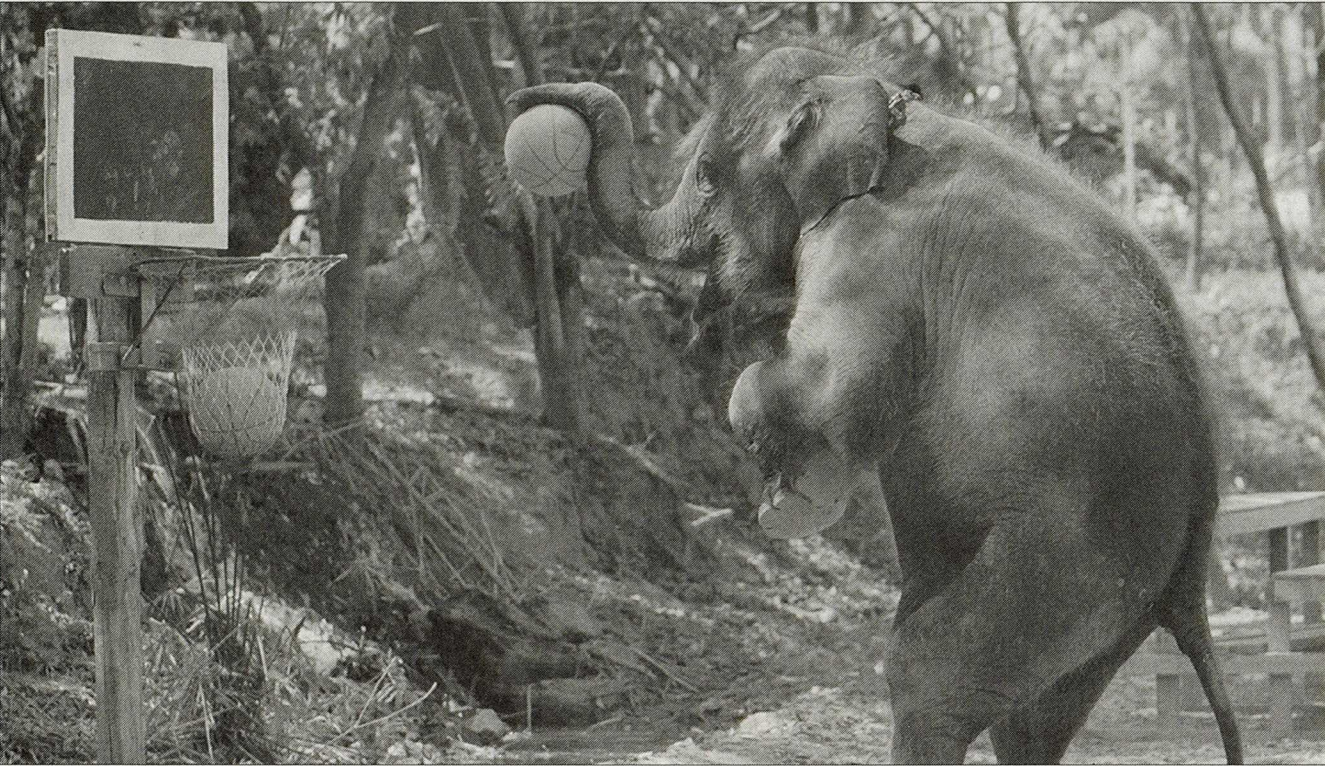
involving his son, and criticism of his expensive junkets overseas.

Kurokawa said he had been friends with Ishihara for more than 40 years, but believed he must go — and was willing to give up his candidacy if Ishihara withdrew his own bid.

Both Kurokawa and Ishihara are independents. So far only one other candidate, a communist, has declared candidacy.

The architect said he would also abandon Ishihara’s hopes for Tokyo to host the Olympics for the second time, saying the Games would be a burden on the densely populated capital’s urban design.

“I would like to make a capital where the economy and culture can live together in harmony,” he said. — AFP



ENDANGERED: An elephant stands on its hind legs as it shoots a ball during a basketball performance for foreign tourists at Mae Taman Elephant Park in Chiang Mai province yesterday. It was reported last year that Thailand has an estimated 4,000 elephants — 2,500 domesticated and 1,500 wild — sharply down from around 50,000 animals present in 1950. — AFP



# Liverpool only winners on night of three draws

LONDON — Craig Bellamy and John-Arne Riise, who made headlines for all the wrong reasons last week, were Liverpool's scoring heroes in a famous 2-1 win over European champions Barcelona on Wednesday.

The two players were both fined and heavily censured by coach Rafa Benitez after a bust-up during the club's training camp in Portugal last week but both repaid Benitez's faith in playing them by finding the net.

The 2005 European champions now take a huge advantage into the second leg against the 2006 champions when they reconvene in the first round of this Champions League tie at Anfield in two weeks time.

Elsewhere, former Porto boss Jose Mourinho saw his Chelsea side come back to draw 1-1 at the Dragao Stadium in an eventful match, AS Roma and Olympique Lyon drew 0-0 in Rome and Inter Milan conceded a late goal to draw 2-2 at the San Siro with Valencia.

The outstanding match on a relatively quiet night of European soccer was at the Nou Camp where Liverpool, the only English club ever to beat Barcelona there back in 1976, repeated the feat.

Deco headed Barca ahead after 14 minutes and Bellamy equalised with a header that squirmed out of goalkeeper Victor Valdes's grasp and over the line two minutes before halftime.

Liverpool played the better football in the second half and deservedly went ahead when Riise lashed in the winner 16 minutes from the end.

Deco came close to equalising when he hit the post from a free kick before the Catalans slumped to only their second defeat in their last 20 Champions League matches and their first at home in the competition since April 2003.



**WELL PLAYED:** Barcelona's Brazilian Ronaldinho, left, shakes hands with Liverpool's Dirk Kuyt after the match at the Camp Nou Stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Riise told Sky Sports News he and Bellamy had put the incident — which involved a row over a Karaoke song and the unconventional use of a golf club —

behind them: "It is all over, it's behind us and we have to look to the future now," he said.

"There is no problem between him and me and all the team are very happy."

Bellamy, who celebrated his goal with an exaggerated golf-swing action, told Sky Sports News he agreed with his Norwegian teammate.

"There is no problem between us. You know how strict the manager is. If there was a big problem then I wouldn't have been here — but there isn't one."

Inter Milan, who have won 16 successive Serie A matches and not lost since September, were held to a 2-2 draw at the San Siro by Valencia who twice came from behind to equalise with David Silva grabbing the draw for the Spaniards with a well struck volley three minutes from time.

Esteban Cambiasso put the Serie A leaders ahead with a

29th minute header before David Villa equalised with a thunderous 30-metre free kick after 64 minutes.

Defender Maicon restored Inter's lead with a well worked goal 14 minutes from time, before Silva gave Valencia real hope with his side's late equaliser.

The main talking point to emerge from AS Roma's goalless draw with Olympique Lyon was the fact English referee Mike Riley booked 11 players to equal the competition record set in November 2000 when Dutch referee Dick Jol booked 11 when Panathinaikos played Juventus.

At least there were goals at the Dragao Stadium in Porto where the home side and Chelsea, managed by Porto's 2004 Champions League winning coach Jose Mourinho, battled out a 1-1 draw with Raul Meireles scoring for Porto after 12 minutes and Andriy Shevchenko equalis-

ing with a left-foot shot four minutes later — his 58th European goal.

While Chelsea now look the more likely to advance to the quarterfinals the night was costly in terms of injuries for them.

England captain John Terry, who has only recently returned from a long injury layoff, went down after only eight minutes with an ankle ligament injury that will keep him out of Sunday's League Cup final against Arsenal — and possibly a lot longer than that.

Chelsea also lost Dutchman Arjen Robben, who came on as Terry's replacement but picked up a muscle injury and was himself replaced by John Obi Mikel at the start of the second half.

The second legs of Wednesday's ties will be played on March 6. This year's final is in Athens on May 23. — Reuters

## Ronaldo once again takes centrestage for AC Milan

ROME — All eyes will once again be on Ronaldo when AC Milan host Sampdoria on Sunday (kickoff at 1930GMT).

The three-times World Player of the Year conjured up two goals and the pass that created Milan's third in the 4-3 win over Siena last weekend.

It was a performance that swept away any doubts that "The Phenomenon" as he was known during his days at Inter was worth the 7.5 million euros Milan paid Real Madrid for him in January.

"We all knew he was a great player. What came as such a big surprise to us was how quickly he has managed to slip back into the Italian Championship," said coach Carlo Ancelotti, whose team have won six of their last

seven league matches to climb to sixth.

For the 30-year-old Brazilian striker, meanwhile, his display provided an eloquent riposte to those who had written him off as overweight and over-the-hill.

"I don't have to say anything to my critics. I'll just shut them up with what I do on the pitch," he said.

He should have plenty of opportunities to impress between now and the end of the season.

With Filippo Inzaghi injured, Marco Borriello suspended after failing a drugs test, and Ricardo Oliveira and Alberto Gilardino dogged by inconsistency, competition for places in Milan's attack is not as fierce as it was when Andriy Shevchenko used to automatically claim a starting

## Chelsea suffer blow as Terry ruled out of Cup final

OPORTO — Chelsea will be without John Terry for the League Cup final against Arsenal on Sunday and possibly the rest of the season after the England captain hobbled away from the Estadio do Dragao on crutches.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho could not offer a precise estimate of how long he would be without Terry but admitted he would be forced to use Michael Essien as a stand-in centreback once more at the Millennium Stadium on Sunday.

Terry lasted just eight minutes of Chelsea's 1-1 Champions League draw with FC Porto before going over on his right ankle, which had been heavily strapped during on Tuesday's training session at the stadium.

"He has a problem in his ankle," Mourinho said. "It is ligaments but I cannot say much."

Porto snatched the lead through Raul Meireles while Terry was receiving treatment on the touchline but Chelsea equalised almost as soon as Arjen Robben had replaced the defender, the Dutch winger setting up Andriy Shevchenko for a superbly-taken equaliser.

To make matters worse for Chelsea, Mourinho revealed that Robben had not appeared for the second half because he had strained a muscle after coming on without a proper warm-up. "It is always difficult to lose a defender at the start of the game, especially if you don't have another one on the bench," Mourinho said.

"Robben came on and he did well but he was injured too and we had to change tactics again. But we are a pragmatic team that knows how to defend and we did what we could and eventually got a good result." — AFP

## Madrid derby holds key to future for both clubs

MADRID — Real Madrid travel across the capital to city rivals Atletico Madrid in the Primera Liga tomorrow for a derby match that could have far-reaching consequences for both sides.

Atletico, who have not beaten their neighbours at home since a 3-1 win in the 1998-99 season, are fifth in the table and desperate for a place in European competition next year.

Having lost to Sevilla and Valencia in recent weeks, who along with Real and Barcelona make up the top four in Spain, Atletico have another chance to make the step up by overhauling Fabio Capello's side.

They have 39 points, three behind fourth-placed Real, and a victory would give them the head-to-head advantage having drawn 1-1 in the Bernabeu in October.

Infuriatingly inconsistent, if Atletico lose it could be the blow to morale that sees them slip off the pace to finish in mid-table obscurity as happened last season.

"I don't know why we haven't responded well in these games (against direct rivals). Perhaps we have lacked a little confidence. A win would maybe give us that confidence boost

we need," said Atletico's Argentine striker Sergio Aguero.

The local media always build up the game as a huge test for Real but the sad fact is that for the last four seasons it has been a cakewalk for the visitors.

Four straight wins with 12 scored and one conceded from the penalty spot, are facts that speak for themselves in the Calderon.

Real enter the game in a delicate state. Capello's future on the bench remains a hot topic and a setback against their city rivals could force the exit of the under-fire Italian.

On a positive note, a bittersweet 3-2 home win over Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Wednesday was a boost for their under-performing forwards, and the side set out for the Calderon with the league's best away record.

Midfielder David Beckham is suspended while Mahamadou Diarra and Roberto Carlos are injury doubts.

Leaders Barcelona, on 46 points, host lowly Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in need of a lift after losing 2-1 to visitors Liverpool in the Champions League. — Reuters

## United aim to charge nine points clear

LONDON — Manchester United can open a nine-point lead over champions Chelsea by beating Fulham in the Premier League this weekend.

With Chelsea's attention on Sunday's League Cup final against Arsenal in Cardiff, leaders United visit Craven Cottage tomorrow determined to turn up the heat on their title rivals.

The confidence of the visitors will be high after Tuesday's 1-0 Champions League win over Lille. Fulham's morale was knocked after a 4-0 rout by Tottenham Hotspur in the FA Cup last weekend.

Alex Ferguson's side, who demolished Fulham 5-1 on the opening day of the season, are also boosted by a full-strength squad and the knowledge they could be 12 points ahead of Chelsea by the time the Londoners next play in the league.

On March 3, United travel to Liverpool for a 12.45 start while Chelsea kick off at Portsmouth at 1715.

Third-placed Liverpool, who trail Chelsea by 10 points, play their first home match since the takeover by American sports tycoons George Gillett and Tom Hicks when they host Sheffield United tomorrow.

Javier Mascherano could make his first league appearance in a Liverpool shirt after his move from West Ham United was approved by the league this week.

The Argentina midfielder has vowed to make more of an impression than he did at his former club.

"I am aware this is an important step in my life and that my career will depend on what will happen at Liverpool. This is an opportunity I won't waste," he told the club's website.

Bolton can leapfrog Arsenal into fourth place by winning at Tottenham on Sunday, who have gone almost two months without a home league victory.

"There is a burning desire in the camp that this will ultimately be our year when we get back into Europe," said Bolton captain Kevin Nolan.

Egypt striker Mido, who has not started a league game for Spurs since the end of December, should be fit after missing Wednesday's trip to Everton with a groin problem.

Elsewhere, second bottom Charlton Athletic host West Ham United, who are a place higher on goal difference.

West Ham, who have not won a league game since their surprise 1-0 victory over Manchester United on Dec. 17, go into tomorrow's match on the back of a morale-crushing 1-0 league defeat by bottom team Watford.

Also tomorrow, Middlesbrough are at home to Reading and Everton visit Watford.

On Sunday, Newcastle United travel to Wigan Athletic and Blackburn Rovers entertain Portsmouth. — Reuters

## Stuttgart chase double dream

BERLIN — Bundesliga leaders Schalke 04 will be casting nervous glances behind them if VfB Stuttgart win the first part of a double-header at home to Hertha Berlin today.

Stuttgart have climbed from fourth to second, overhauling Bayern Munich and Werder Bremen on the way, thanks to a run of four straight victories in the league.

Another win today would take them to within two points of Schalke, who do not play until Sunday when they face a hard game at home to Bayer Leverkusen.

It would also confirm Stuttgart as the only candidates in Germany for a league and cup double. While Bayern, Schalke and Werder all made early exits from the Cup, Stuttgart are looking forward to another clash at home to Hertha in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Coach Armin Veh has been at pains to downplay his young team's trophy chances but two victories over Hertha would make double talk hard to resist.

Stuttgart certainly looked serious candidates for the title in their 4-0 win away to Eintracht Frankfurt last Friday.

Precision passing and sharp finishing took

them into a quick 2-0 lead and after Frankfurt had had a decent spell they killed the game off with a third before the first half was out.

Mario Gomez was once again on target, taking his total for the season to 13, and the league's top scorer is eager for more against Hertha in a second successive Friday night match. "The game against Frankfurt went perfectly for us and now we want to show our fans the same sort of form," Gomez told reporters.

"For the moment, though, we're just going step by step."

The bad news for Stuttgart is that Pavel Pardo is suspended for on today's game. Coach Veh will hope Fernando Meira recovers from injury in time to take his place.

Hertha, who have slipped to sixth in the table after a couple of bad results, will also be missing a key player in Arne Friedrich, who is also suspended.

It will not just be Schalke, the leaders on 49 points, who are hoping for a Hertha win today.

Werder, in third place on 42 points, and Bayern, in fourth on 37, are the other sides with designs on finishing in the top three and qualifying for the Champions League. — Reuters

## Confident Lyon are ready to resume march towards title

PARIS — Olympique Lyon believe they are almost back to their best as they prepare to host Sochaux at Gerland in Ligue 1 tomorrow.

Happy with their 0-0 draw away to AS Roma in the Champions League on Wednesday, Lyon regard their early 2007 slump as over and say they are ready to resume their march towards a record sixth consecutive title.

"We are just 20 per cent away from our form before the winter break," assistant coach Patrice Bergue was quoted as saying on the club's website. "But we will back there very soon."

"We have improved since January and even if we were

not that good against Lille (last Friday), we proved efficient," said goalkeeper Gregory Coupet. After a string of five league matches without victory, Lyon, who recovered from a goal down to win 2-1 at Lille, will be looking for a third consecutive Ligue 1 win against Sochaux. With 13 matches remaining, Lyon are 13 points clear of second-placed Racing Lens, who entertain off-form Nancy on Sunday.

"I'm happy with the defence which proved solid and strong," said coach Gerard Houllier after the first leg of their Champions League first knockout round tie in Rome.

"We still need to work on our attacking skills but the team can be proud of itself."

Houllier rated Wednesday's performance as Lyon's best since the beginning of the year.

"It certainly was our best match since January," a smiling Houllier told a news conference on Wednesday.

Sochaux, fourth in the table 18 points off the pace after their 2-0 victory over Le Mans last weekend, have managed only one league win this year. They see their visit to Lyon as a good way to prepare for the visit of improving Paris St Germain in the quarterfinals of the French Cup next week. — Reuters

# James helps Cavaliers cool off in-form Raptors

TORONTO — The Cleveland Cavaliers enjoyed a winning return to action after the All-Star break, edging the in-form Toronto Raptors 86-85 led by LeBron James's game-high 29 points.

James, who said before the game that it was his responsibility to guide the Cavaliers into the playoffs, had a lacklustre 10-point first half before sparking a 15-3 third quarter run that put the Cavaliers 59-51 in front on Wednesday.

The Raptors battled back to lead 83-80 with four minutes remaining, but James kept them in touch with a pair of baskets to leave the Cavaliers (32-22) trailing by one point going into the final seconds.

Anderson Varejao then stepped up to finish off the Raptors, the big Brazilian dunking teammate Sasha Pavlovic's missed shot with

16 seconds left on the clock to complete the scoring.

Varejao contributed 16 points and 15 rebounds to the win while Larry Hughes chipped in with 14.

"As the leader, I can't allow us to have a mental hurdle. We've got less than 30 games to the playoffs and I can't allow that," James told reporters.

"That (the playoffs) is the only reason I play this game. I hold this team to a high standard and they know that, we have to live by that every time we go on the court. We've shown over the last few weeks the type of basketball team we can be. We played against some tough teams and won."

The win over the Raptors would classify as one of those well-earned victories.

With eight wins in their last 10 contests, the Atlantic Division leading Raptors (29-35) emerged from the All-Star



**KEEN CONTEST:** Orlando Magic's centre Dwight Howard, left, drives against Detroit Pistons' centre Chris Webber during the second half of their NBA game in Auburn Hills, Michigan. — Reuters

break as one of the hottest teams in the NBA with only the Dallas Mavericks (9-1) posting a better record over the same stretch.

The Raptors also entered the game unbeaten in their last eight at home, one short of the single-season franchise record of nine set in 1999.

Chris Bosh continued to show the way for the Raptors, nailing 24 points and grabbing 10 rebounds while number one draft pick Andrea Bargnani scored 18 points off the bench.

"He (James) is their main go-to guy and he turned it on in the second half," Bosh said.

"I tried to do the same, especially late in the fourth quarter. We tried to get it out of his (James) hands and make the rest of his team make plays, but he made the right passes and they squeaked by us."

Vince Carter had a season-

high 46 points but he was unable to prevent the New Orleans Hornets from beating his New Jersey Nets 111-107. Carter has been the subject of numerous trade rumours as deadline approaches.

The Detroit Pistons won for the ninth time in 10 games, downing the Orlando Magic 110-88.

Manu Ginobili scored a season-high 40 points, including 24 straight points for his team in the first half, to lead the San Antonio Spurs past the Atlanta Hawks 103-96. San Antonio has won four straight.

Kyle Korver tied a career-high with 31 points as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the New York Knicks 104-84.

Jermaine O'Neal had 29 points and 15 rebounds as the Indiana Pacers out-last-ed the Milwaukee Bucks 136-129 in double overtime. — Reuters

ing with a left-foot shot four minutes later — his 58th European goal.

While Chelsea now look the more likely to advance to the quarterfinals the night was costly in terms of injuries for them.

England captain John Terry, who has only recently returned from a long injury layoff, went down after only eight minutes with an ankle ligament injury that will keep him out of Sunday's League Cup final against Arsenal — and possibly a lot longer than that.

Chelsea also lost Dutchman Arjen Robben, who came on as Terry's replacement but picked up a muscle injury and was himself replaced by John Obi Mikel at the start of the second half.

The second legs of Wednesday's ties will be played on March 6. This year's final is in Athens on May 23. — Reuters



## Roddick, Murray reach second round

**MEMPHIS** — Top seed Andy Roddick and number three Andy Murray reached the Memphis International second round in contrasting styles. World number four Roddick eased past former Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson 6-2, 7-5 but Murray had to come from 4-2 down in the final set to beat Canadian world number 95 Frank Dancevic 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 on Wednesday. Murray beat Roddick in the semifinals on his way to the title in San Jose on Sunday and the two could meet in the last four again. — *Reuters*

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## Nalbandian crashes out, Gaudio jeered

**BUENOS AIRES** — Top seed David Nalbandian crashed out of the Buenos Aires Open and his fellow Argentine Gaston Gaudio said he felt like quitting after being jeered off court on Wednesday. Gaudio, who reached No. 5 in the world rankings in 2005, was trounced 6-1, 6-1 by Ruben Ramirez Hidalgo in his opening match of the tournament, which uses a round-robin system. “The jeers don’t surprise me, they came from the same people who applauded me in 2005,” said the sixth seed, who won the tournament two years ago.

# Wimbledon serves up equal pay for women

**LONDON** — Wimbledon chiefs announced yesterday that they will pay men and women equal prize money for the first time at the prestigious tennis championships this year.

The decision overturns more than a century of deliberate inequality in pay and brings the tournament more into line with the other three annual Grand Slam tennis events.

“We will be paying equal prize money this year at Wimbledon, through all the rounds in both singles and doubles,” said Tim Phillips, the chairman of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, which runs Wimbledon.

He said the club’s committee unanimously agreed that “the time is right to bring this subject to a logical conclusion and eliminate the difference.”

Phillips said that social and marketing factors had made

Wimbledon chiefs decide to do a U-turn to end the anomaly and hoped it would send out a positive message about tennis to young sportswomen.

And he defiantly insisted that the club had not caved in to pressure from politicians, female tennis players and women’s rights campaigners.

“Tennis is one of the few sports in which women and men compete in the same event at the same time,” he said.

“We believe our decision to offer equal prize money provides a boost for the game as a whole and recognises the enormous contribution that women players make to the game and to Wimbledon.

“We hope it will also encourage girls who want a career in sport to choose tennis as their best option. In short, good for tennis, good for women players and good for Wimbledon. We think it’s exciting news for tennis and

will provide a boost in the crowded sports landscape.”

This year’s Wimbledon runs from June 25 to July 8.

Female tennis stars hailed yesterday’s announcement that women would receive the same prize money as men at this year’s Wimbledon — triggering delight and relief among former Wimbledon ladies’ champions.

Venus Williams, three times a Wimbledon singles winner, led the bandwagon of female tennis stars hammering on the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club’s door demanding equal pay.

The 2000, 2001 and 2005 champion had even said she would be prepared to play the best of five sets like the men rather than the best of three if that was what it would take to close the pay gap.

“The greatest tennis tournament in the world has reached an even greater height today. I applaud today’s deci-

sion by Wimbledon, which recognises the value of women’s tennis,” the American said.

“The 2007 Championships will have even greater meaning and significance to me and my fellow players.” Reigning Wimbledon champion Amelie Mauresmo hailed the decision which she believes will now

really fair,” said the Frenchwoman.

“But with Wimbledon making this great decision and the right decision the French Open is under a lot of pressure. It may not happen this year, but definitely in 2008 they will have to do it.”

World number one Maria Sharapova had also been out-

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put pressure on the French Open to follow suit.

“My answer always is that it is a matter of principle — all over the world in different jobs women get paid less for the same work in many countries, than men, and that’s not

spoken in her demand for equal pay.

The Russian star transformed herself into one of the highest-profile sportswomen in the world when she won the 2004 Wimbledon ladies’ singles. “Wimbledon has always

# Australia now look to change ODI strategy

**SYDNEY** — Skipper Ricky Ponting said yesterday Australia may consider batting second in One-day cricket and opt to chase scores at next month’s World Cup to ease the pressure on their under-fire bowlers.

The defending world champions have for some time preferred to bat first and set the pace after winning the toss in One-day International cricket.

But after conceding the four greatest run-chases in limited-overs history during the past 14 months, Ponting admits it may be time for a change.

“We’re going to come up against some small grounds in the World Cup (in the West Indies), so the consideration of batting second in One-day cricket is something there to think about,” Ponting said yesterday.

“That straight away eases a bit of the pressure on the bowlers.”

New Zealand successfully chased down 336 and 346 in the final two games of the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy series to carry off a 3-0 sweep over Australia.

Only pace spearhead Brett Lee was missing from Australia’s World Cup-strength bowling attack due to an injury to his ankle ligaments. He remains in serious doubt for the World Cup.

On grounds similar in size

## Ponting to be fully fit

**SYDNEY** — Captain Ricky Ponting gave beleaguered Australia a boost yesterday when he said he is expecting to be fully fit and pain-free when he arrives in the Caribbean next week for the World Cup.

Ponting, who missed last week’s 3-0 One-day series loss to New Zealand with back trouble, had three cortisone injections to reduce inflammation caused by bone spurs in his spine but said much of the pain had eased.

“My back’s fine,” Ponting told a business luncheon here. “(Doctors) said on the day that I had the injections it would be three to four days of not doing much before the injection settles down. It’s been about a week and the last few nights I’ve slept a lot better and felt a lot better in the morning. Hopefully, when I get to the West Indies I’ll be pain-free and ready to go.”

Ponting said he felt good enough last Friday to play a round of golf, reportedly on the advice of back specialists, who claimed swinging a golf club would help maintain movement while not aggravating the inflamed area.

There are five Australians struggling with injuries three weeks out from their World Cup defence, but Ponting and fellow batsman Michael Clarke (hip) are the two players giving least concern. Pace spearhead Brett Lee is the biggest concern, with Cricket Australia delaying a second round of scans on his injured ankle until Tuesday — the day before the team flies out. — *AFP*

to those to be encountered in the West Indies, Australia’s bowlers were toothless in stopping New Zealand claim the second and third-biggest run chases in One-day cricket history.

Australia have now lost their last five One-day Internationals — their worst losing streak in a decade.

But while Ponting admits

there are several areas of concern Australia must address before their tournament opener against Scotland on March 14, he denies the team is in crisis. He does concede much of the aura surrounding Australian cricket has diminished ahead of the World Cup.

“I think it will have an effect on the other teams, they’ll say, ‘hang on England

just beat Australia in (the tri-series) finals, New Zealand just beat Australia 3-0, why can’t we beat them’,” Ponting told a business luncheon here.

“I think other teams around the world will be thinking Australia are beatable now, where only a few weeks ago everybody was wondering how any other team in the world was going to compete with us.”

Ponting later told reporters: “I don’t think the team’s in any dire straits at the moment. We’ve had a few injuries and lost a few guys, but I’m pretty confident that we’ll be ultra competitive in every game we play.”

“If you sit back and look at the results only and you notice that we’ve lost five games in a row, it doesn’t read that well, but I think right through everyone of those games we’ve done lots of things well, but we haven’t done them well enough for long enough.”

“We’ve got some areas we need to address, but we’ve got a little bit of time now ... there’s a good chance for the guys now to freshen up after a long summer for a few days, and we’ll get over there and make sure we’re working as hard as ever on our game.”

Cricket Australia said selectors will consult team medical staff early next week to decide on Lee’s availability for the World Cup. — *AFP*

# Struggling Pathan is upbeat ahead of World Cup

**RARING TO GO:** Indian cricket player Irfan Pathan smiles during an event to promote a razor brand in New Delhi. — *Reuters*

**NEW DELHI** — Indian paceman Irfan Pathan yesterday brushed aside concerns over his form and fitness, saying he was confident of delivering at next month’s World Cup in the Caribbean.

“Whatever has happened in the last eight months has made me stronger. I am happy to have gone through this phase when I am 22, and not 28,” said Pathan, who figured in just one of his team’s last eight One-day Internationals.

He sat out a four-match series against Sri Lanka due to a sore shoulder and played just one game against the West Indies, but appeared a pale shadow of his former match-winning self.

“The injury is not serious. I would be playing in domestic One-day matches, which is better than merely practising in the nets,” said Pathan.

“I didn’t have a problem before I was picked for the World Cup. It happened the day I went to Kolkata (for the match against Sri Lanka). The injury is not an issue at all and I’m confident of a good show in the Caribbean.”

Although asked to prove his form and fitness in domestic matches, Pathan denied he was under pressure to justify his selection in the Cup squad.

“I don’t think there is extra pressure on me,” said Pathan, who was sent home midway through the recent tour

of South Africa to sort out his bowling.

“When you are taking wickets, no one talks about your line and length or your speed. But when you stop taking wickets, then people always try and find fault in the way you are bowling.”

Pathan said he was looking forward to contributing to the team as a bowler who is also handy with the bat.

“I have never called myself an all-rounder. The media has given me this tag. I have always maintained I am a bowler first and batting is just an added advantage,” he said.

Pathan has taken 115 wickets and scored 1,006 runs in 73 One-day Internationals. — *AFP*

# Scotland eye Aussie upset

**EDINBURGH** — The Scotland cricket team’s Australian coach has backed the minnows to add to the reigning champions One-day problems at next month’s World Cup in the West Indies.

Australia have lost their last five One-dayers, against England and New Zealand, and were unable to prevent the Kiwis achieving two of the biggest limited overs run-chases of all time in failing to defend 336 in Auckland on Sunday and 346 in Hamilton on Tuesday.

This has bolstered Scotland coach Peter Drinnen’s belief that his adopted team can produce what would be an even bigger upset than Bangladesh’s stunning One-day defeat of Australia in Cardiff two years ago when they go up against Ricky Ponting’s men in a World Cup Group A match in St Kitts on March 14.

Drinnen, whose largely amateur side are in the same group as South Africa, who have replaced Australia at the top of the world One-day rankings, and the Netherlands, said: “If we can take early wickets, which I’m sure we can with the way we’ve been bowling, we might set a few nerves jangling and cause the likes of Australia and South Africa a few problems.”

The 39-year-old Queenslander, who 13 months ago replaced former Warwickshire batsman Andy Moles as Scotland coach, added:

“Teams are going out and giving it the gun really early in their innings and setting targets of 300. But you run the risk of losing early wickets. In the One-day game anything can happen and if we get it together we are going to be very dangerous even against Australia. We have a game plan and hopefully we can stick to it.”

And he insisted his side wouldn’t freeze come their clashes with Australia, 1/500 to win with some London bookmakers before their astonishing five-wicket loss to Bangladesh, and South Africa.

“You hear a lot about our amateur status but that doesn’t wash with me or the players,” said Drinnen. “The players set themselves professional standards and if they stick to them they are going to have a good tournament.

“We don’t fear anyone at this World Cup — the last month’s fixtures in One-day cricket all over the world have been interesting to say the least and we won’t be losing any sleep over playing the world champions.”

“We aren’t going to the Caribbean to play exhibition cricket. Yes we will be massive underdogs in the most difficult group but I’m confident we will justify our place with the elite and who knows what we could do? Nobody is getting carried away here and we know we’ve got jobs to do and we will be giving it everything to cause a shock.” — *AFP*

## Mauresmo in semis

**DUBAI** — Wimbledon champion Amelie Mauresmo celebrated equal prize money for women at the British Grand Slam with a courageous performance to reach the semifinals of the \$1.5-million Dubai Open here yesterday.

Second seed Mauresmo won 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 against Daniela Hantuchova, the eighth-seeded Slovakian to whom she had lost twice in their four previous meetings, and did so despite her tiredness and heavy strappings on both thighs.

The French heroine had flown to the Gulf only on Monday after answering a last moment call to rescue a depleted tournament, and although she appeared to be feeling the pace of her schedule and of the contest in the second set, she rallied cleverly to snatch the result.

“I kind of felt sleepy in the second set, perhaps because I was so much in control in the first set and it made things

look so easy,” Mauresmo reckoned. But in fact Hantuchova, who went 0-3 and love 40 down in no time, improved, keeping more of her raking drives in court, at the same time as Mauresmo began to struggle a little physically.

“The strappings are only a precaution,” she claimed. “I felt really okay most of the time. But she had a hard serve and it gave me a lot of trouble today and I thought I could have done a lot better in that area of the game.”

Although Hantuchova often did serve well on the bigger points there were still plenty of long and varied rallies, and Mauresmo’s “sleepiness” appeared to come after the blow of a line decision in the second set.

Leading 3-2 Mauresmo was adjudged to have delivered an ace, but Hantuchova appealed to the computerised replay and succeeded in getting the decision over-turned. — *AFP*

## De Silva backs Lanka to win

**COLOMBO** — Former batting great Aravinda de Silva believes the current Sri Lankan side go into the World Cup with better chances of winning the title than their champion 1996 team.

“I honestly feel this side have a better chance than we had in 1996. When you compare the eras, I feel this team have got a better combination. We didn’t have experience in 1996, but this team have,” De Silva said.

Arjuna Ranatunga’s Sri Lankans stunned the world in 1996 when they won the Cup in the subcontinent after being considered underdogs, with De Silva scoring a match-winning century in the final against Australia.

Sri Lanka are in Group B with former champions India, Bangladesh and first-timers Bermuda, with the top two sides advancing to the next round of the Caribbean extravaganza.

“The bowling looks good.

The batting has depth and fielding looks sharp. Things are in favour of us and if we don’t win this time, then it’ll take some time to do it. My money is on Sri Lanka,” said De Silva, 41.

“The conditions (in the West Indies) will suit our players and the combination we are going in with looks good. It’s the most experienced bowling outfit in the world and it has got variations which we lacked in 1996.”

De Silva said the presence of veteran batsmen Sanath Jayasuriya and Marvan Atapattu, and bowlers Muttiah Muralitharan and Chaminda Vaas made Sri Lanka a formidable outfit.

“In batting, Sanath will be the key. He’s a dangerous player,” said De Silva, who figured in five World Cups and is only the fourth batsman to score a century in the final.

“Murali is a world-class performer and a lot of people under-rate Vaasy. He’s a quiet

achiever and played a vital role in the last World Cup. The only issue with this team is its middle-order batting, but Marvan’s presence should sort things out. He brings experience and should be able to bat according to the situation.” De Silva said Australia would find it difficult to retain the title, as they had several weak links. “Australia are an ageing side,” said De Silva, who quit the game after the 2003 World Cup as Sri Lanka’s top scorer in both Tests (6,361 runs) and One-day Internationals (9,284).

“There’s pressure on most of their players. Their bowling is questionable and it is not what it used to be. (Glenn) McGrath can probably contain, but the traditional bounce won’t be there in the Caribbean. Brett Lee can provide a bit of variation, but the rest of the bowling looks very average. Even scores of 275 or 280 can be chased against the Aussies.” — *AFP*



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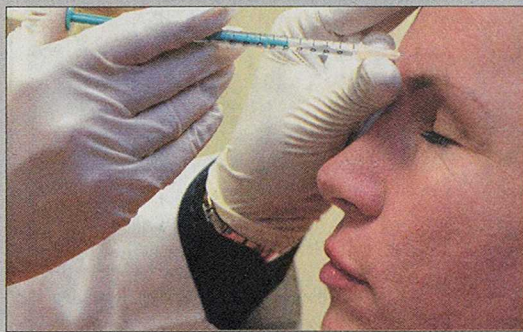
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## TRAVEL

Where chips are part of the culture

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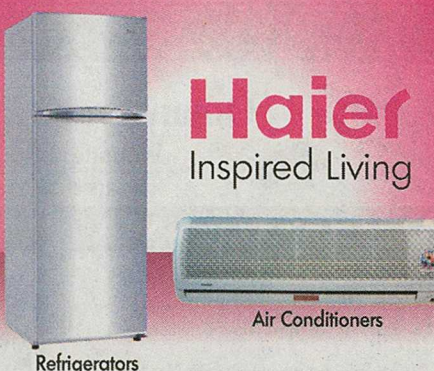


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# When food critics are at your desk side

By Abby Ellin

**B**RIAN Kutcha does not mean to annoy his boss with his eating habits, but he is a struggling actor and worries about his appearance.

So he eats five little meals daily to stay slender, nibbling on couscous or chickpeas at his desk.

Never mind that his boss, Stephen Viscusi, who runs his own headhunting firm in Manhattan, would prefer that employees not pollute the workplace with lunch.

"Bringing food into the office dynamic makes things too familiar, more like the free-for-alls that might have taken place in your family kitchen growing up," Viscusi said.

He rattled off his food peeves: "Serial eaters" like Kutcha, who loudly chomp through the day.

"Show offs" who feel they deserve points for lunching at their desks. And people who can't decide what to have and poll the entire office for ideas.

These days, more and more employees consume their lunches from the comforts of their cubicles.

"I see it all the time," said Joseph Gibbons, the research director of the FutureWork Institute, a consulting firm in Brooklyn that focuses on workplace issues.

"We're used to eating alone and having everything we need right there and being very self-sufficient. That carries over to the workplace."

Other reasons people dine "al desko" vary, said Robin Jay, author of *The Art of the Business Lunch*.

They need to high-tail it out of the office at 5pm sharp to pick up the kids. They want to save money, or they are just too stressed to leave.

In the last decade, the lunch hour has become a misnomer. A 2005 study conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for Steelcase, an office furniture manufacturer, found that 55 per cent of 700 office workers surveyed took 31 minutes for lunch, down from 36 minutes in 1996.

But that precious half-hour was not devoted to dining. Instead, workers ran errands, read or made personal calls. Jeanine Holquist, a spokeswoman for Steelcase, said "we assume they ate at their desks while multitasking."

Eating at the office has its own stresses. No matter how private you think it is, what you eat — and how much — sends telltale signals. People make assumptions about your character, whether you're driven (grilled salmon) or lazy

(pepperoni pizza).

"Food is a constant topic of conversation at our office," said Margaret Wilesmith, the president of Wilesmith Advertising/Design in West Palm Beach.

"Each individual's identity is somehow defined by his or her food choices."

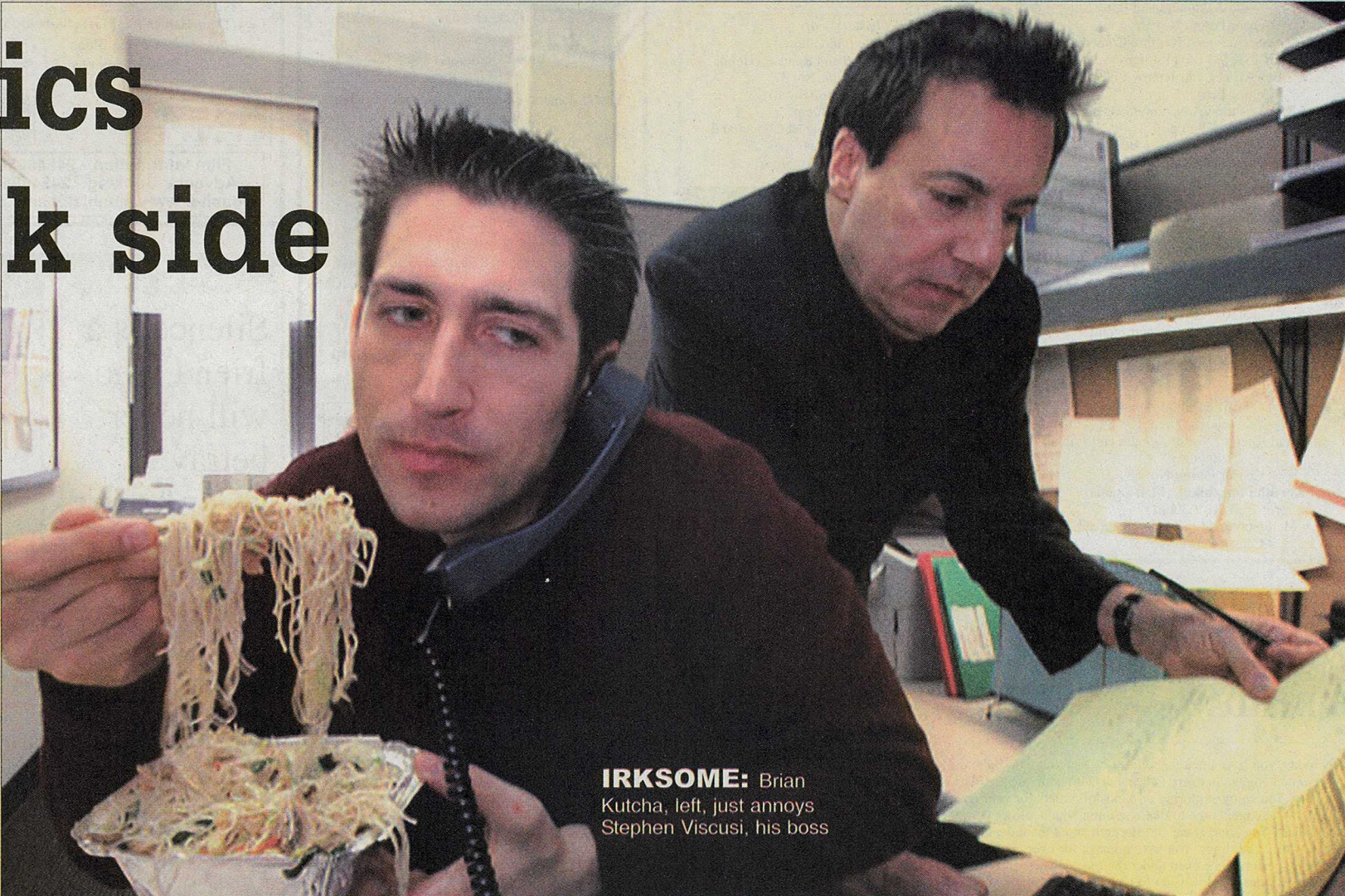
A co-worker noticing your third cheeseburger of the week is annoying. But a boss sizing up unhealthy choices carries far more influence.

"In a workplace context, the effect of such judgement is not just social but also potentially economic," said Philip N. Cohen, an associate professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who has taught courses on the sociology of food.

"Why would a co-worker or manager trust you with responsibility at work if they see you making bad decisions in your self-management enterprise during meals?"

Gayle A. Brandel, the chief executive of Professionals for NonProfits, a staffing company, said that what her employees eat reflect their diligent work habits. Her vice-president begins his day with a cup of oatmeal, Ms Brandel said, boasting.

Viscusi was more blunt. "When I'm interviewing



**IRKSOME:** Brian Kutcha, left, just annoys Stephen Viscusi, his boss

someone and I see their bones protruding, I know it's a good hire," he said. "They're extremely disciplined."

Ms Wilesmith welcomes deskside dining because she views it as a sign of dedication to the company.

"If someone goes out to eat here, it's an oddity and almost annoys people because it means you're not available 24/7," she said.

Lunching in your cubicle isn't necessarily a career booster.

"What's going to make you more money in the long

run, a lunch that you spent working and billing \$350, or having face time with clients and building a better relationship?" said Ms Jay, who often dines out at mid-day.

Eating in isn't always smart nutritionally, either. Dieters can end up sharing barbecue takeout instead of choosing their own fare.

"Small offices or companies can make lunchtime a big deal, where everyone puts in their order, it gets delivered and everyone eats together," said Geri Brewster, a dietitian and

nutritional consultant for Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, New York. "It's really easy for some to get caught up in the 'What are we going to order for lunch today' mode." Fewer people would eat at their desks if they realised what lurked near their iMacs.

Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona, has swabbed various everyday surfaces for bacteria.

A 2006 study conducted by Dr Gerba, and financed by Clorox, found that the

most germ-laden places are telephones, keyboards, computer mice and desktops.

Some lunchtime habits are conspicuous no-nos, like hogging the company refrigerator.

A colleague of Kutcha's used to bring a whole chicken on Mondays, microwave it, then nibble on the refrigerated carcass till Friday.

Lara Dyan, co-host of ChickChat, a syndicated radio programme, knows what it is like to be on the receiving end of such wrath.

For a dozen years, Dyan, 37, worked at a telecommu-

nications company where typing through lunch was encouraged.

Trouble was, she loved Chinese food, and she was an achingly slow eater. "I'd get chow fun with everything in it and graze," she said. "Everyone in cubeland would be smelling the MSG."

Still, her boss preferred to suffer through her pungent meals rather than have her leave the office for a half-hour. "He said, 'No, No, don't do that,'" Ms Dyan recounted.

— *The New York Times*

# Tidying up that mess at home with a strategy

By Nicole Jankowski

**W**AITING to tidy up that desk piling up with paper? Forget it, say the experts. Postponing such a decision doesn't work. Other strategies are necessary to simplify your life.

"Don't attempt too much at once," says expert Werner Tiki Kuestenmacher who has written the book: *Simplify Your Life*.

"It makes little sense to tidy up the entire office or cellar all at once. If you don't see the result after 15 minutes you will soon give up," says Kuestenmacher.

The expert recommends starting with a single shelf or cupboard. In sorting things it is important to be radical.

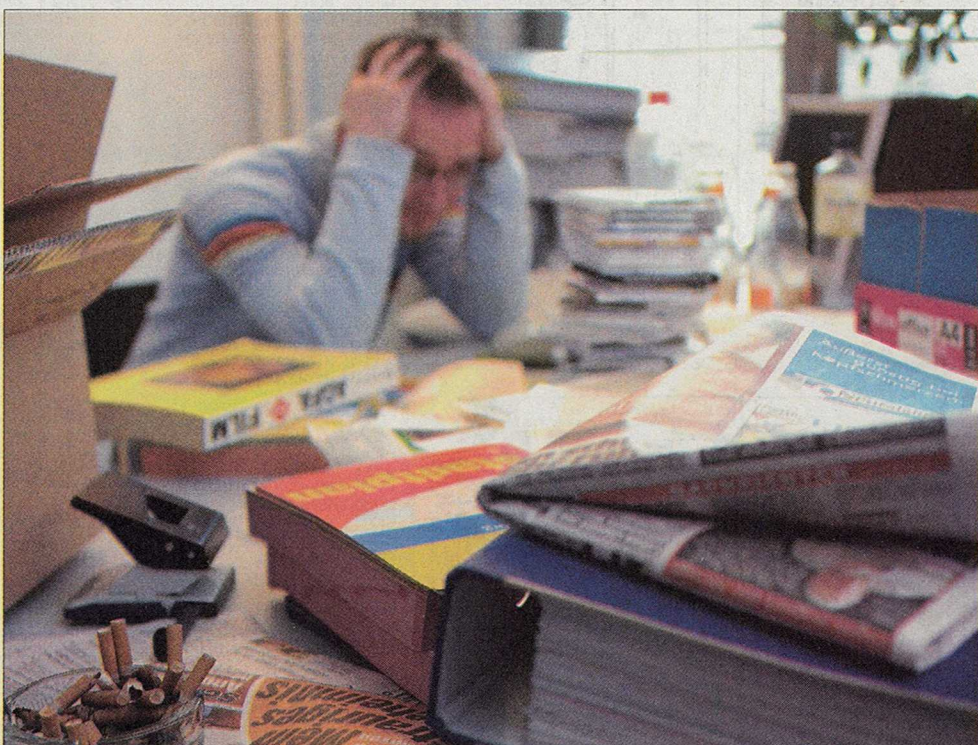
"Empty the contents completely, and don't place everything back after wards," he says.

Star designer Karim Rashid in New York recommends removing one old object from the house for every new object bought.

"If you buy a new pair of socks get rid of an old pair. Every object in the apartment should be of value to the owner. If not it should be disposed of," he says.

Even valuable collectors' items should from time to time be assessed.

Not everyone can afford to maintain two homes, like fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld who for years had one house to live in and one house for his collections.



**Time is the biggest luxury of the 21st century. The more furniture, clothing and other objects you gather, the more time you will need to maintain them**

"It is most important not to be constricted by all one's favourite possessions," says British author Tamsin Blanchard in her book *Love Your Home*.

She recommends taking a photograph of objects for which there is no longer any space, then getting rid of

them and hanging the picture on the wall.

Strict routines can help overcome inner resistance to creating order.

Kuestenmacher recommends a routine like putting every object back where it belongs when you finish using it.

"Decide to tidy up and write it down on a piece of paper," says psychologist Heike Ulrich from Potsdam near Berlin.

"It is often more difficult to keep order in one's own four walls than in the office. Nobody checks on us at home, and there is a tenden-

cy to throw things into the corner."

Kuestenmacher says taking mail into the office to open is a wrong strategy. "Sort everything on the kitchen table and throw away all the ads and envelopes. Newspapers and magazines should be read on the spot, and then put away. You won't read them later."

The experts agree that the "messie" can only learn and keep order through organisation and adopting new habits.

Karim Rashid says people who clean their apartment for just 10 minutes each day always have a tidy home.

"Time is the biggest luxury of the 21st century," the American designer argues. The more furniture, clothing and other objects you gather, the more time you will need to maintain them.

"If you simplify your lifestyle, you improve your life. Buy only the best quality and only those things you really need," Rashid argues.

But there should always be a little room left for a chaotic nook full of junk, Kuestenmacher recommends.

"It could be a kitchen cupboard for example. It is the place to deposit anything which you feel you might need and don't want to just throw away."

— *dpa*

# New bats! New birds! DNA 'barcoding' uncovers new species

By Chris Cermak

**E**VEN the most avid of bird watchers can't always spot every tiny little difference.

That's why a new classifying technique described in two papers being published recently in the British journal *Molecular Ecology* was needed to distinguish 21 new birds and bats from identical-looking species in the Americas.

So-called DNA "barcoding" serves as an identity card for animal species, and also has potential conservation and bio-security benefits. The technique consists of a short DNA sequence taken from a specific, uniform point on any animal's genome.

Scientists have begun creating a library of barcodes over the past three years, and one of the most comprehensive studies to date, including 643 North American bird and 87 Guyanese bat species into the "barcode of life" collection, was published in the two papers.

Climate change, deforestation and hunting have brought many species to the brink of extinction, and the study brings some welcome news.

Scientists identified 15 new birds and six new bats from virtually identical-looking and -sounding species through variances in the DNA sequence, an amazing feat

given the centuries-long history of bird studies in North America.

"There are as many bird watchers out there as there are species," co-author Paul Hebert of the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario at Guelph University in Canada, said in a telephone interview. "Sequencing technology is very young indeed."

The findings raise the question of what exactly is a species, and could bring an older, somewhat foundering theory back into play: breeding. Species very rarely interbreed, but that theory has been notoriously difficult to prove in some animal types — especially those of similar shapes and sizes.

"The difficulty has been the lack of ability to apply this (theory) in nature. We are not in a position to watch bats mate," said Mark Stoeckle, at Rockefeller University, New York, who co-authored the bird study. "DNA data is becoming a standard part of species description."

The difficulties are no more true than with birds, of which there are about 10,000 different species around the world today. Stoeckle predicts that at least 1,000 new species could still be discovered through DNA barcoding.

But bird watchers won't be entirely left out of the fun. DNA can only identify the species — it will now be up

to the "community of interested biologists" to identify behavioural patterns and other practices that could further distinguish the birds, according to Stoeckle.

Once the barcode library is complete, that community could be armed with handheld identification devices to take with them into the wild.

DNA can be taken from samples of any part of an animal, at any age and, scientists say, could provide a definitive distinction between animal species within minutes. That technology is about 10 years away.

Other benefits: conservation efforts will be improved by allowing environmentalists to better track species, helping tropical countries with dense, unexplored forests decide which areas to protect.

"We have some ideas of what species we may be finding but not where these species might be found," Hebert said.

Barcoding could also stop the illegal trade in foodstuffs and endangered animals like shark fins, as the handheld devices would allow port officers to quickly inspect cargo.

"Once you cut up a fin and dry it you can't tell what it is," but barcoding can, Stoeckle said.

Scientists expect to have completed their bird DNA-inventory by 2011.

— *dpa*



INFORMATION

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**AL SHATTI PLAZA**  
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**The Pursuit Of Happyness** (Drama/Biopic)  
1:00pm  
Cast: Will Smith and Thandie Newton  
Censor Permit No: 29

**Rocky Balboa** (Action/Adventure/Drama)  
3:15, 5:15 & 11:45pm  
Cast: Sylvester Stallone and Bert Young  
Censor Permit No: 62

**Eklavya** (Hindi-Drama)  
7:15 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Amitabh Bachchan and Sanjay Dutt  
Censor Permit No: 66

**Fearless** (Action/Drama), 1:30 & 7:30pm  
Cast: Jet Li, Shido Nakamura and Betty Sun  
Censor Permit No: 56

**Smokin' Aces** (Action/Adventure/Comedy)  
For 15+, 3:30 & 11:45pm  
Cast: Ben Affleck and Jeremy Piven  
Censor Permit No: 61

**Ghost Rider** (Action/Adventure/Suspense)  
5:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Nicolas Cage and Wes Bentley  
Censor Permit No: 57

**AL NASR CINEMA**  
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**Eklavya** (Hindi)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Amitabh Bachchan, Sanjay Dutt and Vidya Balan  
Censor Permit No: 65

**Guru** (Hindi)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai  
Censor Permit No: 27

**Risk** (Hindi)  
3:30pm (One Show)  
Cast: Vinod Khanna and Randeep Hooda  
Censor Permit No: 37

**Salaam-e-Ishq** (Hindi)  
6:00 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Salman Khan, Priyanka Chopra and Vidya Balan  
Censor Permit No: 46

**AL WAFI PLAZA - SUR**  
Telephone: 25545544 (after 2pm)

**Blood Diamond**  
(Drama/Romance/Thriller)  
3:30, 7:30 & 10:30pm  
Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly  
Censor Permit No: 30

**Traffic Signal** (Drama)  
10:00pm  
Cast: Kunal Khemu, Neetu Chandra and Ranvir Shourey  
Censor Permit No: 58

**Karutha Pakshikal** (Mal. Drama)  
3:30, 7:30pm  
Cast: Mammooty, Shradha and Padmapriya  
Censor Permit No: 31

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**(Hindi) DVD/VCD**  
Bhagam Bhag — DVD/VCD  
Risk — DVD  
I See You — DVD  
Anwar — DVD

**RUWI CINEMA**

**Smokin' Aces** (Eng.)  
2:00, 4:15, 6:15, 8:30 & 10:30pm  
Cast: Ben Affleck, Andy Garcia and Alicia Keys  
Censor Permit No: 61

**The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning** (Eng.)  
2:00, 6:30, 8:00 & 10:30pm  
Cast: Jordana Brewster, Taylor Handley and Dora Baird  
Censor Permit No: 54

**Catch A Fire** (Eng.)  
6:00pm  
Cast: Tim Robins, Derek Luke and Bonnie Henna  
Censor Permit No: 52

**Blood Diamond** (Eng.)  
2:00pm  
Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly  
Censor Permit No: 32

**Apocalypto** (Eng.)  
2:00, 4:30 & 8:15pm  
Cast: Dalia Hernandez, Mayra Surbulo and Rudy Young Blood  
Censor Permit No: 35

**Eklavya** (Hindi)  
3:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, 9:30 & 10:30pm  
Cast: Amitabh Bachchan, Sanjay Dutt and Saif Ali Khan  
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Cast: Ben Affleck, Andy Garcia and Alicia Keys  
Censor Permit No: 61

**The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning** (Eng.)  
2:00, 4:00, 8:30, 10:15 & 11:55pm  
Cast: Jordana Brewster, Taylor Handley and Heather Kafka  
Censor Permit No: 54

**Blood Diamond** (Drama/Romance/Thriller)  
6:00pm  
Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly  
Censor Permit No: 33

**Apocalypto** (Action/Adventure)  
5:45pm  
Cast: Dalia Hernandez, Mayra Surbulo and Rudy Young Blood  
Censor Permit No: 34

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**Mayavi** (Mal.)  
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Cast: Mammooty and Gopika  
Censor Permit No: 68

**Babakalyani** (Mal.)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Mohanlal, Manthra and Jagathi  
Censor Permit No: 49

**Pothan Vava** (Mal.)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Mammooty and Gopika  
Censor Permit No: 358

**Aalvar** (Tamil)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Jr NTR, Ellaina and Kalyani  
Censor Permit No: 57

**Rakhi** (Telugu)  
3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm  
Cast: Jr NTR, Ellaina and Kalyani  
Censor Permit No: 38

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Tel. No. 24700192

BORN today, you have great personal style and dramatic flair, and you pursue every goal and engage in every endeavour with a unique brand of enthusiasm that others envy. You enjoy exploring all kinds of outlets for your creative energy, but you will always come home to that one thing which allows you to use your talents to their fullest. You have grace and strength and a great deal of stamina that will serve you well at all times. You have a knack for overcoming the odds and turning in a winning performance even under the most adverse of circumstances.

Of course, there is a downside to your brave, even adventurous nature, and should you ever have a yearning for a more stable, settled kind of life you must be willing to sacrifice much that you had, in the past, held dear.

Also born on this date are: Peter Fonda, actor; Naruhito, Crown Prince of Japan; George Frideric Handel, composer.

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.

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2007**

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20) — What is not readily apparent as the day opens may well become clear to you only after a good deal of close investigation on your part.

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19) — You must balance excitement with practicality. The need for both can be satisfied, but it is likely to take a little planning and preparation.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20) — You must be clear and precise at all times, as you are asking much of those who may not be as well-equipped or efficient as you are.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 20) — You're in no mood to do things according to plan. Rather, you are eager to see where your legs take you, for better or worse.

**CANCER** (June 21-July 22) — You're in the mood to experiment with your own emotions, but you must do so only when surrounded by caring, protective people.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22) — Concentrate on fitness and style; how you orchestrate that first move will make all the difference. Romantic success can be yours!

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — It's time to get to the bottom of a particularly stubborn mystery — once and for all. You mustn't stop until your curiosity is satisfied.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — You may want to send a special SOS to a friend or loved one who knows exactly how to get you out of an unfortunate predicament.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — You're likely to be invigorated and rejuvenated as a result of a chance encounter you could not in any way avoid.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Your insistence to get started a bit prematurely may expose you and your colleagues to unnecessary dangers before the day is out.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Take care you do not stray too quickly from your chosen path, no matter how routine it may seem to be at first. Stay the course!

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Communication may be breaking down slightly at home or at the workplace. See to it that you don't contribute to conflicts among coworkers.

**THE BORN LOSER**  
By Art and Chip Sansom

IT NEVER ENDS! I CUT THE GRASS, THEN I RAKE THE LEAVES...

NOW I HAVE TO SHOVEL ALL THIS SNOW! IT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING!

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE—AT LEAST YOU DON'T HAVE TO BAG IT AND HAUL IT TO THE CURB!

**DILBERT**  
By Scott Adams

THANKS TO MY P.R. CAMPAIGN, YOUR STOCK PRICE IS GROSSLY OVER-INFLATED.

NOW YOU CAN USE YOUR STOCK TO BUY COMPANIES THAT ACTUALLY MAKE MONEY.

AFTER YOU MANAGE THOSE COMPANIES INTO THE TOILET, GIVE ME A JINGLE.

**BIG NATE**

I'M SCULPTING A GRIFFIN! A GRIFFIN?

YOU KNOW, FROM GREEK MYTHOLOGY! HALF LION, HALF EAGLE!

THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A GRIFFIN? IT LOOKS MORE LIKE A MUFFIN!

IT'S A GRIFFIN! HALF ANIMAL, HALF BREAD PRODUCT!

I CAN'T CREATE UNDER THESE CONDITIONS.

**TARZAN**

SURPRISED WHEN TARZAN DISCOVERED HIS TREASURE CACHE, JUAN TOKRES PERSEPERATELY LEAPED TOWARD HIS RIFLE.

HE GRASPED THE WEAPON WITH EAGER, TREMBLING FINGERS--

BUT BEFORE HE COULD SHOOT, A PEAPY ARROW GRAZED HIS HAND!

**MARMADUKE**  
by Brad Anderson

Thanks for sharing. You can stop now.

**KidSpot**  
by Dick Rogers

DOUBLE GROSS

Read the clues and write the answers in the boxes. The same words appear across and down.

CLUES:

- Graceful water bird.
- Drink made from grapes.
- Picnic pests.
- Bird's home.

ANSWERS: 1. SWAN, 2. WINE, 3. ANTS, 4. NEST.

FRIDAY			SATURDAY		
FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA	FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA
GF466	DOHA	0005	GF466	DOHA	0005
GF428	DUBAI	0005	GF428	DUBAI	0005
GF068	BAHRAIN	0020	GF556	ABU DHABI	0015
GF270	BAHRAIN	0030	PK225	KARACHI	0040
PK225	KARACHI	0040	KU675	KUWAIT-DUBAI	0210
GF272	BAHRAIN	0045	A1845	BOMBAY-ABU DHABI	0250
IX831	MANGALORE-ABU DHABI	0145	R6000	AMMAN-DAMMAM	0530
TK1160	ISTANBUL	0245	GF059	BOMBAY	0710
RJ600	AMMAN-DAMMAM	0530	GF028	PARIS	0755
GF059	BOMBAY	0710	WY806	BOMBAY	0800
TV5510	PRAGUE	0715	GF006	LONDON HEATHROW	0800
GF006	LONDON HEATHROW	0800	WY806	BOMBAY	0800
WY836	HYDERABAD	0835	GF469	MADRAS	0850
GF273	BANGALORE	0905	WY828	COCHIN	0920
WY856	MADRAS	0920	WY856	MADRAS	0920
WY828	COCHIN	0920	EK862	DUBAI	0925
EK862	DUBAI	0925	WY816	TRIVANDRUM	0925
GF271	COCHIN	0925	GF271	COCHIN	0925
WY816	TRIVANDRUM	0925	QR166	DOHA	1015
GF609	MADRAS	0950	GF131	DELHI	1025
GF461	TRIVANDRUM	0955	GF461	TRIVANDRUM	1040
QR166	DOHA	1015	WY608	DUBAI	1140
EP6555	SHIRAZ	1040	GF134	BAHRAIN	1145
WY846	DELHI	1100	IX349	CALCUT-TRIVANDRUM	1205
GF457	DHAKA	1145	GF274	BAHRAIN	1210
WY608	DUBAI	1210	GF540	BAHRAIN-ABU DHABI	1222
GF540	BAHRAIN-ABU DHABI	1220	IX425	COCHIN	1230
GF064	BAHRAIN	1245	IX615	COCHIN	1230
GF153	BANGKOK	1255	GF457	DHAKA	1245
GF1029	BAHRAIN	1325	GF279	CALCUTTA	1350
GF1005	KARACHI	1355	GF1005	KARACHI	1355
GF550	BAHRAIN	1400	GF554	BAHRAIN	1400
GF532	BAHRAIN-DUBAI	1430	GF532	BAHRAIN-DUBAI	1410
EP6557	CHAH BAHA	1500	WY306	SALALAH	1440
MS930	CAIRO	1515	QR164	DOHA	1520
WY530	KHASAB	1710	A1841	DELHI-ABU DHABI	1655
WY808	BOMBAY	1730	MP93	AMSTERDAM	1655
WY612	DUBAI	1815	WY612	DUBAI	1815
WY676	CAIRO	1925	WY516	SALALAH	1850
GF487	JAKARTA	1940	WY678	AMMAN	1915
GF409	KATHMANDU	2020	GF487	JAKARTA	1940
IC977	HYDERABAD-BANGALORE	2025	GF281	KUALA LUMPUR	1955
GF065	BOMBAY	2035	GF403	KATHMANDU	2010
GF9115	SHARJAH	2045	GF065	BOMBAY	2015
GF902	BAHRAIN	2045	GF275	BANGALORE	2030
WY644	KUWAIT-DUBAI	2100	GF915	SHARJAH	2045
SV532	JEDDAH	2105	GF232	KUWAIT	2120
TV5511	BANGKOK	2110	IC885	DELHI-AHMEDABAD	2100
LH632	FRANKFURT-RIYADH	2130	GF437	PESHAWAR	2120
GF439	LAHORE	2130	BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2215
BE023	DHAKA	2155	IC973	MADRAS-COCHIN	2220
GF168	RIYADH	2200	GF152	BAHRAIN	2220
BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2215	EY707	ABU DHABI	2230
IC925	MADRAS-CALCUT	2220	WY806	BEIRUT	2240
EY707	ABU DHABI	2230	GF004	LONDON HEATHROW	2240
WY508	SALALAH	2230	GF178	JEDDAH	2250
QR168	DOHA	2230	GF016	FRANKFURT-BAHRAIN	2250
GF009	LONDON HEATHROW	2240	WY656	BAHRAIN	2300
GF016	FRANKFURT-BAHRAIN	2250	GF546	BAHRAIN-ABU DHABI	2305
GF974	AMMAN	2300	WY658	DOHA	2320
GF546	BAHRAIN-ABU DHABI	2320	LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2325
LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2325	LH634	FRANKFURT-DUBAI	2330
WY626	DUBAI	2330	WY626	DUBAI	2330
WY518	SALALAH	2335	EK864	DUBAI	2345
WY658	BAHRAIN-DOHA	2340			
EK864	DUBAI	2345			
FRIDAY			SATURDAY		
FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA	FLT NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA
DEPARTURES TO			DEPARTURES TO		
IC974	COCHIN-MADRAS	0005	BA072	ABU DHABI-LONDON HEATHROW	0015
BA072	ABU DHABI-LONDON HEATHROW	0015	GF017	BAHRAIN-FRANKFURT	0020
GF559	ABU DHABI-BAHRAIN	0015	LX243	DUBAI-ZURICH	0040
GF017	BAHRAIN-FRANKFURT	0020	EK865	DUBAI	0045
LX243	DUBAI-ZURICH	0040	WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0045
EK865	DUBAI	0045	WY855	MADRAS	0050
WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0045	GF280	KUALA LUMPUR	0055
WY835	HYDERABAD	0055	WY827	COCHIN	0110
WY835	HYDERABAD	0055	GF058	BOMBAY	0110
WY827	COCHIN	0110	GF270	COCHIN	0115
GF058	BOMBAY	0110	GF456	DHAKA	0115
GF270	COCHIN	0115	WY805	BOMBAY	0130
GF456	DHAKA	0115	GF488	JAKARTA	0135
GF068	MADRAS	0120	PK226	KARACHI-ISLAMABAD	0140
GF009	LONDON HEATHROW	0120	GF460	TRIVANDRUM	0210
GF460	TRIVANDRUM	0125	IC926	CALCUTTA-MADRAS	0235
GF070	BANGALORE	0130	GF278	CALCUTTA	0245
GF468	JAKARTA	0135	GF009	LONDON HEATHROW	0255
PK226	KARACHI	0140	A1840	DELHI	0350
IX424	COCHIN	0245	R1601	DAMMAM-AMMAN	0615
WY845	DELHI	0300	KU676	DUBAI-KUWAIT	0700
TK1160	ISTANBUL	0330	GF541	ABU DHABI-BAHRAIN	0800
GF541	ABU DHABI-BAHRAIN	0800	WY607	DUBAI	0900
TV5510	BANGKOK	0815	GF106	KARACHI	0900
GF106	KARACHI	0920	GF003	BAHRAIN	0920
WY607	DUBAI	0930	GF404	KATHMANDU	1005
GF273	BAHRAIN	0950	WY505	SALALAH	1040
GF271	BAHRAIN	1005	EK863	DUBAI	1045
WY675	CAIRO	1030	WY685	BEIRUT	1045
EK863	DUBAI	1045	QR167	DOHA	1100
QR167	DOHA	1100	WY677	AMMAN	1100
GF531	DUBAI-BAHRAIN	1125	GF531	DUBAI-BAHRAIN	1125
WY807	BOMBAY	1130	GF134	DELHI	1230
EP6556	CHAH BAHA	1140	GF274	BANGALORE	1255
WY643	DUBAI-KUWAIT	1230	IX350	CALCUTTA	1305
WY307	SALALAH	1300	GF543	ABU DHABI-BAHRAIN	1310
GF543	ABU DHABI-BAHRAIN	1310	IX833	ABU DHABI-MANGALORE	1330
GF064	BOMBAY	1330	IX615	ABU DHABI-MANGALORE	1330
GF153	BAHRAIN	1355	GF004	BOMBAY	1330
GF465	DOHA	1400	GF456	PESHAWAR	1400
GF438	LAHORE	1400	GF465	DOHA	1400
WY529	KHASAB	1430	GF279	BAHRAIN	1430
GF029	PARIS	1440	WY515	SALALAH	1500
GF973	AMMAN	1500	GF231	KUWAIT	1500
WY611	DUBAI	1545	GF177	JEDDAH	1515
EP6558	SHIRAZ	1600	WY611	DUBAI	1545
MS931	CAIRO	1615	GF005	LONDON HEATHROW	1625
GF167	RIYADH	1615	A1844	BOMBAY	1755
GF005	LONDON HEATHROW	1625	MP94	SHARJAH-HONG KONG	1825
WY657	BAHRAIN-DOHA	1830	QR165	DOHA	1900
WY517	SALALAH	1945	WY655	BAHRAIN	1900
WY625	DUBAI	2000	WY657	DOHA	2015
GF065	BAHRAIN	2040	WY625	DUBAI	2040
GF427	DUBAI	2105	GF281	BAHRAIN	2050
GF116	SHARJAH	2125	GF403	DAMMAM	2100
EP6559	ABU DHABI	2135	GF427	DUBAI	2105
IC978	BANGALORE-HYDERABAD	2200	GF065	BAHRAIN	2110
SV533	RIYADH-JEDDAH	2205	GF275	BAHRAIN	2155
TV5511	PRAGUE	2210	GF116	SHARJAH	2125
BE024	KARACHI-DHAKA	2255	IC886	AHMEDABAD-DELHI	2200
LH633	RIYADH-FRANKFURT	2255	GF152	BANGKOK	2320
QR169	DOHA	2315	EY708	ABU DHABI	2330
EY708	ABU DHABI	2330			



# Where chips are part of the culture

Tourists passing through Belgium cannot fail to notice the "Frietkots" and "Frituuren", the stands where French fries, or chips, are sold.

These golden-brown delicacies made from the humble potato are on sale at more than 4,000 stands across this relatively small country.

And they are offered these days with more than 30 different sauces, from sweetish mayonnaise to piquant chili.

Belgians see their Frietkots as a kind of bulwark against the invasion of American fast-food chains, regarding their own home-grown fast food as intrinsic to their culture. In the city of Antwerp there is even a museum to the Frietkots.

In Brussels, the numberless bureaucrats of the European Union stream out of their glass palaces at lunchtime every day with one thought in mind: the nearest chippy.

"Maison Antoine", run by Pascal and Thierry Willaert at the Place Jourdan, is an institution these "Eurocrats" know well.

Here members of the European Parliament and prominent public figures wait their turn in the queue with humble secretaries and lobbyists for their portion of chips. This fast-food outlet has been there for more than 50 years.

Frietkots are something of a cult in Belgium. They are everywhere: at street markets, on church squares, along the promenades of the North Sea beaches and at the highest point in the country, the "Baraque Michel" between Eupen and Malmédy, 673 metres above sea-level.

"Chips and pralines make up Belgium's Supertrio," says Bernard Lefevre of the National Association of Chipmakers, the 1,500-member professional chip friers



body. Friday evening is traditionally chip time, when Belgian fathers go out to the outlets and take chips home for the family. High season is in July and August.

Some people like their chips — "Frieten Special" — with mayo, ketchup and onions. The first Frietkots in Belgium were set up in the second half of the 19th century.

"Hawkers offered fried potato chips to their customers during the annual markets in Antwerp and other towns," according to the art historian Paul Ilegems, who himself hails from Antwerp.

"A couple of decades later, more permanent chip establishments were set up. And with the passage of time, this spread right across Belgium," Ilegems says. Some of them have been turned into works of art by Gilles Houben, who works in oils and acrylic.

He has immortalised more

than 100 chippies in Antwerp and Brussels, exhibiting them in his studio high up under the roof in a Brussels house.

Houben notes with regret that many of the subjects of his paintings have given way to the march of time, as buildings have been torn down to make way for new projects.

"With them, part of Belgian life has passed away," he says.

Unlike the mass-produced architecture of US fast food joints, no two Belgian chippies are alike. Some are converted caravans, some former shipping containers and others simple wooden huts.

"Drive through our country with open eyes and watch out for Frietkots and Frituuren," says Ilegems, the author of a book on the topic.

"The chippies reflect the character of my countrymen, which is characterised by individualism, improvisation and surrealism."

Ilegems, who takes his chip research seriously, sees many positive aspects to Belgian fastfood culture.

The Frietkots appear to unite the three main ethnic groups in Belgium, the Flemish, the Walloons and the Germans, in a way that nothing else does. Right across the country, the potato sticks have been prepared in much the same way for generations.

Whether in Bruges, Charleroi, Hasselt or Eupen, they are eaten in much the same way. Moreover, there is no class prejudice when it comes to the humble potato chip.

"Top managers and working people alike are regular customers at their local chippy," Ilegems says.

Since the 1980s he has been collecting anything and everything connected with Belgian chippies. Some of his large collection is to be seen on the upper floor of "Frietkot

Max" at 12 Groenplaats in Antwerp.

Among the most recent additions to his collection are old vinyl records on which bands with bizarre names like *De zingende Frietboeren* — The Singing Chip Friers — sing the praises of the chip in a *Frituurballade*.

Belgian chippies have developed their own way of preparing the potato chip. The 10-centimetre long sticks are pre-fried at a temperature of 160 degrees Celsius. Then they are cooled and kept ready for an order.

Once the order comes in they are fried once again, this time at 180 degrees in vegetable oil or in beef fat.

"This double frying ensures that the chip is really beautifully crispy and crunchy," Ilegems says.

There are minor regional differences, discernible only to the most demanding customer. In Limburg and Wallonia the chips are on average 11 millimetres thick, whereas Antwerp's citizens prefer them a millimetre thinner.

In Ghent in the heart of Flanders they are slimmest at nine millimetres, and in Eupen they reach their maximum girth of up to 14 millimetres, according to Jozef van Remoortel, who runs Remo Frit in Verrebroek near Antwerp, one of around 100 chip-making firms in Belgium.

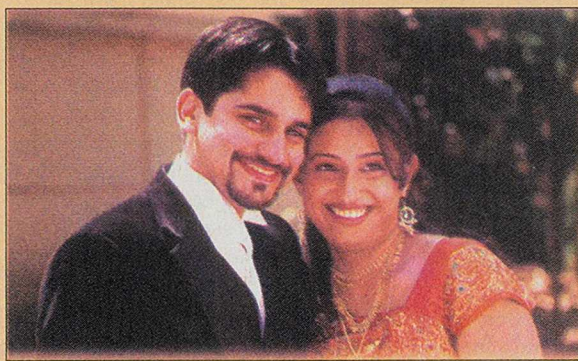
Remoortel's firm delivers ready-cut potatoes to chippies within 24 hours of the raw product arriving at his factory. The preferred potato varieties are *Bintje* and *Hansa*.

"We deliver the fresh potatoes vacuum-packed, and not frozen, to the chippies. That's what gives them their characteristic flavour and texture," Remoortel says.

Truck drivers — true connoisseurs of the chip — vote as best chippy the one to be found on the A1 motorway linking Brussels and Antwerp, where an old bus has reached its last parking place between Machelen and Weerde.

Now brightly painted, the bus dispenses huge quantities of chips under the banner "Hunger Killer". — *dpa*

## Best wishes to the newly married couple



Kamal Diab and family wish the newly-weds, Miliche and Robin, a very happy and contented married life, full of peace, prosperity and happiness. Best wishes for their families too.

Be the lucky  
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GSM: 99228904 Salalah Tel: 23296655  
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**GIFTS FOR LUCKY KIDS:** Get your kids featured in this column. Three lucky kids featured in this column will receive gifts worth R015 each from A' Safwah every month. Besides, all the other kids will receive attractive gift items like dinner set, tea set, trolley bags, wall clock, etc., on purchase of pre-paid home delivery coupon book worth R0 24.

## With Love

Best Wishes from Parents & Relatives



**Sneha Dinesh Bhandari**  
February 23, 2005

**Navya Padmakumar Nair**  
February 23, 2004



**Siddhant Janakiraman**  
February 23, 1995

**Atul Shivkumar**  
February 21, 2001

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 [leisure@timesofoman.com](mailto:leisure@timesofoman.com) 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.



PLAY SUDOKU TO STIMULATE  
YOUR MIND AND IMPROVE  
YOUR MEMORY

## How to play?

Fill the empty cells with the numbers 1 to 9, so that each number appears once in each row, column and area.

## Today's Puzzle

	5	9			8			
				9	4			
	4						1	5
		6	8	5	2	7		
3			4		7		6	
	7	5		3				
	9		3	2		8		
		3			1		7	6
		4						1

## Solution for previous puzzle

3	4	5	9	1	2	8	7	6
7	8	2	6	4	3	5	9	1
9	1	6	7	5	8	3	4	2
2	7	8	1	3	6	4	5	9
6	3	9	4	2	5	7	1	8
4	5	1	8	9	7	2	6	3
1	9	3	2	7	4	6	8	5
5	6	4	3	8	9	1	2	7
8	2	7	5	6	1	9	3	4

## TV Schedule



### Star World - Star Select

0600	Fashion House
0700	The King Of Queens
0730	The Simpsons
0800	Seinfeld
0830	Hollywood Squares
0900	Friends
0930	Cheers
1000	Oprah Winfrey Show
1100	Miami Vice
1200	Boston Legal
1300	8 Simple Rules
1330	Scrubs
1400	Oprah Winfrey Show
1500	Fashion House
1600	General Hospital
1700	Desperate Housewives
1900	The Simpsons
1930	Cheers
2000	Friends
2030	Seinfeld
2100	Ncis
2200	Fashion House
2300	Ghost Hunters
0000	Seinfeld
0030	Friends
0100	The Apprentice
0200	Fashion House
0300	Still Standing
0330	Frasier
0300	Dangerous Encounters
0430	Ncis
0530	Hollywood Shootout

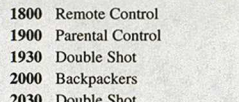


### Channel V - Star Select

0600	Double Shot R&B/Hip-Hop
0700	Poparazzi (Thur)
0730	The Record Shop
0800	Parental Control
0830	Double Shot
1000	Arcade
1030	Cactus Garden
1100	The Ticket
1130	Soundtracks
1200	Breaking Up With Shannen
	Doherty
1300	CD USA
1400	America's Next Top Model S7
1500	[V] Special: Evanesence
	Anywhere But Home
1530	Double Shot
1600	For The Record: Hady Mirza
1615	Double Shot
1700	Breaking Up With Shannen
	Doherty

## Oprah Winfrey Show

1400hrs on  
Star World



### Star Gold - Pehla

0705	V Trailers — Star Gold
0710	TVM Saunafit
0725	V Trailers — Star Gold
0730	Bewafa Sanam
0735	V Trailers — Star Gold
0740	Major Saab
0745	V Trailers — Star Gold
0750	Jhankar Beats
0805	Ladai
0810	Rehna Hai Tere Dil Mein



### ESPN Sports - Orbit

0600	College Basketball Atlantic Coast Conf. Duke Vs Clemson Live
0800	PGA Tour Accenture Match Play Championship 1st Round
1000	PRCA Bull Riding
1100	SportsCenter Live
1200	High School Basketball St Patrick/Huntington
1330	Cycling BMX
1400	Beach Soccer Brazil V England Brazil V Japan Short
1600	Racing World
1630	College Basketball Conference USA Rice Vs Memphis Repeat
1830	ATP Tennis
1900	Offshore Adventures
1930	XBS
2000	SportsCenter Repeat
2100	Beach Soccer Brazil V England Brazil V Japan Repeat
2300	Friday Night Fights
0100	NBA Action
0110	Planet Speed
0200	Motorworld
0230	American Dragster
0300	Sportscenter
0400	Live
0430	Planet Speed
0500	Friday Night Fights Repeat



### Fox Sports - Star Select

0700	FOX Soccer Report
0800	Pac-10 Conference Men's College Basketball Wildcard: Teams TBA
1000	Dream Team Season 5
1100	Golf Central International
1200	NHL: Ottawa Senators At Buffalo Sabres
1500	FOX Soccer Report
1600	TBA
1700	Sports Unlimited
1800	Pac-10 Conference Men's College Basketball Wildcard: Teams TBA
2000	FOX Soccer Report
2100	IMPACT!
2200	NHL: Ottawa Senators At Buffalo Sabres
0100	2007 PGA TOUR: Mayakoba Classic At Riviera Maya - Cancun Rd. 1 Riviera Maya, Mexico
0300	Inside The PGA TOUR
0330	World Of Athletics
0400	PortoGol
0430	TBA



### Star Gold - Pehla

0705	V Trailers — Star Gold
0710	TVM Saunafit
0725	V Trailers — Star Gold
0730	Bewafa Sanam
0735	V Trailers — Star Gold
0740	Major Saab
0745	V Trailers — Star Gold
0750	Jhankar Beats
0805	Ladai
0810	Rehna Hai Tere Dil Mein



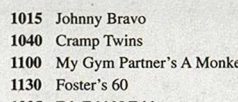
### Animal Planet - Showtime

0640	Animals AÀz
0705	Animal Park — Wild In Africa
0730	Vets In The Sun
0800	Vets In The Sun
0825	Vets On The Wildside
0850	Aussie Animal Rescue
0915	Wild Rescues
0940	Crocodile Hunter
1030	Animal Planet At The Movies
1055	Pet Rescue
1120	Animals AÀz
1145	Animal Park — Wild In Africa
1210	Animal Cops Phoenix
1300	Crocodile Hunter
1350	The Planet's Funniest Animals
1400	Aussie Animal Rescue
1440	Aussie Animal Rescue
1505	Wild Rescues
1530	Animal Planet At The Movies
1555	Pet Rescue
1620	Animals AÀz
1645	Animal Park — Wild In Africa
1710	Crocodile Hunter
1800	The Planet's Funniest Animals
1850	Crocodile Hunter
1940	Animal Cops Phoenix
2030	Animal Planet At The Movies
2055	Pet Rescue
2120	Animals AÀz
2145	Animal Park — Wild In Africa
2210	Crocodile Hunter
2300	The Planet's Funniest Animals
2350	Animal Cops Phoenix
0400	Vets In The Sun
0105	Vets On The Wildside
0135	Aussie Animal Rescue
0200	Wild Rescues
0225	Crocodile Hunter
0315	Animal Planet At The Movies
0340	Pet Rescue
0405	Crocodile Hunter
0500	The Planet's Funniest Animals
0525	The Planet's Funniest Animals
0550	Animal Cops Phoenix



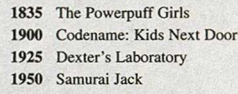
### Cartoon Network - ST

0605	The Powerpuff Girls
0630	Dexter's Laboratory
0655	Gadget Boy
0720	Mike, Lu And Og
0755	Dexter's Laboratory
0820	I Am Weasel
0845	Cow And Chicken
0900	Ed, Edd N Eddy
0925	Codename: Kids Next Door
0950	The Powerpuff Girls



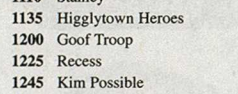
### Star Gold - Pehla

0705	V Trailers — Star Gold
0710	TVM Saunafit
0725	V Trailers — Star Gold
0730	Bewafa Sanam
0735	V Trailers — Star Gold
0740	Major Saab
0745	V Trailers — Star Gold
0750	Jhankar Beats
0805	Ladai
0810	Rehna Hai Tere Dil Mein



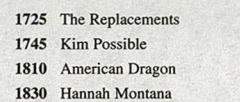
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# The bling fling of Oscars

By Cory Ohlendorf

WITH the taxman cracking down on those five-digit goody bags and questioning the legality of "gifting" designer dresses tax-free, one Oscar night tradition remains alive and, more important: The lending of

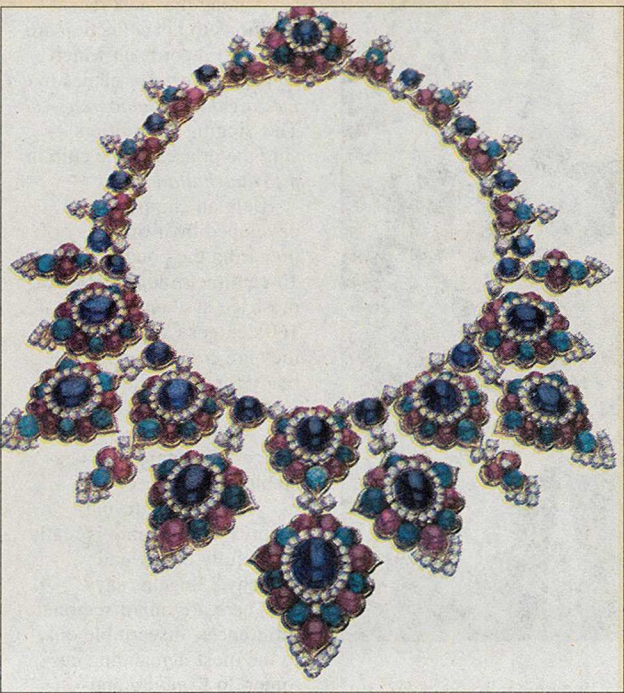
the jewels. Jewellers can load a starlet up with as much loot as her lithe frame can carry, as long as they get the bling back. So it's open-sesame time at the vaults of the world's finest jewellers. Tim Gunn, of TV's *Project Runway* and now chief creative officer for Liz Claiborne, likens

Oscar night to a coronation: "It's where you see the most over-the-top pieces in fashion and jewellery, and actually I'm disappointed if I don't." Disappointment seems unlikely. The ubiquitous "who are you wearing" no longer refers to just the clothes being donned. Necklaces, earrings, even cuff links and watches now get a shout-out. The larger jewellery houses have staffers whose sole job is to jet around the world, matching sparkling charms to the rich and famous.

The shiny accessories are the last thing chosen for a celebrity's red-carpet ensemble (which itself often isn't decided until days before the big night), so the lending and swapping sometimes continues until the final bobby pin is placed and the limo door opened.

"You never really know how it's going to turn out. We've had situations where an actress had a change of mind and it simply wasn't our day and that's just the unfortunate part of the business," says Rebecca Selva, director of publicity and celebrity liaison for New York-based Fred Leighton, which has lent pieces to Nicole Kidman and Kirsten Dunst.

"And other times we're surprised to find out that they ended up wearing us." Such was the case in 2001 when Jennifer Lopez wore a grey Chanel gown



**PRICELESS:** The 1960s Bulgari necklace in gold set with emeralds, rubies, sapphires and diamonds, plus 10 large floral clusters set with cabochon sapphires framed by diamonds, cabochon emeralds and rubies was worn by Keira Knightley

with an eye-popping sheer top. Selva and her team were told at the last minute that Lopez decided to go with yellow diamonds from another jeweller. Yet as they watched the televised broadcast, they screamed with excitement: J-Lo stepped onto the carpet in their white diamond earrings. Van Cleef & Arpels, in addition to the contemporary jewellery in its showrooms, flies in special, rarely seen heirloom pieces from its museum collection,

housed at the company's Paris headquarters, to outfit famous Oscar attendees, explains Emmanuel Perrin, CEO and president of the firm's American division. In past years, Julia Roberts and Reese Witherspoon have worn the jeweller's creations. Bulgari has a history of decorating the necks and earlobes of Hollywood's elite. Nicola Bulgari, vice-chairman of the venerable house, traces it back to Richard Burton's quip about Elizabeth Taylor: "The only

word Liz knows in Italian is Bulgari." Getting the jewels to celebs is also more of a production than ever before. When Gunn provided red-carpet commentary for this year's Golden Globes he was shocked at all the options set up in stars' homes or hotel rooms. "It's like a small department store, where they have dozens of dresses and hundreds of jewellery options laid out and they start playing mix-and-match," he said. "It can be a bit of a circus and I think it's a process that can get rather seamy." But does all this exposure pay off in sales? Are those who can afford an \$800,000 necklace really impressed that it was once wrapped around the neck of Reese, Cate or Keira? In short, no. The exception is Fred Leighton — the company says it often sells the pieces not long after their red-carpet debut. Last year, the firm strung a 19th-century diamond fringe necklace across the décolletage of Best Supporting Actress nominee Michelle Williams' sunshine-yellow Vera Wang gown and sold it "soon after" the show. Then the company began fielding requests for similar pieces. For smaller jewellers, the exposure can really pay off. But that doesn't make them any less celeb-selective. "While some of the

tabloid-fodder girls may make for good press, we're not really interested in lending to them," Carlile says. Then there's the security. The jewellers dispatch guards in black tie to trail along with each bejewelled celebrity. But do the guards get to hit the after-parties? What

time do Angelina, Nicole and Meryl have to hand back the goods? While most of the houses clammed up at the mention of security, Carlile just laughed. "There's enough guys wearing those little ear-pieces to make sure everyone is safe." — *LAT/MP*



**JENNIFER ANISTON:** Sporting 1930s platinum Bulgari necklace with a double festoon of circle-cut diamonds spaced by baguettes totalling 137 carats



**JENNIFER LOPEZ:** In 1960s pendant earrings set with 15.80 carats of rose-cut diamonds; 18-karat gold and diamond necklace, the earrings costing \$75,000 and necklace \$35,000

# The real star of the Oscars? Dermatology

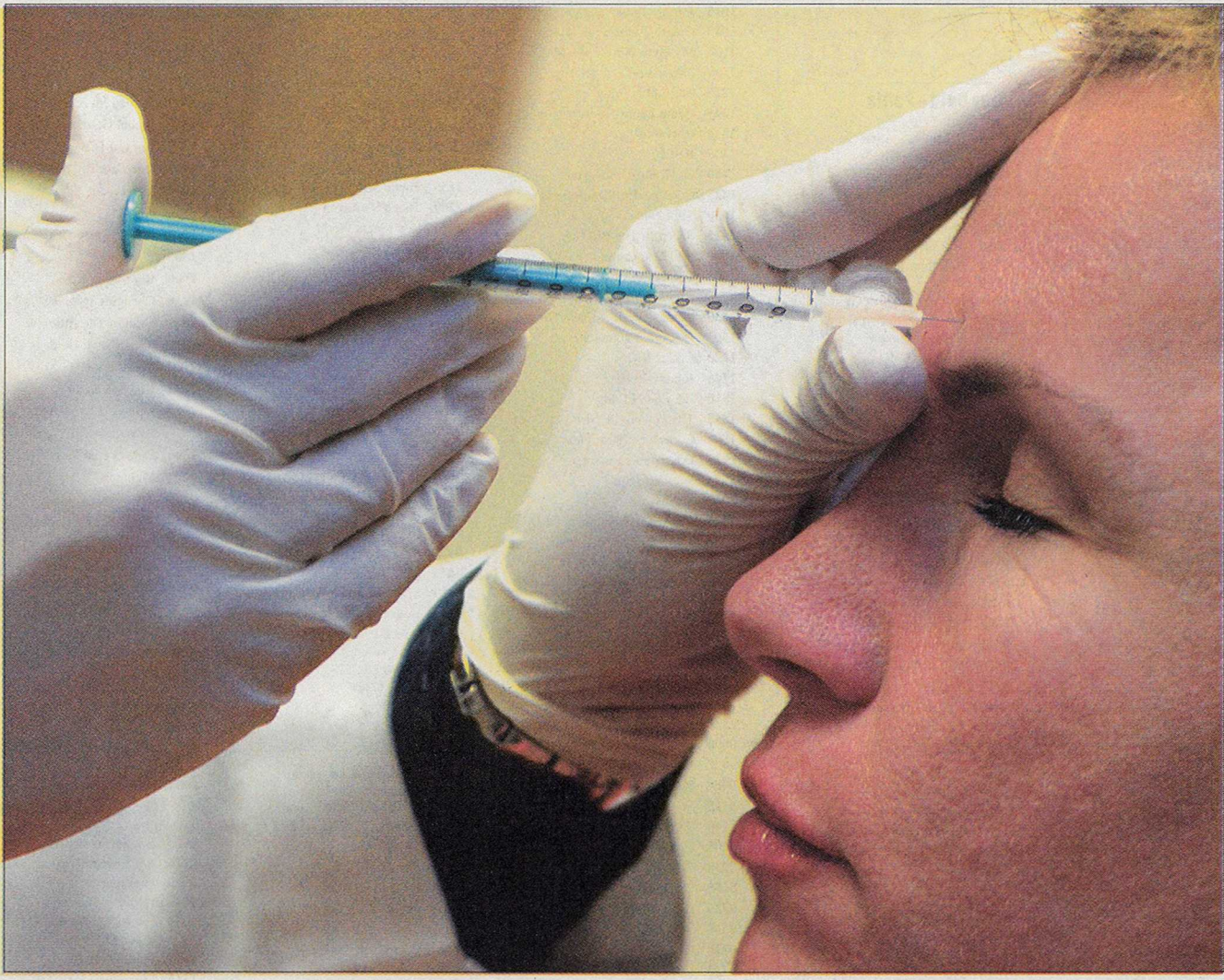
By Natasha Singer

THE countdown has begun for the big day. For Dr. Ava T. Shamban, a dermatologist in Santa Monica, California, the countdown started five weeks ago when several dozen actors and agents, along with a few spouses and siblings, began coming in for laser procedures and facial injections, she said. And, in the days remaining before the Oscars on Sunday, two nominated actresses and one presenter were due in her office for last-minute facials or lip-plumping injections, Shamban said.

"Whoever is going to walk down that red carpet, actor, spouse, mother, sister, they all want to look like the burnished statuettes on the podium," said Shamban. "They all want to look nice, smooth, glowing, untouched by woe and by time."

This increased attention to the smallest details of the skin might be called red-carpet dermatology, a speciality spawned in response to the relentless scrutiny of celebrities by paparazzi, gossip magazines, entertainment shows, high-definition television, camera phones and internet sites.

Red-carpet dermatology involves scalpel-free procedures that create more temporary and potentially less detectable changes than a facelift, including Botox injections to paralyse the muscles underlying wrinkles, filler injections to pad lips and facial creases, or lasers for brown spots and broken blood vessels. These make possible the treatment of minutiae, like tiny crevices above or in the lips, about which actresses may fret more than civilians. And red-carpet dermatol-



ogy permits entertainers with augmented faces to utter stock lines like, "I only had Botox"—a little white lie that allows them to obfuscate a veritable arsenal of beauty interventions. "Celebrities can't afford to look like they have had something drastic done," said Dr. Jessica P. Wu, a dermatologist in Los Angeles. Indeed, the increasing popularity among celebrities of less invasive procedures has

turned the idea of cosmetic treatments into a kind of guessing game played with equal gusto by red-carpet commentators and couch potatoes at home. None of the doctors would name their celebrity clients because such a disclosure could constitute a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. But they were willing to discuss in general terms the cosmetic treatments that are particularly popular in their prac-

tices during awards season. Wu said an actor's grooming process might begin a month before an awards ceremony with Botox injections to the hands and armpits, treatments designed to reduce sweating. "Botox for excess perspiration is a must-have for the red carpet, for actresses so they don't stain their dresses and for actors who don't want clammy handshakes," Wu said.

She recommends that some celebrities undergo what she calls a "Botox neck lift" about two weeks before an awards show. This involves injecting the jaw line and neck to relax muscles underneath the skin, she said. "It temporarily gives you a sharper jaw line and a longer neck, which looks good if you are wearing a strapless gown or a low-cut dress," Wu explained. Up to one week before an

event, Shamban said, she administers injections of temporary fillers like Restylane, a gel made out of hyaluronic acid, to pad lips and invert crow's-feet. This week, she said, she will also give "superamped facials" to a few awards-goers; the facials involve an acid peel or microdermabrasion to exfoliate the top layer of skin cells, followed by an application of a moisturising serum. "If skin is hydrated, it plumps up more and looks glowing," Shamban said. "It should last through a whole night of partying. But just because some Oscar attendees have opted for the syringe instead of the scalpel doesn't necessarily mean the interventions go

undetected. Telltale signs include raised Vulcan eyebrows (ladies, you know who you are), fleshy platypus snouts (ditto), paralysed expressionless gazes (gentlemen of celluloid, this means a few of you) and overstuffed moon pie faces (come one, come all). As Jay Leno put it in a recent monologue: "For the first half hour, I didn't even realise I was watching the Golden Globes. I thought it was Extreme Makeover." Dermatologists, too, are watching the red-carpet parade with a critical eye on the work of colleagues. "Too much filler can eliminate the natural contours of your face," Wu said. "You don't want to look like you just had dental work or an

allergic reaction." Shamban added that television viewers have visceral reactions when they see actors on the red carpet who look as if they belong in Madame Tussaud's. "You just watch and think: something bad happened here and the results are not good," she said. But if awards-show commentators and viewers are more attuned to and more critical of celebrity cosmetic transformations, it may also be chalked up to Schadenfreude. "Celebrities are so beautiful that people kind of enjoy it when they start to age," Lask said. "They become human. It brings them back to being like the rest of us." — *The New York Times*

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