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16 SAFAR 1429
 Vol. 34, No. 1



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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2008
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NATION

Oman Air to unveil new corporate identity today

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INDIA

Jyoti Basu wants to step down as PB member

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AMERICAS

Jennifer Lopez delivers twins

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His Majesty greets Brunei and Guyana

MUSCAT — His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkhiah of Brunei Darussalam on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished him good health and happiness and his country's people further progress and prosperity. ● His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has sent a cable of greetings to Bharat Jagdeo, president of Guyana, on his country's Independence Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to the president and his country's friendly people. — *ONA*

Fahim seen as frontrunner to be Pak PM

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's two biggest opposition parties sought to thrash out their choice for premier yesterday after agreeing to form a coalition government. Officials from the parties of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and the widowed husband of slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto said the frontrunner to be prime minister was Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the widely respected vice-president of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). — *AFP*
 ● See also Page 11

Iran cooperating but doubts remain: IAEA

VIENNA — The UN nuclear watchdog said yesterday Iran was being more transparent about its nuclear programme but doubts remained about whether it was entirely for peaceful purposes and not to make atomic bombs.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's report highlighted Iran's lack of credible answers to intelligence about explosives and missile design work relevant to making atomic bombs, calling it "a serious concern".

"In the last four months, in particular, we have made quite good progress in clarifying the outstanding issues," IAEA Director Mohammed ElBaradei said in a statement accompanying the report assembled by senior IAEA inspectors.

"On that score, Iran, in the last few months, has provided us with visits to many places that enable us to have a clearer picture of Iran's current programme," ElBaradei said. "However, that is not in my view sufficient".

Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said the IAEA report "is another document which proves the Iranian nation was right about the nature" of its nuclear programme.

"This report showed that our activities are peaceful," he told a news conference in Tehran shortly after the IAEA

- Report positive: Iran
- US 'disappointed'
- Big 6 to meet on Monday



BRIEFING: Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili addressing the press in Tehran yesterday. — *Reuters*

report was released in Vienna. "I congratulate the Iranian nation for this success and victory which was a result of their resistance on (the country's) nuclear rights," Jalili said.

A senior Iranian lawmaker, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, described the agency's report as "positive" and said it would undermine a US push

for more UN sanctions, Iran news agency reported.

"The road will not be paved for the Americans to issue a new resolution against Iran in the (UN) Security Council," Boroujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliament's national security and foreign policy commission, was quoted as saying.

● Continued on Page 4

India sets wages for housemaids working abroad

NEW DELHI — India has begun rolling out mandatory minimum wage requirements for housemaids working in the Gulf and parts of Africa and southeast Asia, a minister said yesterday.

"They are the most exploited lot," Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi said, citing frequent complaints of harassment, overwork and low wages from female domestic workers.

"They are not covered by the labour laws of those countries."

Indian embassies in 18 countries have been told to prescribe minimum monthly wages for maids in the range of \$300-350 in consultation with the local governments, the minister said.

"Otherwise we will not give them clearance to go," said Ravi, adding that he expected Indian embassies in the countries concerned to issue wage guidelines by the beginning of March. — *AFP*

Will travellers to Europe face fingerprinting?

By Palazhi Ashok Kumar
 Associate Editor

MUSCAT — Will all foreign travellers entering and leaving Europe face fingerprinting?

Times of Oman spoke to a cross-section of people in Oman and abroad and explored the European Commission's (EC) last week proposal that all foreign travellers entering and leaving Europe, including US citizens, should be fingerprinted.

Does this actually make the world a safer place? The *Times*' enquiry evoked mixed, but thought-provoking reactions.

Many of the 27 EU countries, such as Belgium, have very strong privacy laws that specifically limit access to database. Reaction to the EU announcement in the Gulf has been slow as the timing and logistics of the plan remain uncertain.

"Thousands of Arab nationals, especially businessmen and executives, including the AGCC citizens, visit Europe on a daily basis. If approved by the European parliament, this proposal, according to Arab travellers, would allow friendly governments around the world to share information on tens of millions of people," Ali Hassan Al Balushi, a regular business traveller, opined.

Will this database pose the risk of abuse? This, according to Al Balushi, has to be debated, globally. Unauthorised access to info of this nature, he said, could reveal executive travel patterns. It's another way to know what you're doing, and where you are going.



● Continued on Page 4

Turkish troops hunt down Kurdish rebels in north Iraq

ANKARA — Turkish ground troops crossed into northern Iraq in their hunt for Kurdish PKK rebels, the military said yesterday, describing the start of a campaign one report said could last 15 days.

The White House said the United States had been informed in advance of Turkey's offensive and called on Ankara to limit the operation to "precise targeting" of the PKK rebels who have been using northern Iraq as a base to stage attacks in Turkey.

Iraq's government urged Turkey to respect its sovereignty and avoid any military action which would threaten security and stability.

— *Reuters*

We are 34

ON its 33rd anniversary today, the *Times of Oman* wishes to thank its valued readers, well-wishers and supporters who have always been with it for three-and-a-half decades. May this partnership continue to grow the way it has.

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Sharqiya	Abdul Hakeem Salim Hamuda - Ibra Branch Said Ali Said Al-Salfi - Ibra Branch Saleh Salim Abdullah Al-Arimi - Sur Branch
Dhahirah & Musandam	Nasser Rashid Salim Al-Hatmi - Al-Daruss Branch Sulaiman Nasser Ali Al-Harthy - Al-Jubeil Branch Humaid Salim Badar Al-Kalbani - Al-Jubeil Branch
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OMAN

Trade expo in Salalah from Monday

SALALAH — The Afrah Al Rabea exhibition organised by Oman International Trade and Exhibition will begin on Monday at the recreational centre in Salalah. The opening ceremony of the exhibition, which will continue till March 25, will be held under the auspices of Abdullah bin Aqeel Ahmed, adviser at the office of the minister of state and governor of Dhofar. More than 120 companies from India, Pakistan, Thailand, Singapore, Egypt, UAE, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Yemen will take part in the exhibition. — *ONA*

Career Opportunity for Omani Professionals in Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

Retail Engineer

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG (SOM) is the leading marketing company of fuel and premier quality lubricants in the Sultanate of Oman. Our petroleum products and services are offered through a robust network of strategically located retail service stations all over the country and to private and government customers across Oman. Through our franchise arrangement with the Royal Dutch Shell plc, Shell Oman has access to international professional expertise and the latest technology in all relevant disciplines.

More than 85% of the workforce in SOM is Omani who are present at all levels of seniority, including top management. In our continuous endeavour to enhance performance and upgrade our products and services, the Company seeks to employ a motivated Omani as **Retail Engineer**.

The responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Review, coordinate and approve conceptual and detailed designs for projects
- Initiate, evaluate and prepare cost estimates, bidding and award for projects
- Submit budget reports to business on monthly basis and highlight progress
- Ensure compliance to statutory requirements, standard designs and drawings
- Manage the entire chain of projects execution process
- Monitor and review performance of suppliers and contractors to ensure compliance and conformance to strategies
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Qualifications & Skills required:

- University Degree, preferred with strong mechanical or civil background
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OCCI to initiate setting up of Muscat University

MUSCAT — Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that the OCCI has adopted the idea of setting-up a Muscat University, a project assigned to the private sector by the Higher Education Council.

The proposed university would work along with the other private universities in the Sultanate.

"The capital declared for the project is RO50 million and businessmen, dignitaries, private sector establishments and companies and pension funds would be invited to contribute in the foundation stage of the project," Khonji said in a statement.

He also said that the preparatory committee for foundation of the Muscat University presented the minister of higher education with an application.

The university would have specialised subjects to meet the labour market requirements in the fields of engineering, commerce and industry.

The university would award BA, MS and PhD degrees and would be associated with an international renowned university. — *ONA*

NBO Al Kanz grand prize: Lucky Qurum branch customer wins RO100,000



Times News Service

MUSCAT — National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently conducted its Al Kanz Grand Prize Draw for RO100,000 at its CBD branch.

Chief Guest Mohammed Ahmed Al Lawati, NBO's long-standing customer, drew the lucky winner. Emadel Ahmed Taleb, NBO's Qurum branch customer, was declared the lucky winner of the grand prize amount of RO100,000. NBO's Al Kanz prize draw scheme is aimed at increasing low cost savings deposits for all individuals.

The current January — February 2008 Al Kanz scheme includes a total of two grand prizes of RO100,000 each in addition to 12 monthly prizes of RO2,500 and 14 regional prizes of RO1,000 every month.

To be eligible for the grand prize draws, customers are required to deposit a minimum of RO1,000, a minimum of RO500 for regional prizes, and a minimum of RO100 for monthly prizes.

Non-interest bearing savings account holders are automatically included in all draws provided they meet the required balance.

Asif Redha, NBO's acting head consumer banking said: "Our Al Kanz scheme is popular among our customers. The more the customer deposits the more chances he has to win. I invite all of you to save and thereby increase your deposits and participate in our next grand prize draw which will be held in March 2008."

Book on Omani brands survey hits market

Times News Service

MUSCAT — A new book containing a brand survey and study of Omani brands *Oman's Best Brands: The Journey to Excellence* has been published.

Written by Hasan Kamoonpuri, a senior journalist, the 388-page book is full of stories of business success.

The product of a one-year field research by the author, *Oman's Best Brands* provides a comprehensive coverage of leading Omani brands, industry insights and news snippets.

The author's previous books *Success Stories of Omani Entrepreneurs* (2005) and *Top Brands in Oman* (2006) were a hit and this encouraged him to produce the third book with a special emphasis on the winners of His Majesty's Cup and Oman Awards for Excellence.

Drawing on many years of experience in branding, marketing and research from 34 top-notch companies, *Oman's Best Brands* is a must-read for investors, marketers, advertisers and students of business administration.

Based on more than 45 interviews in the field, the book provides a comprehensive coverage of 34 leading brands and contains a complete list of the winners of His Majesty's Cup for Best Factories and Oman Awards for Excellence.

Oman's Best Brands is the first of its kind in publication in that it includes a unique Brand Awareness Survey of 500 consumers, including CEOs and marketing executives.

It reviews, examines and analyses the results of this survey in the light of existing literature on branding. It provides an insight into the brands of many winners of His Majesty's Cup for Best Factories as well as the winners of Oman Awards for Excellence.

Paying tribute to winning Omani brands, the book seeks to complement the National Product Promotion Campaign of the Sultanate by demonstrating how Oman has produced an array of strong international brands.

The book opens with insightful messages from Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, minister of national economy and deputy chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council; Ahmed Hassan Al Dheeb, undersecretary for commerce and industry; Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji, head of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Hilal bin Hamad Al Hassani, CEO of PEIE.

In this book, professionals as well as students will find cutting edge ideas on what it means to build a brand, increase margins, make price irrelevant, win stakeholders' credibility, and create sustainable competitive advantage.

The book argues that brand drives nearly two-thirds of customer purchases and impacts nearly every functional area of the business. The concluding chapter of the book "Brand Management: Today & Tomorrow" provides essential guidelines for developing, integrating, and implementing key elements of an effective brand development strategy.

Sponsored by Oman Mobile and Al Sulaimi Group, *Oman's Best Brands* is a comprehensive exploration that provides brand builders with keen insights and practical ideas for navigating a company and meeting its challenges.

The book traces the achievements of leading Omani brands and comprehensively investigates their brand development strategies to unearth key success factors.



Tunisian trade delegation arrives tomorrow

MUSCAT — A Tunisian trade delegation including representatives of the Export Development Centre of the Ministry of Trade and Traditional Industries in Tunisia and an industrial estate in Nafidha will arrive here tomorrow on a three-day visit.

The aim of the visit is to boost cooperation between the Sultanate and Tunisia to facilitate more economic investments.

The Tunisian embassy at the Sultanate in collaboration with the OCCI on Monday will organise a seminar for the Tunisian trade delegation to discuss the development made by the Tunisian economy, the incentives provided to investors and facilities and services provided by Nafidha Industrial Estate to foreign investors.

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Boston seafood expo from tomorrow

MUSCAT — The Sultanate will be making a strong presence at the International Boston Seafood Exhibition in Boston beginning tomorrow.

The Sultanate delegation includes representatives of the Ministry of Fisheries and the Omani Centre for Investment Promotion and Exports Development (Ociped) and a number of fish companies operating in the Sultanate.

Ociped has appointed Infoline LLC to market the Omani pavilion.

On his part Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said Al Busaidi, director-general of fisheries development, praised the efforts to develop fisheries sector in the Sultanate and improving their efficiency by participating in international exhibitions. The exhibitions will help to attract investments and increase Omani fish exports. — *ONA*

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- Co-ordinate with various Government authorities at the time of retail sites final inspections.
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ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Interior

Sale of Used Furniture

The Ministry of Interior announces sale of used furniture and other items of the old building of the office of the wali of Al Buraimi, affiliated to the Ministry.

Terms and conditions are as follows:

Firstly: Sale shall be through closed envelopes

Secondly: Interested parties may inspect the furniture and other items in collaboration with the office of the Wali of Al Buraimi, during the office hours, and also to collect the list of items for sale, effective from Sunday February 24, 2008.

Thirdly: The items on display shall be sold on whole sale basis

Fourthly: Interested party has to enclose a cheque approved by a locally registered bank at 25% of the purchase value, addressed in the name of the Ministry of Interior

Fifthly: The last date for submission of envelopes to the office of the Wali or the premises of the Ministry in Ruwi (Financial Affairs Department -third floor) shall be March 15, 2008.

Sixthly: The purchased items' value should be paid within one week from notifying the successful buyer with the award of the items. The buyer shall bear the cost of dismantling and transport of the purchased items not later than 15 days from the date of payment of the amount to the Ministry, otherwise the Ministry shall not be held responsible for the same.

www.moi.gov.om

OMAN

CMA to attend forum of emerging markets

MUSCAT — The Sultanate represented by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) will take part in the 'Sixth World Forum for Emerging Capital Markets' organised in Cairo by the International Union for Stock Markets beginning tomorrow. The forum will continue for two days. The forum is important as it is held in the backdrop of developments witnessed by the world economy, fears of slowing down by the key economies and its impact on the world capital markets. The forum will also discuss the trends of capital migration from the advanced stock markets to emerging capital markets as they are less affected by the volatility in the world economy. The conference will discuss the development of emerging capital markets in the region, the challenges facing them and the means of attracting investments in addition to issues related to mergers of various stock markets and the independent operations of these markets. — *OMA*

Juma leads Omani team to Arab labour meet



DELEGATION: Dr Juma bin Ali bin Juma and Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji with the Omani delegation in Sharm Al Sheikh.

From Essa Al Masaudi

SHARM AL SHEIKH — The 35th Arab Labour Conference will begin here today in the presence of labour ministers from the Arab countries and a number of businessmen representing the private sector. Dr Ahmed Nadhif, prime minister of Egypt, will open the conference on behalf of President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak. The Sultanate is taking part in the conference with a delegation representing the government and private sector led by Dr Juma bin Ali bin Juma, minister of manpower. The delegation will also include Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI); businessmen and representatives of the Sultanate's Workers' General Confederation.

Dr Juma and the delegation reached Sharm Al Sheikh yesterday, where the AGCC labour ministers held a coordinative meeting to discuss the agenda.

The Sultanate's delegation, besides Juma, also includes Dr Ali bin Hassan Al Abdawani, Dr Younus bin Khalifan Al Akhazmi, Samer bin Ahmed Al Nabhani, Salim bin Naseer Al Hadhrami, Khalid bin Talib Al Zakwani and Dalal bint Said Al Hashli.

The business delegation, besides Khonji, includes His Highness Sayyid Taimour bin

Asaad Al Said; His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said; Abduladhim bin Abbas bin Assadullah; Hamdan bin Saif Al Rabiee; Khalid bin Mohammed Al Zubair; Khalid bin Said Al Wahaibi; Hani bin Jama'an A'shour; Khalid bin Abdulwahab Al Buloshi; Muratda bin Hassan bin Ali; Hussain bin Mohammed Al Saleh; Hussain bin Jawad bin Abdulrasoul; Hisham bin Jama'an Al A'shour; Hussain bin Salman Al Lawati; Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Hosni; Mohammed bin Abdulhussain Al Lawati; Sahar bint Saad Al Ka'abi; Khoulia bint Hamoud Al Harthy; Said bin Salim Mara'ei; Jinan bint Anwar Al Asfour and Hassan bin Salim Sha'aban.

The Oman Workers Confederation's delegation is headed by Saud bin Ali Al Jabri, chairman of the confederation, and includes Rashid bin Said Al Hashmi; Esam bin Nasser Al Shibani; Mahdi bin Abdulbaqi Al Lawati; A'aidah bint Shamis Al Hashmi; and Nabhan bin Ahmed Al Battashi.

Dr Juma will hold a meeting with the business delegation taking part in the conference to discuss Omanisation, training programmes and future plans for development of human resources. An exhibition of companies representing various sectors in the Sultanate will be opened today. The conference will conclude on March 1.

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ANNOUNCEMENT
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WEATHER

Mainly clear skies over the Sultanate with dust raising winds over Buraimi and Dhofar and regions of Al Dhahirah, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah and Sharqiyah.

Winds: Over the Sultanate winds will be northerly to northwesterly light to moderate occasionally fresh.

Sea state: Moderate to rough over coastal area of Musandam and southeastern coast with maximum wave height between 2 to 3 metres and slight to moderate along the rest of Omani coasts with maximum wave height of 1.5 metres.

Muscat
Maximum today: 23C
Minimum tonight: 15C
Relative humidity: 40 to 75 per cent
Sunrise 06:34am — Sunset 06:05pm

Salalah
Maximum today: 27C
Minimum tonight: 16C
Relative humidity: 20 to 50 per cent
Sunrise 06:46am — Sunset 06:29pm

Temp Max Min
Seeb 23 15
Khasab 22 15
Diba 23 13
Mad'ha 22 13
Buraimi 23 09
Ibri 24 10
Fahud 23 08
Sohar 23 12
Suwaiq 24 12
Rustaq 24 11
Sumail 24 12
Nizwa 27 11
Saiq 17 07
Jabal Shamas 13 05
Bahla 26 09
Adam 27 12
Mudhebi 28 15
Ibra 27 12
Sur 24 17
Ras Al Hadd 25 11
Masirah 26 17
Duqm 25 15
Haima 28 14
Marmul 24 10
Mhout 25 12
Thumrait 22 08
Salalah 27 16
Qairoon Hairiti 18 07
Mina Salalah 27 18
Al Halaniyat 26 13
Jabal Samhan 17 08
Jabal Qamar 16 09

Prayer Timings

Dhuhr 12.25am
Asr 03.44pm
Maghrib 06.11pm
Isha 07.22pm

Tomorrow
Fajr 05.18am

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EVENTS

- Jazz concert at Higher College of Technology by Paul-Marie Barbier (PMB) trio on Sunday at 7:30pm. For more details check the French Embassy website at www.ambfrance.om.org
- Registration for German language basic course at German Language Centre Oman, Azaiha on March 5. For details call on 2496013.
- This year's Women in Business Conference will be held on March 15-16. For more details contact 99113838 or visit info@eventsom.com
- The last date for submissions for the International Essay Competition 2008 by the World Bank is March 23. The topic is "What can you do to shape the city of your dreams?" The contest is currently open to all nationalities in the age group of 18-25. For details visit www.essaycompetition.org

OMAN RADIO

06:00 Opening, Royal anthem, the Holy Quran, preview of morning programme, weather forecast, pharmacies on duty.

06:15 Good Morning Oman

07:00 News bulletin

07:10 Stocks and Shares

07:20 Good Morning Oman

09:00 News Headlines

09:02 Piano

10:00 Instrumental music

11:00 Light classical music

12:00 News headlines

12:02 Live with Studio One

02:30 News bulletin

02:40 Sports

02:50 Mix Music

02:55 Tips of the day

03:00 Short Stories

03:15 Mix music

04:00 News headlines

04:02 FM Cruise

06:00 Mix music

06:30 News bulletin

06:40 Mix music

07:00 Nightstream

08:00 News headlines

08:02 Nightstream

10:00 News bulletin

10:10 Night Beat

11:40 News summary

11:45 The Holy Quran

12:00 National anthem, close down

FM frequencies

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

AUSTRIAN EMBASSY PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

As of 23rd February 2008 all visa applications for the following countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Malta, Slovenia, and Sweden have to be submitted at the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Shatti Al Qurum, way no. 3017, villa no. 1366 (Tel.: 24603706 / 24603719) as the Austrian Embassy is relocating.

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WORLD

Iran cooperating but doubts remain: IAEA

● From Page 1

The White House said yesterday it was "disappointed" with Iran's continued nuclear activities and said it was moving forward with a call for more sanctions.

"Based on this latest report, we are disappointed with Iran's continued failure to comply with its UN Security Council obligations and calls by the IAEA to suspend all proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, and to provide full transparency and access to the IAEA," said National Security spokeswoman Kate Starr.

"At this point, we are continuing to move forward with our Security Council partners on a third sanctions resolution," Starr said.

Meanwhile, senior diplomats from Britain, France, Germany, the United States, China and Russia would meet in Washington on Monday to discuss next steps regarding Iran's nuclear programme, Western diplomats said in New York yesterday.

The diplomats spoke after the release of the UN nuclear watchdog's new report on Iran's atomic programme. On Thursday, France and Britain formally submitted a third sanctions resolution against Iran to the UN Security Council, on which they hope for a vote next week.

Among the issues the political directors — high-ranking diplomats — from the six powers will discuss in Washington is the timing of a sanctions vote at the Security Council, diplomats said on condition of anonymity.

The United States has accused Iran of having a secret programme to build nuclear weapons. Tehran denies the charges, saying the programme is only for power generation to meet the growing demands of its economy.

In its report, the IAEA said Iran was being more open with UN monitors than before but that Tehran was testing technology that could give it the means to enrich uranium much faster.

The IAEA findings, which also said Iran had failed to clear up all outstanding questions by an agreed February deadline, may be branded negative on balance by big powers and spur the UN Security Council to adopt more sanctions as early as next week. — Reuters, AFP

Sadr extends ceasefire by six months



PROTEST: Demonstrators chanting slogans during a protest in Baghdad's Sadr City yesterday. — Reuters

KUFA (Iraq) — Moqtada Al Sadr ordered his Mahdi Army militia to prolong its ceasefire for a further six months yesterday, to the evident relief of the United States.

The decision to keep the force's black-clad fighters off the streets was welcomed by the US military, who once saw the Mahdi Army as the greatest threat to the future of Iraq but now hope Sadr can be a stabilising influence.

In Washington, the White House called the renewal a "positive development."

Shiite imams in mosques across south and central Iraq opened sealed letters from their populist movement's leader and read his statement to supporters after Muslim weekly prayers six months after the truce was first declared.

"I prolong the freeze in the activities of the Mahdi Army until the 15th day of the month of Shababan," Sadr said, using the Islamic calendar to indicate that the ceasefire will continue at least until August 16.

"I cannot support the crimes of criminals, nor the sins of sinners, and I created this army on the principles of the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)," according to the letter read by the imam at

Sadr's mosque in Kufa, Assaad Al Nasiri.

The White House yesterday welcomed Sadr's call as a "positive development."

"We welcome any move that forswears violence and encourages peaceful participation," said White House spokesman Scott Stanzel.

"To the extent the announcement today serves to further isolate the groups that are engaging in violence and to the extent that it helps enhance our intelligence to root out those groups, it's a positive development," he said. Sadr did not appear publicly at Friday prayers, and it is not clear where he is now based. Some reports have suggested that he has crossed the border into Iraq's neighbour Iran, but his group would not confirm this.

The decision to continue the ceasefire was not universally welcomed by Sadr's supporters, some of whom had been hoping for a return to their former campaign of violence against American and Iraqi security forces.

"I know I must obey this decision, but I don't support it because it harms us. We have been exposed to revenge attacks and political score-settling," said Mohammed Ouz, a 35-year-old Mahdi Army

militiaman in Karbala.

But other fighters said a truce would allow time for Sadr to further purge his movement of criminal elements, and for Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki's government to address Shiite demands.

"Seyyed Moqtada's decision is right and aims to unite our movement and stop the shedding of Muslim blood," said Nazari Jabbar, a 25-year-old Mahdi Army guard at the Kufa mosque. Sadr ordered a six-month freeze in attacks on rival armed groups and US forces late last August after allegations that his fighters had been involved in bloody clashes with security forces in the shrine city of Karbala.

The decision came at the same time many Sunni groups in western Iraq decided to join forces with the US military to fight Al Qaeda and amid a "surge" in American troop numbers. These three developments combined have led to a steep decline in fighting between rival factions in southern and central Iraq, but Iraqi leaders have always known that the relative peace was fragile.

Sadr's supporters claim that rival Shiite groups within the government security forces have used the truce as cover to arrest and assassinate

leading figures in their movement.

Sadr forces have in particular clashed with another powerful Shiite group, the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC) of Abdel Aziz Al Hakim, in southern cities such as Diwaniyah and Amara. In the southern port city of Basra, senior Sadr supporter Sheikh Ali Al Sadi welcomed yesterday's announcement.

"We see this freeze as a chance for the government to review its policies," he said. "At any moment we can expect the Seyyed (Sadr) to lift the freeze if it is necessary."

"This extension of his August 2007 pledge of honour to halt attacks is an important commitment that can broadly contribute to further improvements in security for all Iraqi citizens," the statement said.

"We also welcome an opportunity to participate in dialogue with the Sadr Trend and all groups who seek to bring about reconciliation in building the new Iraq," it added.

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said Washington welcomed "any move that forswears violence and encourages peaceful participation." — AFP

Will travellers to Europe face fingerprinting?

● From Page 1

When contacted, Susan Gurley, executive director of the US-based Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), said: "ACTE, with membership in 82 countries, including the Middle East, sees the potential for abuse in a growing trend by governments to rely on higher levels of electronic surveillance to track the movement of suspected terrorists or criminals throughout the global transportation network."

"While it is the obligation and duty of any government to safeguard the security of its citizens, travel privacy and identity security must be part of any security equation," Susan told *Times of Oman* yesterday.

"Our concerns were mirrored by privacy advocates in the EU and in the US who are opposed to the automatic sharing of biometric data between governments, and security specialists who oppose storing so much sensitive information in one place."

"For example, travellers from Oman, or anywhere throughout the Middle East and the Gulf states travelling to Europe might suddenly discover that their fingerprints and/or other data were being shared with the US government and other governments — even if they had no plans of visiting the US and/or another non-EU country," Susan said.

The association's position, she said, was prompted by an announcement from the EU last week, in which that governing body on Brussels has proposed the fingerprinting of all non-Europeans entering

the 27 countries of the region.

ACTE, she said, was concerned that the EU might share this data with other governments, which would impact the privacy or identities of millions of international travellers. The law also proposes that the information be stored for several years.

She, however, said it was not clear at this point how the information would be destroyed and whether people would have access to information if and with whom the fingerprinting data was shared. What are the auditing protocols that are being discussed? It's not clear.

"ACTE believes that there may be no need to create or support this kind of third-party data sharing unless there are clear protocols in place to ensure the safety of the data," she added.

The fingerprinting requirement for the EU is still in the embryonic stages, as the governments of 27 countries now have to vote on it. Furthermore, it should be noted that civil rights groups and European privacy groups have already voiced strong opposition to this proposal.

"It's going to be challenging to recognise the privacy ramifications of the law, especially for the average traveller/business executive," says a Singapore-based Gulf businessman.

"It's a new trend, especially, after September 11. The outcome can be positive and negative. But all are going to be tagged. I think the US and EU, if necessary, can follow everything we do. They know where we are," says young Arab entrepreneur Kalid Khamis.

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Sex-and-property row stuns Australian state

CANBERRA — A sex-and-property scandal involving a female city planner on a "mission for sex" in return for approvals of high-rise buildings threatened to engulf Australia's biggest state government yesterday.

An undercover sting by anti-corruption investigators uncovered a web of affairs involving 32-year-old town planner Beth Morgan in the steel-and-surfing city of Wollongong, south of Sydney, with three prominent building developers.

Morgan, said by one of the three men to be "on a mission for sex", gave approval for millions of dollars worth of unlawful city building devel-

opments in return for gifts and affairs, the powerful Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) heard.

"Mile High Rise Club," said a headline in the mass-selling *Daily Telegraph* newspaper.

Morgan gave testimony to the commission about the affairs, admitted to by two developers, while a third denied the pair actually had a sexual relationship.

But the scandal, which has captivated Australians, also threatens several ministers in the government of the nation's most populous state, New South Wales, which includes Sydney.

Australians generally believe their country to be largely corruption free and it ranks well on the international index prepared by Transparency International.

Amid the public ICAC hearings, state Premier Morris Iemma promised to sack a senior minister if he was found to have improperly given a job to a Wollongong city councillor linked to the scandal.

Four other state ministers have also been indirectly linked by the ICAC to central figures in the furor.

"Anyone found to have done the wrong thing will be out, no matter who they are," Iemma said. — Reuters

East Timor sends more forces to hunt rebels

DILI — East Timor sent more than 1,000 police and soldiers to search the hills and raid homes yesterday in pursuit of rebels involved in this month's assassination attempts on the country's president and prime minister.

Rebel soldiers attacked Jose Ramos Horta's home on February 11, seriously wounding the president during a gunfight.

Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, who escaped unhurt in a separate attack the same morning, ordered the country's military and police forces to form a joint command to arrest followers of rebel leader Alfredo Reinado.

— Reuters

US-Serb rift deepens with embassy attack

WASHINGTON — The United States has issued a stern complaint to Belgrade after protesters torched its embassy there, in a sign of a deepening rift in US-Serbian relations since Washington recognised Kosovo's independence.

The third highest US diplomat, Nicholas Burns, called Serbia's Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic to formally protest the storming of the embassy in Belgrade on Thursday, State

Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

"The message was very clear: the situation was intolerable; they needed to act immediately to provide the adequate security forces so that our embassy compound and our personnel were not under attack," McCormack told reporters.

Burns "made very clear to the foreign minister that we would hold the Serbian government personally responsible for the safety and the well-being of our embassy employ-

ees," McCormack said.

A spokeswoman for President George W. Bush said he had been briefed about the incident on Thursday as he returned from a five-country Africa tour.

"We have made known to the Serbian government our concern and displeasure that their police force did not prevent this incident," spokeswoman Dana Perino said.

The protest came after several hundred Serbians opposed to Kosovo's independence broke into and set

alight the United States embassy in Belgrade.

The embassy was unstaffed at the time of the attack, but an unidentified person died in the incident. McCormack said all US staff were safe.

Burns told the Serbian officials Serbian security for the embassy "was completely inadequate to the task and that we expected them to act immediately, and that we would not expect a repeat of this situation in the future," McCormack said. — AFP

Japanese who was shot in the eye by Israeli troops may lose sight

BILIN — A Japanese translator who was shot in the eye last month during a demonstration against Israel's construction of a West Bank separation barrier said yesterday he may permanently lose his sight. Kaoru Kishida, 43, said he was watching the demonstration on January 25 when he was struck by three rubber bullets, with one hitting him in the eye. "I was operated on several days ago and I have still not recovered the sight in my left eye," Kishida said. "I should be operated on again in two or three months, and it will only be after that surgery that a definitive diagnosis will be made." Kishida was speaking just days before Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is due to travel to Japan, amid press speculation that the incident might sour his visit. Army radio said yesterday that the army had denied firing any rubber bullets on that day, but only smoke grenades. Bilin has long been the site of weekly demonstrations against the barrier. Israel is building to separate itself from the West Bank. Again yesterday, several hundred people gathered in protest. — AFP

Shwas Homes team in town to sell Aqua City project

MUSCAT — After successful campaign in Salalah, the Shwas Homes marketing team is again conducting their exclusive promotion in Muscat and for the first time in Sohar, promoting 'Aqua City'.

'Aqua City' is the largest integrated township on the banks of river Periyar in Alwaye. The 17.8-acre township comprises 10 apartments, 40 villas, waterfront restaurant, pools, clubhouse and a jogging track.

Shwas Homes marketing team visited Muscat and Salalah last week to promote the 12th project 'Aqua City'. There were many inquiries and bookings from different parts of the Sultanate. Due to high demand, the team is again visiting Muscat and Sohar this week. It is offering special schemes and Rs1,000 per square feet buy-back guarantee on the sale price for the clients who book at the exhibition dates this month.

The project is ideally located in the happening city of 'Aluva', with equal distance to airport, Smart City and Cochin City. The 'Aqua City' project consists of 10 apartment blocks, pool villas

and villas. Each block has special features, modern and lifestyle living apartments.

Shwas Homes introduced a new flat block named 'Moon Waters' Sky villa apartments with no sharing walls, fully ventilated and each flat having individual garden space and landscaping with a water front view from garden and balcony.

"If you are planning to invest in Cochin, the investors hotspot, or wish to have a retirement life full of vibrancies, 'Aqua City' is the right choice. Here we are creating a metro city in 17.8 acres with all amenities for a rich lifestyle," says an official.

"For investors, we give a guaranteed buy-back of Rs1,000 per square feet above the sale price which will give 300 per cent appreciation on your investment. Apartments are available with price ranging from Rs20 lakh to Rs1 crore," says the official.

Minimum investment of Rs3 lakh for 2-bedroom in 'Aqua City' will give you Rs9 lakh returns within 2 years with our buy-back guarantee option and Shwas Homes is offering special rental scheme on daily basis.

The attraction of 'Aqua City' is its fully loaded amenities. Food courts, multiplex, shopping complex, performance theatre, dance floor, 24-hour coffee shop, large space for discotheque and parties, squash court, skating rink, billiards, bowling alley, swimming pools, wading pool, gazebo, fitness centres, yoga and meditation area, barbecue counter and much more.

Aqua City is the biggest project, water front project and highest amenities provider in Kerala.

Quality is never an accident, but it is the result of a committed team effort with a determination to provide more value to the customer. Shwas Homes keeps up quality in all areas, be it technical quality or in aesthetic appeal or in customer interface.

The central focus of Shwas philosophy is always the customer and years of commitment is paying rich dividends. Shwas Homes has already launched 12 projects among these, 3 projects have already been completed and handed over, and another 3 projects are ready to be handed over.

Oman Air to unveil new corporate identity today

Times News Service

MUSCAT — Oman Air will unveil its new corporate identity today, at Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa, under the auspices of Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, minister of national economy and deputy chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, and chairman of the national carrier.

The new identity will represent warmth, creativity and energy. Ziad bin Karim Al Haremi, CEO of Oman Aviation Services (Oman Air) said: "The new identity will project the airline's transformation into a world-class airline. The airline has rejuvenated itself as a major carrier in the region. The new corporate identity is considered a defining milestone in the process of change, making the brand more relevant to global markets; also match with customers in international markets. It reflects the spirit of flying, transparency in operations and cutting-edge efficiency in service."

"The new corporate image will add value, reflecting the élan of flying, friendliness and warmth the airline will ensure in its day-to-day operations," he added.

"Reflective of its creative, vibrant, and innovative personality, the new logo of Oman Air reflects the reality of the company as a breakaway brand that will bring the best international practices to the regional aviation sector," he stated.

The new identity colours represent growth and resilience as well as Oman Air's commitment to deliver a fresh experience to air travellers in the world.

He said that the move comes at a time of extensive growth and development for the company and emphasises the fast-evolving portfolio of Oman Air globally. The new corporate identity will highlight the message that Oman Air appeals to both leisure and

business travellers, while simultaneously underlining the ever-increasing importance of leisure travel within the market.

The decision to revitalise the brand identity is a testament to Oman Air's global growth.

The national carrier's mission is to connect the world to the Sultanate of Oman. The new identity, he added, will convey that Oman Air is on the cutting edge of rapidly changing industry scenario and technology.

Oman Air Corporate Communications and Media Department said: "Oman Air, which commenced operations in 1993 as a regional player, has played a major role in making Muscat a major traffic hub in the Middle East providing a filip to commercial, industrial and tourism activities. As a full-fledged



UPBEAT: Al Haremi

commercial airline of Oman, it has striven to maintain high performance standards in all aspects of its operation."

The company fleet will consist of 12 Boeing 737-800 aircraft (by end January 2009), 7 Airbus A330 aircraft with deliveries starting in 2009 and, commitment to some six Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

Oman Air will be the first airline in the Gulf region to undergo such a move to obtain the Dreamliner aircraft, which are expected to be delivered to the carrier in 2012, 2014, and 2015.

Oman Air is currently flying from Muscat to 25 destinations. Ten destinations in the Middle East: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Jeddah, Riyadh, Bahrain, Doha, Kuwait, Beirut, Cairo, and Amman. Also to 10 destinations in the Indian subcontinent: New Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Jaipur; Karachi in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, in addition to London in Europe and Bangkok in the Far East, as well as, three internal destinations: Muscat, Salalah and Khasab.

British troops accused of executions, torture in Iraq

LONDON — Lawyers for five Iraqis have accused British soldiers of mass executions and torture and called for a police investigation into an 'atrocious episode' in British army history.

Phil Shiner and Martyn Day, who have brought several cases against the British military for its actions in Iraq, produced statements yesterday from five men who say they were detained by British forces after a battle in southern Iraq in May 2004.

The men, who were blindfolded and bound, said their captors repeatedly beat and abused them, including forcing them to strip naked. While detained, they said they heard the systematic torture and execution of up to 20 other detainees.

"On the basis of the evidence currently available, we are of the view that our clients' allegations — that the

British were responsible for the torture and deaths of up to 20 Iraqis — may well be true," Day told a news conference. "Whether or not there is enough evidence to prosecute individual soldiers, it will only be by an open public inquiry that this question will be answered." The military has already conducted its own investigation into the events surrounding the intense, two-hour battle between British troops and Iraqi activists, in which it says 28 Iraqi fighters were killed, and concluded there was no evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

Shiner and Day say, on the basis of the witness statements and other evidence, that 29 people were detained in detention and nine were later freed. A second investigation, also by Britain's military police, was opened last December after the families

of some of the victims called for a judicial review. It is not known when that investigation will be concluded.

As well as the witness statements, Shiner and Day produced photos, video footage and death certificates signed by Iraqi doctors that they said together painted a picture of violent, deadly abuse perpetrated by British troops. They said there was evidence that two detainees had their eyes gouged out, one had his genitals cut off, several were strangled or mutilated, some were shot in the back of the head and others had body parts systematically broken.

"What went on whilst UK forces had the custody of Iraqi civilians is a disgrace, a stain on our nation, and a terrible stain on the reputation of all the good soldiers who have operated in Iraq," Shiner said. — Reuters

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Dubai to have tram network by Sept. 2009, says report

DUBAI — Dubai plans to have a \$500-million tram network up and running by September 2009 to deal with the growing transport demands of the booming Gulf emirate, *Khaleej Times* reported yesterday.

The completion of the 15km network is also expected to coincide with the opening of the first phase of a multi-billion-dollar metro network, the English-language daily reported.

Both projects aim to reduce traffic congestion in the popular tourist destination.

"The tram service will not only be an effective solution to the traffic woes but will also become a major tourist attraction," Abdulredha Abu Hassan, a senior Dubai transport official, told the paper.

More than a million cars ply the roads of Dubai for a population of just over 1.2 million, of which 80 per cent are expatriates. — AFP

Iran plans higher fuel prices but sees inflation

TEHRAN — Iran has 'no choice' but to implement a plan to offer drivers extra gasoline at a higher price outside a subsidised rationing system even though it will increase inflation, a minister said yesterday.

A government committee has proposed making fuel available at up to seven times the current subsidised price available under a rationing scheme in place since June. The government has previously opposed the move because of the inflationary impact.

Iran is the world's fourth-largest oil producer but lacks refining capacity and imports large amounts of gasoline, which it then sells at the heavily subsidised price of 1,000 rials, roughly 11 US cents, a litre.

Under the proposal, drivers would still be able to buy 120 litres a month at the subsidised price but could then buy extra fuel at between 5,000 and 7,000 rials (55-77 US cents).

"Naturally, a rise in gasoline prices will raise inflation but in regard to the necessity of the issue, some products should be offered to people freely (outside rationing) and unsubsidised," Economy Minister Davoud Danesh-Jafari said.

"Many of our people, if they are in need of fuel, and they have no access to it, they are willing to get it at a higher price from others," he told Mehr News Agency, adding fuel was "very much more valuable" to people than 1,000 rials a litre.

Some drivers, who complain the rationing scheme does not give them enough fuel, already turn to a higher priced black market to buy extra gasoline. — Reuters



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46/2008	Supply of flower Seeds for 2008	20/02/2008	22/03/2008	25 R.O.
47/2008	Supply of Outdoor Plants	20/02/2008	22/03/2008	25 R.O.
48/2008	Supply of Insecticide	20/02/2008	22/03/2008	25 R.O.

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Documents are to be enclosed in plain envelope sealed with red wax (without showing any identity of the company on the envelope) addressed to H.E. Head of Muscat Municipality. Tenders are to be deposited in the Tender Box near the reception counter, Muscat Municipality Head Office, Darsait, latest 10 a.m. on the above mentioned dates.

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PROJECT ENGINEER (CIVIL WORKS)

CIVIL ENGINEERS - PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Profile: The incumbent would be responsible for assisting Project Managers in all areas. Candidate should have adequate knowledge of project execution, co-ordination with various agencies, suppliers & contractors, supervision of jobs at site, monitoring the Contractor's progress, ensuring necessary quality & cost controls, etc.

Qualification: Engineering Degree in Civil from a reputed Institution/ University OR Diploma from Govt. approved Polytechnic / Institution.

Experience:

1. Engineering Degree holders 5 – 7 years in Civil Engineering projects.
2. Diploma holders in Engineering 7 – 10 years in Civil Engineering projects.

Age: 26 – 35 years

MEP ENGINEERS

Profile: The incumbent would be responsible for the MEP Scope of works of several large Civil/ Building projects including monitoring of MEP Sub-contractors works and progress, coordination with various agencies, suppliers and contractors, ensuring necessary quality and cost controls, etc.

Qualification: Engineering Degree in Mechanical or Diploma from Govt. approved Polytechnic/Institution.

Experience:

1. Engineering Degree holders 5 – 7 years in MEP installations.
2. Diploma holders in Engineering 7 – 10 years in MEP installations.

Age: 26 – 35 years

QUANTITY SURVEYORS

Profile: The incumbent would be responsible for tender analysis, verification of bills submitted by Consultants/Contractors/Suppliers, periodic site visits, analysis of variations/ cost implications, coordination with Consultants for clarifications on above.

Qualification: Engineering Degree in Civil or Diploma from Government approved Polytechnic/ Institution.

Experience:

1. Engineering Degree holders 5 – 7 years.
2. Diploma holders in Engineering 7 – 10 years.

Age: 26 – 35 years

Candidates with exposure in Construction of Showrooms, Automobile Workshops, Warehouses, Multi-storied Residential and Commercial buildings, Villas, Townships etc. in GCC countries and well acquainted with all aspects of construction projects will get preference.

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OPINION

TIMES OF OMAN
ESTABLISHED: 1975

US had ulterior motives in shooting down spy satellite?

By Peter Grier and Gordon Lubold
The Christian Science Monitor

YES, the Pentagon can obliterate a broken satellite tumbling at the edge of space. The question is, why bother? That is the reaction of some experts to the successful destruction on February 20 of a dead US spy satellite 153 miles over the Pacific Ocean. The official explanation — that the US wanted to prevent the toxic contents of the spacecraft's fuel tank from hitting the ground — seems a bit thin, according to James Lewis, director of the technology and public policy programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. Thus critics from around the world have speculated about ulterior motives, ranging from a desire to test US ballistic missile defences to poking China in the eye.

Lewis says he thinks the Defence Department crunched the numbers and found there was a chance the satellite might come down somewhere embarrassing, or dangerous, like the landmass of a foreign country. He thinks it was not the fuel tank's toxic hydrazine fuel, but a more general desire to prevent any impact, that led to the decision to shoot it down. "It was a surfeit of caution," says Lewis. A three-stage Navy SM-3 missile hit the satellite 153 miles up, just northwest of Hawaii, said military officials at a February 21 news conference. The missile's kill vehicle contained no explosives and had to manoeuvre into the path of the satellite and collide with it, destroying it with kinetic force. The spacecraft — described as being about the size of a school bus, and weighing about 5,000 pounds — exploded spectacularly.

That fireball likely indicates that the frozen hydrazine fuel was destroyed, said military officials, but they won't know for sure until February 23 or 24. "Our objective was to intercept the satellite, reduce the mass that might survive re-entry, [and] vector that mass into unpopulated areas, ideally the ocean," said General James Cartwright, vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The military has long described the difficulty of hitting an object in space with a missile as being akin to striking a bullet with another bullet. With the 25th anniversary of president Ronald Reagan's original speech calling for a Strategic Defence Initiative coming up on March 23, the US has now fully demonstrated such a capability. "Yes, this was uncharted territory," said General Cartwright. "The technical degree of difficulty was significant here. You can imagine that at the point of intercept there were a few cheers that went up." Last year, China used a newly developed anti-satellite missile to destroy a weather satellite orbiting 528 miles above the earth. The unannounced move surprised the world and caused the US to react with anger and concern. The US spy satellite destruction was different from the Chinese move for two reasons, according to US officials. It was announced in advance.

The Chinese move was not. It also took place at a low orbit, meaning the resultant cloud of debris for the most part will fall into the atmosphere and burn up. The Chinese anti-satellite missile left a cloud of debris in a higher orbit, endangering other spacecraft. But both the Chinese and the Russians complained about the US move, saying it risked accelerating an arms race in space and showed the hypocrisy of America's criticism of China. "China is continuously following closely the possible harm caused by the US action to outer-space security and relevant countries," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao at a news conference in Beijing. Some critics say there's now a danger that the US move will provide other nations an excuse to move forward with their own programmes. Given that it has the most satellites of any nation, and its military depends more heavily on space assets than does any other, the US should be taking the lead in pressing for an international ban on weapons in space, said Laura Grego, an astrophysicist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, in an analysis of the impact of the satellite's destruction.

Deepening crisis

SIGNALS from the United States point to a bleaker economic scenario than what was projected till recently. In what is seen as a significant statement on the true state of the economy, the country's two top economic policy makers, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben S. Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson testified before the Congress that the outlook for the economy had worsened. Both stopped short of predicting a recession but admitted that their more optimistic forecasts of last November will have to be scaled down. Others from outside the government, including the former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, are less circumspect. They see an even chance of a recession setting in, although there is no agreement on when that would happen. The continuing deterioration in credit markets on the back of heavy losses in the sub-prime mortgage remains the primary concern, with its consequences increasingly felt across the whole economy. Large institutional lenders are reducing their exposures not only to the riskier categories but to their blue chip clients as well. There are many instances of credit drying up even for municipalities, students, and investment trusts holding top-rated bonds. The spiralling crisis is seen spreading to other intermediaries, such as insurance companies that have guaranteed against defaults.

The magnitude of the economic crisis is underlined by the fact that the drastic remedial policy measures undertaken so far have apparently had only a limited impact. For instance, the Federal Reserve Bank reduced its benchmark interest rate five times since September bringing it down to 3 per cent. The Fed has also pumped in enormous sums of money to shore up liquidity. Yet even the promise of lower borrowing costs has failed to reverse the negative sentiment in stock markets in the US and practically everywhere else. Recently the Congress approved a large fiscal stimulus package aggregating \$168 billion. Besides providing for accelerated write-offs by certain businesses, the package would provide many categories of income earners a cash rebate beginning May. It might be too early to assess its impact but initial reactions suggest that even this package may not be able to revive consumer sentiment or alleviate the concerns over the economy. It seems that only by mending the parts of the financial sector that have given way will the policy makers be able to get a handle on the crisis. — *The Hindu*

From Our Archives

February 1993

Symposium on study of plains

SALALAH — A symposium on an integrated agricultural study of the Salalah and Batinah plains began in Salalah yesterday. It is being held under the supervision of the governorate of Dhofar's directorate general of agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Deputy Governor of Dhofar Sheikh Mohammed bin Marhoon Al Ma'amari noted that government support had contributed significantly to the development of the agricultural sector under the renaissance.



TALKS: Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, right, holding talks with United Nations Special Envoy for Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari in Jakarta yesterday. Gambari said on Thursday that he would raise the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi being banned from 2010 elections when he visits Myanmar as early as next month. — **AFP**

Technological cooperation



By Jeffrey D. Sachs
Project Syndicate

IN early February, the United States National Academy of Engineering released a report on "Grand Challenges for Engineering in the 21st Century." The goal is to focus attention on the potential of technology to help the world address poverty and environmental threats. The list includes potential breakthroughs such as low-cost solar power, safe disposal of CO2 from power plants, nuclear fusion, new educational technologies, and the control of environmental side effects from nitrogen fertilisers. The report, like the Gates Foundation's similar list of "Grand Challenges" in global health, highlights a new global priority: Promoting advanced technologies for sustainable development.

We are used to thinking about global cooperation in fields such as monetary policy, disease control, or nuclear weapons proliferation. We are less accustomed to thinking of global cooperation to promote new technologies, such as clean energy, a malaria vaccine, or drought-resistant crops to help poor African farmers. By and large, we regard new technologies as something to be developed by businesses for the marketplace, not as opportunities for global problem solving.

Yet, given the enormous global pressures that we face,

including vastly unequal incomes and massive environmental damage, we must find new technological solutions to our problems. There is no way, for example, to continue expanding the global use of energy safely unless we drastically alter how we produce electricity, power automobiles, and heat and cool our buildings. Current reliance on coal, natural gas, and petroleum, without regard for CO2 emissions, is now simply too dangerous, because it is leading to climate changes that will spread diseases, destroy crops, produce more droughts and floods, and perhaps dramatically raise sea levels, thereby inundating coastal regions.

ing them.

Consider carbon capture and sequestration. The idea is that power plants and other large fossil fuel users should capture the CO2 and pump it into permanent underground storage sites, such as old oil fields. This will cost, say, \$30 per tonne of CO2 that is stored, so businesses will need an incentive to do it. Moreover, public policies will have to promote the testing and improvement of this technology, especially when used at a large scale.

New kinds of power plants will have to be built to make carbon capture economical, new pipelines will have to be built to transport the CO2 to storage sites, and new monitoring systems will have to be

rich countries monopolise new technologies, the goal of worldwide use to solve worldwide problems will be defeated. Thus, technological developments should involve a collaborative international effort from the start.

All of this will require a new global approach to problem solving. We will need to embrace global goals and then establish scientific, engineering, and political processes to support their achievement. We will need to give new budgetary incentives to promote demonstration projects, and to support technology transfer. And we will have to engage major companies in a new way, giving them ample incentives and market rewards for success, without allowing them to hold a monopoly on successful technologies that should be widely adopted.

I believe that this new kind of global public-private partnership on technology development will be a major objective of international policy making in the coming years. Look for new global cooperative approaches to clean energy systems, medicines and vaccines, improved techniques for fish farming, drought-and-temperature resistant crop varieties, high-mileage automobiles, and low-cost irrigation techniques.

Rich countries should fund these efforts heavily, and they should be carried out in collaboration with poor countries and the private sector. Successful technological breakthroughs can provide stunning benefits for humanity.

This will be an exciting time for a scientist or engineer facing the challenges of sustainable development.

● Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University

New technologies to address environmental threats will be useful only if they are widely used, notably in China and India. If rich countries monopolise new technologies, the goal of worldwide use to solve worldwide problems would be defeated

The National Academy of Engineering identified some possible answers. We can harness safe nuclear energy, lower the cost of solar power, or capture and safely store the CO2 produced from burning fossil fuels.

Yet the technologies are not yet ready, and we can't simply wait for the market to deliver them, because they require complex changes in public policy to ensure that they are safe, reliable, and acceptable to the broad public.

Moreover, there are no market incentives in place to induce private businesses to invest adequately in develop-

designed to control leaks. Likewise, new regulations will be needed to ensure compliance with safety procedures, and to assure public support. All of this will take time, costly investments, and lots of collaboration between scientists and engineers in universities, government laboratories, and private businesses.

Moreover, this kind of technology will be useful only if it is widely used, notably in China and India. This raises another challenge of technological innovation: we will need to support the transfer of proven technologies to poorer countries. If

We'll save the planet only if we're forced to

By Johann Hari
The Independent

DO you check every item you buy to make sure it is green and planet-friendly? Do you buy carbon offsets every time you fly? Stop. It is time to be honest: green consumerism is at best a draining distraction, and at worst a con. While the planet's fever gets worse by the week, we are guzzling down green-coloured placebos and calling it action. There is another way. Our reaction to global warming has gone in waves. First we were in blank denial: How can releasing an odourless, colourless gas change the climate so dramatically? Now we are in a phase of displacement: We assume we can shop our way out of global warming, by shovelling a few new light bulbs and some carbon offsets into our shopping basket.

This is a self-harming delusion. It's hard to give a sense of the contrast today between the magnitude of our problem, and the weediness of our response so far. But the best way is offered by the Nobel Prize-winning scientist Paul Crutzen.

He explains that until 10,000 years ago, the planet's climate would fluctuate violently: Sometimes it would veer by 12 degrees centigrade in just a decade. This meant it was impossible to develop agriculture. Crops couldn't be cultivated in this climatic chaos, so human beings were stuck as a tiny smattering of hunter-gatherers.

But then the climate settled down into safe parameters — and humans could settle down too. This period is called the Holocene, and it meant that for the first time, we could develop farming and cities. Everything we know as human civilisation is thanks to this unprecedented period of climatic stability.

Today, we are bringing this era to an end. By pumping vast amounts of warming gases into the atmosphere, we are creating a new era: the Anthropocene, in which man makes the weather. There is an imminent danger of it bursting beyond these safe parameters, and bringing about a return to the violent, volatile variations that prevented our ancestors from progressing beyond spears and sticks.

Those are the stakes. Every week, there is greater evidence that we are nudging further from our safety zone. The hottest year of the 20th century — 1947 — is now merely the average for the 21st century.

And what are we doing? Many good, well-intentioned people are beginning to grasp this problem and then assuming green consumerism is the only answer to hand. They shop around for items that have not been freighted thousands of miles to make it to their supermarket shelves. They change their light bulbs. They turn down the thermostat a few degrees. They make sure they buy products that don't sit on electricity-burning standby all day. They buy the more energy-efficient cars, and scorn SUV drivers.

No need to attack these people. They are an absolutely essential part of any solution. But we have to be honest.

This is not even the beginning of a solution — and by pouring so much energy into it, we may actually be forestalling the real solution. A huge number of people are known who are sincerely worried about global warming, but they assume they have done their bit through these shifted consumption patterns. The truth is: You haven't.

In reality, dispersed consumer choices are not going to keep the climate this side of a disastrous temperature rise. The only way that can ever happen is by governments legislating to force us all — green and anti-green — to shift towards cleaner behaviour. Just as the govern-

ment in the World War II did not ask people to eat less voluntarily, governments today cannot ask us to burn fewer greenhouse gases voluntarily. It is not enough for you to change your bulbs. Everyone has to change their bulbs. It is not enough for you to eat less meat. Everyone has to eat less meat. It is not enough for you to fly less. Everyone has to fly less. (And yes, I hate these facts as much as you do. But I will hate the reality of runaway global warming even more.)

The only way we will get to the situation where we are all required by law to burn fewer greenhouse gases is if enough people pressure the government, demanding it. Green consumer choices often drain away people's political energies to do this. You have a limited amount of time to spend on any political cause. If you have an hour a week to dedicate to acting on global warming, and you spend it scouring the supermarket shelves for the product shipped the shortest distance, that time and energy is gone; you feel you've done what you can. Part of you might also assume: I've made these choices; other people will too; in time, we'll all be persuaded. But we don't have time.

There is a much better way for you to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Every minute you would have spent shopping around for a greener choice, you should spend volunteering for Greenpeace, or Friends of the Earth, or Plane Stupid, or the Campaign Against Climate Change. Every hundred-pound premium you would spend to buy a greener product, donate it to them instead. Why? Because by becoming part of this collective action — rather than by clinging to dispersed personal choices — you will help to change the law, so everyone will have to be greener, not just nice people like you.


It works. Green campaigners from Australia to Canada to Japan have successfully banned the old light bulbs, so only the energy-saving light bulbs are on offer there now. Green campaigners have prompted the Mayor of London to force SUV drivers to pay a punitive £6,000-a-year premium to drive through our city, forcing many of them to shift to greener cars. These are the first tiny steps towards banning — or massively restricting — the other technologies that are unleashing Weather of Mass Destruction.

Of course, some sincere and well-intentioned people have libertarian concerns about this approach at first glance. Why should we force people to choose the green option? Isn't it better to rely on persuasion and voluntary choice?

But even the most hardcore libertarians agree that your personal liberty ends where you actively harm the liberty of another person. Greenhouse gas emissions are undeniably harming tens of millions of people — and endangering the ground on which all human liberty rests: a stable and safe climate. Just as no libertarian would argue you should have the right to buy and fire a nuclear weapon, no libertarian should argue you have the right to burn unlimited greenhouse gases.

Once confronted with this argument, the only people who cling to a libertarian defence of fossil fuels are people who take money from the fossil fuel industry itself, like Spiked Online. They have to scrape together any old excuse.

So enough with the placebos. Enough with the fake-libertarian excuses. As the climate that sustains human life unravels around us, we are long past the moment when we need real medicine — and the only real medicine is hard government legislation.

 *The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes*
"Insure with New India and be secure"

READERS' FORUM

www.timesofoman.com

Oman-UAE ties

I WAS very happy to read about the fruitful talks between Oman and the UAE. Oman and the UAE have been friendly nations from time immemorial. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has always maintained a good relationship with the ruler of the UAE. I pray to Allah to keep this friendship strong.

● KOSOVO has gained independence at last. The Kosovars have suffered a lot of atrocities but now they have won freedom. It's great news for the Muslim world.

Abdul Azeem
Al Ghubra

This isn't cricket!

THE way cricket players of international repute are being

auctioned by the IPL under the aegis of the Board of Control for Cricket in India reminds one of the way domestic animals are auctioned in our local markets. It's not very different from the way bridegrooms are virtually bought by the brides' parents in the great Indian marriage markets. It is in fact the threat from the ICL that had made the BCCI float the IPL and undertake this kind of a sale, which is definitely not in keeping with the spirit of the game of cricket. It's true that games like football and tennis have been thoroughly commercialised; however, the IPL show leaves a bitter taste in the mouth.

Ushadevi Suddapalli & Dr S. Bhaskara Rao
Ruwi

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

INDIA

Arrested techie grilled over terror links in Bangalore

BANGALORE — A software engineer, who was arrested here on Thursday night on suspected terror links, is an important person in the hierarchy of banned outfit SIMI and figures in connection with the case relating to a network in Hubli, police said yesterday. Mohammed Yahya Kamukutty, who holds a B. Tech degree from the National Institute of Technology in Kozhikode in neighbouring Kerala, was yesterday subjected to intense interrogation to ascertain whether he had other associates who were part of the recently busted terror network in the city. "We are still interrogating him and are trying to elicit all information about his links and plans,"



police said while refusing to divulge details. A native of Mukkam in Kozhikode district, Yahya, who is in his late 20s, took his B.Tech degree in electrical engineering and was previously employed with GE software. Yahya at present is unemployed," police sources said. Alok Kumar, DIG of Corps of Detectives (CoD), said Yahya was an impersonator in the SIMI structure and figured in the case relating to a terror network that was recently busted in Hubli. In the wake of certain 'disclosures' made by Yahya, a Corps of Detectives (CoD) team would shortly be visiting Kerala to gather further information, the sources said.

Viral fever hits Delhiites; no reason for worry, say docs

NEW DELHI — As Delhi warmed up for summer, a different strain of viral fever has hit its denizens but doctors are not yet sounding alarm bell. People down with viral fever are complaining of lesser chill accompanied by the other usual symptoms such as body ache, nausea and chest congestion. "Be it virus or bacteria, they have many strains. Each strain produces its own set of symptoms. That is why, every year we hear of different symptoms of viral fever," said Dr Bir Singh, convenor, Disease Outbreak Cell, AIIMS. He, however, said no pathological tests have been conducted and no samples sent to labs so far. "The fever is prevalent for a week and then it is gone," Bir said. A doctor at the National Institute of Communicable Diseases said there was nothing serious about the viral fever. "Those who are already unwell are likely to be affected more. So, they need to be careful during the change of season as more cases are reported during this time," said Dr S.P. Boytra, a senior doctor in the Department of Medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. Chest clinics in government hospitals are open for longer hours and the queues in front of the physicians' clinics too are not short.

5 children die after eating 'prasadam' in Bihar

PATNA — Five children have died and 96 other people have fallen seriously ill after eating sweets and rice offered to a deity at a village shrine, health officials said yesterday. Children in Isua village, in Bihar, fell sick on Thursday during a festival to mark the full moon shortly after eating the temple offerings, known as prasadam, made to Saraswati, the deity of learning. "The children began vomiting and falling on the ground senseless," Ramvilas Ranjan, a health official in the district, said by telephone. The dead children were between 4 and 7 years old. Most of those taken sick are also children. Ranjan thinks it was probably food poisoning. Villagers told him the food had been kept in a store room for ten days. Tests are being done on the prasadam. — PTI, AFP



WELL DONE! Former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam appreciates a girl dressed up as satellite on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebrations of a public school in Hyderabad yesterday. — PTI

Life is bitter-sweet for working couples!

NEW DELHI — Double income couples in India are indeed leading a bitter-sweet life — one in three such couples believe that divergent opinion due to two careers raises divorce chances, but a majority of over eight in ten are still satisfied with their work-family balance.

According to a survey conducted by global research firm Synovate for the country's leading staffing firm TeamLease Services, the overall satisfaction level of married working couples is as high as 87 per cent across India.

At the same time, the survey found that 34 per cent of the couples felt that two careers "substantially increase the chances of a difference of opinion leading to divorce."

While those seeing higher chances of divorce due to both partners being in jobs were still in a minority, a majority of 63 per cent agreed that fights were common on issues like quality time and work travel in such families.

Delhi emerged as the only exception where only about 56 per cent respondents disagreed about fights being common in the double-income families.

The survey was conducted on working corporate executives married with or without kids across five cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, and Hyderabad.

Notwithstanding the high satisfaction levels about the overall work-life balance, a majority of 52 per cent said that, given a chance, they would go for a "less lavish life" with one spouse working but satisfactory marital rela-

SURVEY FINDINGS

- Most couples wary of divorce, satisfied with life
- Fights 'common' on quality time, travel
- More men are now involved in rearing children but such couples are dubbed 'weekend parents'

tionship, as against 48 per cent opting for a "luxury life where both husband and wife are working."

Those living in Pune and Delhi came tops in terms of preference for a luxury life, while people in Hyderabad, Bangalore and Mumbai mostly voted in favour of single income but satisfactory marital relations.

In Delhi, 66 per cent prefer a double-income luxury life, while it is as high as 88 per cent in Pune. However, 95 per cent of Hyderabadis said they wanted a single-income, less lavish life.

According to the survey, while a growing number of men are becoming actively involved in sharing family responsibilities, including rearing a child, a large number of such couples have become "week-end parents."

Across the country, at least 54 per cent of those surveyed said they were becoming "week-end parents", with Bangalore and Mumbai as exceptions and Pune, Hyderabad and Delhi coming on the top of the heap.

The survey comes amid a sharp

surge in the number of working couples with increased urbanisation, lower education dropout by women and the need for two incomes driving higher labour force participation by women.

"This survey highlights the bitter-sweet implications of two careers. The stress on marriages and childcare is often perceived to blunt the economic upside," TeamLease's Permanent Staffing General Manager Surabhi Mathur said.

"The continued difficulties for women looking to re-enter the workforce after a child break and the high unwillingness to move cities to follow their spouses' careers highlights the continued challenges for women spouses in the Indian workplace," Mathur said.

Barring Delhi and Pune, in other cities both spouses share the responsibility to take care of the child.

As much as 43 per cent of Delhi parents do not attend their children's school function. However, 46 per cent mothers in Delhi and 78 per cent in Pune attend such functions.

The verdict was divided on whether

working in same organisation improves or reduces the quality of work-life balance. While 48 per cent said it led to improvement, 21 per cent voted against it and another 26 per cent did not see any impact at all.

However, a vast majority of 70 per cent replied in the affirmative when asked whether the Indian companies had flexible working policies for employees to maintain a work-life balance. The satisfaction level on this front was highest in Pune (88 per cent), while Mumbai came at the bottom (64 per cent).

"Companies that think creatively and deeply about infrastructure for two-career couples have a unique opportunity to not only increase gender diversity but also draft labour market outside to tackle the skill shortage," TeamLease's Mathur noted.

In terms of overall satisfaction level for their own work-life balance, Pune (96 per cent) came tops, followed by Hyderabad (92 per cent) and Delhi (91 per cent), while Bangalore emerged as dissatisfied to some extent with only 79 per cent approving of their work-life balance.

At least 48 per cent of the couples polled said they would willingly follow their spouses to other cities for career, but a higher proportion of 52 per cent are not willing to hamper their career for the sake of their spouses.

Couples in all the cities polled agreed that working in odd shift hours had an impact on their marital relationships, barring New Delhi, where most of the respondents said they do not work in shifts. — PTI

'US should support India's bid for UNSC'

WASHINGTON — Describing India as a "crucial and proven partner", a Florida lawmaker has urged the US and other "like-minded" countries to push for the induction of India as a permanent member in the UN Security Council.

"Rather than remaining on the sidelines when it comes to implementing reform at the UN, the US and like-minded nations should actively advocate reform of the UNSC, beginning with permanent membership for the world's largest democracy, India," Republican Congressman Gus Bilirakis said in an opinion piece in *The Washington Times*. On September 6, 2007, Bilirakis and Congressman Thaddeus McCotter of Michigan sponsored a resolution that called for UN to amend its charter to admit India into the Security Council.

"India's success is propelled by a trillion-dollar economy that the world's fifth largest with annual growth of 9 per cent. Indian society is comprised of 1 billion Hindus and 150 million Muslims the second-largest Islamic population in the world," he said. — PTI



ALERT: Paramilitary force personnel outside an election material centre in Agartala yesterday on the eve of the state assembly election. — PTI

Tripura polls today

AGARTALA — The stage is set for today's elections to the 60-member assembly in Tripura bordering Bangladesh.

The curtains came down on Thursday on the high voltage campaign in the state marred by militant attacks on political activists.

The ruling CPM-led Left Front is locked in a direct fight with the opposition Congress Party-Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) alliance.

Altogether 313 candidates, including 28 women aspir-

ants, are in the fray with 20,35,877 voters expected to exercise their franchise.

The CPM has alone put up 56 candidates while its two allies — RSP and CPI — would contest in two seats each. The opposition Congress would contest in 47 seats while its two allies — Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) and PDS — would contest in 11 and two, seats respectively.

Altogether 200 companies of additional central paramilitary forces have already arrived in the state for peace-

ful conduct of the elections.

Sources said the election booths would be manned by the central paramilitary forces and all possible measures have been taken to check any rigging attempt.

Police said the Tripura State Rifles (TSR), state's paramilitary force, was deployed in remote areas to stem insurgent activities.

Forty CPM activists were injured, 22 of them seriously, when they were attacked by unidentified persons at Ampura in West Tripura district, police said. — PTI

Chidambaram to present his 7th budget on Feb. 29

NEW DELHI — After presenting his maiden "dream" budget in 1997, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram is all set to present his seventh budget on February 29.

In the North Block, action is in full swing and the entry of all "unwanted" persons — that includes the media — have been barred to ensure that nothing about the budget is leaked.

Since it will be the last full budget of the UPA government in this term, there are lots of expectations from the finance minister.

But it is the late Morarji Desai who still holds the privilege of presenting the maximum number of eight full and two interim budgets in his political career.

The budgets presented by Morarji included five annual budgets and an interim budget during his first stint and one interim budget and three final budgets in the second tenure when he was both the finance minister and deputy prime minister.

He tabled annual budgets for the years from 1959-60 to 1963-64 and the interim budget for 1962-63. Again, in 1967 Morarji Desai presented the budget.

He is the only finance



HONOUR: P. Chidambaram

minister who presented the budget on his birthday, which fell on February 29, 1968.

After he resigned, Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, took over the finance ministry to become the only woman to hold the portfolio.

India's first budget was presented by a Tamilian, R.K. Shanmukham Chetty on November 26, 1947.

Pranab Mukherjee presented the annual budgets for 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85. He was the first Rajya Sabha member to hold the finance portfolio.

Rajiv Gandhi presented

the budget for 1987-88 after V.P. Singh quit his government. He was the third prime minister to present a budget after his mother and grandfather. N.D. Tiwari presented the budget for 1988-89 and S.B. Chavan for 1989-90, while Madhu Dandawate presented budget for 1990-91.

Following subsequent political developments, Yashwant Sinha became the finance minister but presented interim budget for 1991-92 as elections were forced.

In the elections held in May 1991, the Congress party returned to power and Manmohan Singh became the finance minister. He presented the final budget for 1991-92 in July 1991.

The next four annual budgets of Manmohan Singh had an orientation different from the one followed till then.

He opened the economy, encouraged foreign investments and reduced the peak import duty from 300 plus to 50 per cent. After the elections in 1996, another non-Congress ministry assumed office. So, a final budget for 1996-97 was presented by Chidambaram who then belonged to Tamil Maanila Congress. — PTI

Railway budget to be a 'basket of comforts'

CHAPRA (Bihar) — Promising yet another people-friendly budget for 2008-09, Railway Minister Lalu Prasad yesterday said it would be a "basket of comforts" for the general public.

"The Indian Railway is passing through its best phase in terms of development and the budget for the next financial year would be a basket of comforts for the common passengers," Lalu said while addressing a function at the Chapra railway station in his parliamentary constituency.

Lalu was here for the arrival of the Life Line Express, launched jointly by the railways and Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. He thanked Congress party president and chairperson of the foundation, Sonia Gandhi for sending the train to his constituency.

The railway minister said the Life Line Express was playing a very positive role in reaching high quality medical treatment to the poor free of cost in different states. The train would stay at

Despite red flags, Lalu gets his Bihar projects cleared: Sources

NEW DELHI — If Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav has his way, his home state Bihar is set to bag almost 45 per cent of the "New Line" railway projects likely to be announced in this year's rail budget. Sources said that "at least 10 of the 25-odd new line railway projects" Lalu is likely to read out from his budget speech on February 26 are located in Bihar.

These projects in Bihar amount to Rs40 billion. The new lines include: Sitamarhi-Jaynagar-Nirmali via Susand, Muzaffarpur-Katra-Orai-Janakpur Road, Gaya to Daltonganj and Darbhanga-Muzaffarpur. Almost all these projects have a negative rate of return prompting the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission to raise red flags. But Lalu got the decks cleared by getting them approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Thursday. Indian Railways have fixed a rate of return of 14 per cent to decide the viability of a project. A project having a negative rate of return means that the operating losses would skyrocket as and when the project is completed. Already saddled with a crammed shelf of pending projects, Railways nowadays only consider projects having a minimum 14 per cent rate of return. — By arrangement with The Indian Express

Chapra till March 3 and the doctors would conduct various pathological tests, offer medical advice and even perform surgical procedures. — PTI

Saturn to be at its brightest tomorrow

NEW DELHI — Get ready for a weekend packed with celestial activities as sky gazers can watch for Saturn being bright and close to Earth tomorrow. Look with naked eyes for the brightest object in the eastern skies one hour after sunset on February 24 and you will find Saturn glowing on the horizon. Best observation would be between (1710GMT) and (2030GMT). This celestial positioning would not be seen again till 2015. Saturn will reach the position on February 24. This means it is at its closest and brightest. This also means it will rise at sunset and set at dawn. The phenomenon would be thrilling for telescopic observers. — PTI

Newton, Hitler, Romeo — all in fray in Meghalaya polls

SHILLONG — What's in a name? Obviously a lot for the electorate of Meghalaya where assembly polls are slated for March 3. From Adolf Hitler, Admiral, Frankenstein, Romeo to Newton — the 'namegame' promises to turn the otherwise dull campaigning into a colourful one.

Not to be mistaken with the dictator, NCP's Adolf Hitler R. Marak, has thrown the gauntlet to minister Zenith Sangma in Rangsakona constituency in Garo hills.

Another NCP candidate and sitting MLA Admiral Sangma is stewarding his party's 'ship' in Dalangiri constituency in the same district.

Also in fray is UDP's Newton Marak from Rongrenggri. He will seek to attract voters to his symbol emulating his more illustrious namesake.

Another interesting name in the fray is Frankenstein Momin of Congress posing serious threat to UDP legislator BG Momin in Mendipathar seat. Apparently targeting young voters, the BJP has put up Romeo Phira Rani from Laitumkhras constituency. — PTI

INDIA

Basu to step down as PB member



KOLKATA — Veteran Marxist leader Jyoti Basu yesterday expressed his desire to step down as a member of the CPM politburo on health ground and decided not to attend the party Congress next month. Asked whether he would continue to be a PB member, 94-year-old Basu told reporters at the CPM state headquarters, "I don't wish to continue and verbally communicated this to the party leadership". Basu, who attended the CPM state secretariat meeting, said that he would not be participating in the forthcoming PB meeting in Delhi from February 25. "I will also not attend the next month's party Congress," he said. The CPM patriarch had earlier expressed similar desire, but the party did not allow him to take political sanyas considering his invaluable contribution to the party's policy making decisions, especially in times of crisis.

Ghising lost confidence: Commenting on the agitation in Darjeeling hills, Basu said that the caretaker administrator of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, Subhas Ghising had become weak and his own partymen had gone against him. He said Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was closely monitoring the situation and is in touch with Delhi so that the Sixth Schedule Bill was passed in parliament. "I hope it will be passed," Basu said and criticised the UPA government for not fulfilling the Common Minimum Programme. — PTI

Cricket auction: Sena chief wants an end to 'gambling game' of industrialists

MUMBAI — Dubbing the auctioning of cricketers by the Board of Control for Cricket in India-promoted Indian Premier League (Twenty20 cricket) as "a gambling game of industrialists" Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray yesterday asked federal minister Sharad Pawar to stop it.

In an open letter to Pawar published on the front page of yesterday's edition of Sena mouthpiece *Samana*, Thackeray said such open display of wealth does not augur well for the Indian cricket where players are being auctioned for money.

He said the whole thing has started only to checkmate Indian Cricket League (ICL), the rebel league promoted by Subhash Chandra-led Essel Group. The auction of over 60 players, including those from



ON THE OFFENSIVE: Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray

other Test playing countries, was held here on Wednesday. "Oh Pawar, what is happening in the realm of cricket?", said the Sena chief, who is the newspaper's editor.

"These industrialists are throwing money in your cricket field as a result of which cricket is getting corrupt. Cricketers are being purchased as a result their concentration will not be in the game and the sport will decline in this country," he warned. "If this is how industrialists wield their money then a day will come when there will be no need of government because it will be the industrialists who will call the shots and run the country," Thackeray said. "Stop this gambling of industrialists and save cricket. You (Pawar) have the guts to do it, don't you?", the letter added.

Migrants a nuisance for SS too: The Shiv Sena continues its flip-flop over the issue of migrants in Mumbai and Maharashtra, displaying

its apparent discomfort since breakaway leader Raj Thackeray hijacked the party's traditional pro-Marathi agenda.

Bal Thackeray also vehemently opposed the introduction of Hindi as an official language in Sena-ruled Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). In *Saamna*, Thackeray slammed the demand by some north Indian corporators to introduce Hindi as an official language.

The official language of the civic body is Marathi.

Besides, *Saamna* also published an editorial on the issue of migrants, cautioning the BMC as well as Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh to be on their guard on the issue. — PTI and by arrangement with *The Indian Express*

SC takes serious exception to Raj Thackeray's remarks

NEW DELHI — The Supreme Court yesterday took serious note of the controversial remarks of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray relating to north Indians and warned that "Balkanisation" of the country would not be allowed.

"We can understand what is happening. We will not allow/permit Balkanisation of this country," a bench headed by Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan said. Expressing displeasure over Thackeray's statements that allegedly resulted in violence and attacks against north Indians in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra, the bench said "it is a dangerous tendency."

"This is one country and we will not accept sons-of-the-soil theory," the bench, also comprising Justices R.V. Ravindran and Markandey Katju, observed. The bench, however, refused to pass any direction on two PILs relating to the issue saying since the matter primarily relates to law and order situation, it could be brought to the notice of the state government and petitioners could approach the Bombay High Court.

"It is not possible for this court to give a direction on law and order situation," the bench said and also declined to accept the contention that a direction was required to the Election Commission to derecognise MNS as a political party in view of the statements of Raj. "You have to make a representation before the Election Commission for derecognising a political party. How can this court issue mandamus when you have not gone to the EC," the bench said. The PIL filed by advocate Arvind Shukla had sought a direction to the EC to derecognise Raj Thackeray's party over his controversial remarks against north Indians. Another advocate, Rakesh Uttamchandra Upadhyay, had sought a direction to the governments to provide security to residents from other state in view of the recent attacks on north Indians. — PTI



OFFERING: Women offering prayers at Attukal Temple on the occasion of Pongala festival in Thiruvananthapuram yesterday. — PTI

Women in thousands converge on Kerala capital for Pongala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM — Thousands of women yesterday participated in the Pongala festival at the Attukal Devi temple, famed as the "Women's Sabarimala" for attracting one of world's biggest female devotional congregations. The entire city turned into a virtual sea of women since the day-break as devotees poured in from far and wide and joined the local crowd to participate in the annual ritual, which made the temple enter *Guinness Book of World Records*. The ritual started at 10am with women lighting the hearths to make the sweetened pudding (*prasadam*) of rice, coconut, fruits and spices to be offered to the presiding deity, seeking her blessings for peace and prosperity.

The temple had entered the *Guinness Book* two years ago for the unique religious event that draws over a million women on a single day. According to a local legend, Pongala is closely linked with Tamil epic *Silappadikaram*. It commemorates the hospitality accorded to Kannagi, the heroine of the epic and an enduring symbol of chastity, by women in Attukal area while she was on her way to Kodungallur near Thrissur after destroying the city of Madurai to avenge the injustice done to her husband Kovilan. Elaborate security and crowd-management arrangements have been made for the smooth conduct of the festival. — PTI

'Dr Kidney' sent to judicial custody

AMBALA — Amit Kumar, the alleged kingpin in the multi-million kidney transplant racket, was yesterday sent to judicial custody till March 7 by a CBI court here.

Kumar was produced in the court of CBI Duty Magistrate Sunita Grover amidst tight security. Media persons were not allowed inside the court premises.

CBI's Public Prosecutor A. K. Singh did not seek police custody of Kumar, who would now be lodged in the central jail here.

Defence counsel Pradeep Batra made an oral submission on behalf of the accused seeking permission to allow him to speak to his family on telephone.

The court just took note of the submission and issued no direction.

A Nepalese "agent" of Kumar has been arrested in Saptari district of eastern Nepal. Pankaj Jha, 34, was arrested on Thursday from his house at Barhibirpur village, Nepal Police spokesman Sushil Bar Singh Thapa said. Police claimed that Jha had confessed to his involvement in the kidney racket. — PTI

'Jodhaa-Akbar' banned in MP

BHOPAL — Screening of Hritik Roshan-Aishwarya Rai starrer *Jodhaa-Akbar* was banned in Madhya Pradesh yesterday after demonstrations against it by the Rajput community at cinema theatres. "The government has suspended the screening of the movie in the state with immediate effect as protests at cinema halls have posed a threat to maintenance of peace," a top official said. In his order banning the screening of the film produced by UTV Software Communications Ltd, the official said the decision was taken in accordance to provisions under the Madhya Pradesh Cinema (Regulation) Act, 1952.

A Rajput organisation has threatened to set fire to cinema halls in the state if the screening of the controversial film was not stopped immediately. Describing the depiction of the Jodhaa Bai as Akbar's wife in the Bollywood movie as an "insult" to the community, Akhil Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha has threatened to burn the movie reels and cinema halls screening the film, which has been directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. "Till now our protests

have been peaceful. We will resort to violence if our forefathers are continued to be insulted," the Mahasabha General Secretary Surendra Singh Tomar said.

Tomar had also led a delegation to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan seeking an immediate ban on the screening of the controversial film throughout the state.

Banned in Ambala: The district administration imposed a ban on the screening of *Jodhaa-Akbar*, following protests by members of the Rajput community who alleged that historical facts

had been distorted in the film. Members of the community led by Congress party leader Chetan Chauhan went on a protest march here today demanding a ban on the screening of the film.

They submitted a memorandum to DC Ambala in which they said the film had hurt the sentiments of their community stating that Jodha Bai was Akbar's daughter-in-law and not his wife, as is portrayed in the film. Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Shyn imposed the ban with immediate effect on the film which had released on February 15. — PTI

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In the **SPOTLIGHT**

ISD bids adieu to class XII students

MUSCAT — A traditional farewell ceremony 'Ashirvada Sangamam' was organised for the outgoing students of grade XII of the Indian School, Darsait (ISD). The class teachers followed by their students marched into the auditorium and took their seats.

The four class teachers S. Radhakrishnan, Shaji Unnikrishnan, Saji.S. Nair and Beena Govindraj introduced their classes to the audience.

The chief guest, George Mathew, president of School Management Committee, presented the students with scarves and mementoes.

True to the school motto, 'Lighted to Lighten', Principal Dr Ravi Warrier lit the lamps carried by the students, representing knowledge being passed on from the teacher to the taught.

It was followed by an oath, an exhortation admin-



FAREWELL: Chief guest George Mathew presenting a scarf to the head girl; and right, students carrying the lamps lit by the principal.

istered by the principal, requesting each student to uphold the value of diligence, selflessness and social service.

Students were motivated to give an assurance that they would take up responsibilities in life, perform duty with dedication and sublimation, exhibit faith, reverence, modesty and humility and treat their parents and teachers with respect and gratitude.

The Head Boy, Nidhin Raj Thomas and the Head Girl Juliana Mary Job recalled and shared their best moments that they had enjoyed in the school.

They expressed their indebtedness and gratitude to their teachers for their selfless service.

Litling songs like *Jyot se Jyot, Hum ko Mann ki Shakti* by the school choir regaled the audience and created a serene atmosphere.

Scouts & Guides founder's birth anniversary observed

MUSCAT — The Scouts, Guides and leaders observed the birthday of Lord and Lady Baden Powell, founder of the Scouting and Guiding movement on February 14 at Indian School, Darsait (ISD) organised by the Bharat Scouts and Guides, Indian schools, Sultanate of Oman.

Around 72 Scouts, 69 Guides and 38 leaders from Indian School, Muscat, Al Wadi Al Kabir, Sur, Ibra, Muladha, Omani contingent, Sri Lankan School and Indian School Darsait participated in the day's programme.

The Oman Scouts contingent and the Sri Lankan guides participated as special invitees.

The opening ceremony was inaugurated by Waleed bin Ayoub bin Al Zadjali, director of National Organisation of Scouts and Guides (NOSG) in the Sultanate of Oman who was the guest of honour.

The other guests present at the ceremony were Ainsley L. Edgar, president of Bharat Scouts and Guides; Feley Fernandez, secretary of Bharat Scouts and Guides; Vijayachandra, vice-principal of Indian School, Muscat; Dr Ravi Warrier, vice-president of the Bharat Scouts and Guides of Indian School, Sultanate of Oman and principal of Indian School, Darsait proposed the vote of thanks.



SCINTILLATING: The students of Indian School, Darsait presenting a cultural programme.

The Indian Schools Bharat Scouts and Guides conducted a painting competition and the selected paintings were sent to India for the national level painting competition in different age categories organised by the Bharat Scouts and Guides, national headquarters New Delhi.

The scouts, guides, cubs and bulbs whose paintings were selected were awarded 'Excellence in painting' souvenirs by the guest of honour. Scout masters and guide captains were honoured for

voluntary services rendered for the development of the movement of the schools were Saramma Rajan, Indian School, Salalah; Showckath Ali K, Indian School, Salalah; Shamim Minhazali Salim, Indian School, Salalah; Kirtikummar, Indian School, Al Wadi Al Kabir; Kailash Patro, Indian School, Al Wadi Al Kabir; Surendra Thakur, Indian School, Al Wadi Al Kabir; Sushil Kumar Sharma, Indian School, Al Wadi Al Kabir; and Chandrasekaran Ganapathy, Indian School,

Al Wadi Al Kabir were honoured with souvenirs and certificates.

Students from various Indian schools projected the activities of Scouts and Guides through their presentations. Cultural programmes by Sri Lankan School, Omani contingent and other schools were part of the afternoon session.

Finally, P.V. Gopinathan a senior scout master of Indian School, Darsait gave away certificates of participation to each of the members.

Spectacular show at Seeb School Annual Day

MUSCAT — The sixth Annual Day of Indian School Al Seeb was celebrated with gaiety and splendour on February 14. Enthusiastic students showcased their exemplary talents through colourful dances set to litling and melodious tunes, sensational dance-ballets and foot tapping songs.

Anil Wadhwa, Indian ambassador to the Sultanate, graced the occasion as chief guest Deepak Bradoo, president of the School Managing Committee (SMC), members of the SMC, officials of the Embassy of India, Kanaksi Khimji, Karan Asher, sheikhs of wilayat of Seeb, principals, invitees, students and parents attended in large numbers.

Bharat Scouts and Guides of ISAS presented a guard of honour to the chief guest. The Sprint Queen of the School, Mariate Chirackal, presented the chief guest a bouquet of flowers.

Earlier, Head Girl Sheen Maria James welcomed the gathering.

Principal T. Premkumar presented the annual report for the academic year 2007-08, highlighting the activities and achievements of the school. He mentioned that the students produced cent per cent result at the CBSE class X examination for the second consecutive year.

In his report, he reiterated that 'the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step' and that step has been taken boldly and confidently, which has led the school in becoming the bea-



con of learning for children in this region.

In his address, the president of the School Managing Committee, Deepak Bradoo expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said for his benevolence and noble gesture that has enabled the construction of the school in the Seeb area.

He was all praise for the support he received from the School Managing Committee members during the long cherished project that came to reality on September 30, 2007 — the inaugural day of the ISAS building.

Later, Anil Wadhwa gave away the Academic Excellence Awards and Proficiency Awards to the meritorious students. Divyasree Dinesh, who topped the class X CBSE

examination held in March 2007 was awarded the President's Gold medal and a cash award for scoring 90 and above in aggregate. She also received silver medals and cash awards for scoring the highest marks in Science and Mathematics.

Pooja Rao bagged the President's silver medal and cash award for scoring the highest marks in English. Sheen Shylanthan won the President's silver medal and cash award for scoring 98 per cent in Social Science. Thirty-six students from class 5-9 were also presented with academic proficiency awards.

In his address, Wadhwa lauded the achievements of the school in a short span of time and appreciated the efforts of school managing committee in building such a wonderful school in this

region. He also presented the principal a book and announced that he would donate 100 books to the library that will help the students to enhance their knowledge.

Anuradha Vaideswaran, a senior teacher of Kindergarten was felicitated in a special way for perfect attendance for the five consecutive years, which indeed is a remarkable display of commitment and dedication.

Sheen Maria James, Class X student, was honoured as the Best Outgoing Student of the class X batch of 2007.

The vote of thanks was proposed by the Head Boy Praneeth Chandran and the programme came to an end with singing of the school anthem written by Naushad Somjee and set to tune by Shikar Indu.

Indian School Nizwa celebrates youth festival

MUSCAT — Indian School Nizwa conducted its youth festival from February 6 to 8. It was a good function for the budding artistes of the school to showcase their talents.

The event scattered to three days with instrumental music, solo dance, mono act, antashkari, fancy dress, group dance and mime being the main ingredients to this highly spiced event. As one has truly said: 'Success lies not in the result but in the effort'.

This was clearly brought to light through the competitive spirit of the students of ISN. These were the days of fun and frolic and high velocity entertainment.

The events were monitored by eminent judges from College of Technology, Nizwa and Indian School Ibra. This was an event enjoyed thoroughly by one and all, an event which was a tremendous success due to the overall efforts of the students, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff.



PAKISTAN

A rare feat in medical history

From Arif Ali

ISLAMABAD — Doctors retrieved a male foetus from the abdomen of a two-month-old boy at the Khyber Teaching Hospital in Peshawar on Thursday, *Dawn* reported yesterday.

"This is a unique and an unexpected development. I have never heard of this in the medical history of Pakistan," said Dr Ikramuddin, a surgeon who operated on Mohammed Abbas.

The boy was brought to the hospital three weeks ago, from a village in Bajaur Agency, after suffering from bouts of vomiting and abdominal distension. A team of doctors recommended surgery, but did not operate on the baby because he was not fit for anaesthesia.

Abbas's father then took the boy to Tangi village. But the boy again suffered spells of abdominal pain.

Zairullah, the father, once again brought the boy to the Khyber Hospital, where the doctors decided to perform surgery immediately.

Soon after the operation began, the surgeons found a developed chest, abdomen, upper and lower limbs. However, the brain had not formed yet.

"We know of eight such cases across the world, but it is definitively a first in Pakistan," Dr Ikramuddin was quoted by the daily as saying.

The father was in a thankful mood. "I am extremely surprised, but happy that my son is showing signs of improvement after surgery," said Zairullah, who had his left leg amputated at Lahore's Shaukat Khan Hospital six months ago.

The baby is still weak and receiving blood transfusions as well as antibiotics.

Dr Ikram said the 'other baby' was attached to the 'mesentery of (Abbas's) small intestine through a pedicle supplying blood."

Routed PML-Q to take stock

ISLAMABAD — Musharraf-backed former ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q president Shujaat Hussain has convened a meeting of party leaders in Islamabad over the weekend to discuss the election debacle and the current political situation.

A party source said here on Thursday that the main purpose of the meeting of PML-Q leaders convened by the party chief was to take defeated and successful party candidates into confidence on the party's line of future action.

The sources said that at least nine newly elected lawmakers of the PML-Q were planning to join rival Pakistan Muslim League-N of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The sources said that most leaders of the party were not happy over the nomination of Hussain's cousin Parvez Elahi for the post of prime minister.

The sources said that a former chief minister of Punjab and head of his own faction of the PML, Manzoor Wattoo, who has been re-elected to the national assembly, was likely to revive his own faction.

— *Internews*

Prime minister's mantle may fall on Fahim

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's two biggest opposition parties sought to thrash out their choice for premier yesterday after agreeing to form a coalition government that could drive President Pervez Musharraf from power.

Ex-premier Nawaz Sharif and the widowed husband of slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto said their parties, once bitter rivals, would join forces after trouncing Musharraf's allies in elections earlier in the week.

Officials from both parties said the frontrunner to be prime minister was Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the widely respected vice-president of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

A senior PPP official said Benazir's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, and Sharif "discussed the name of Makhdoom Amin Fahim as the future premier" during their meeting late on Thursday.

"It is expected that he will get his party's nomination today," the party official said.

The proposed alliance between the parties brings them nearer the two-thirds majority they would need to seek Musharraf's impeachment, leaving the US ally in the most precarious position since he seized power in a 1999 coup.

Musharraf vowed in an opinion article for the *Washington Post* to work with the new parliament to tackle the three key tasks he said were facing Pakistan: defeating terrorism; forging a stable government; and creating the foundation for sustained economic growth.

"Because these goals are shared by the vast majority of Pakistanis, I am certain we can and will accomplish them, and I stand ready to work with the newly elected parliament to achieve these objectives," he wrote.

All the PPP's members of



AGGRIEVED: Former premier Nawaz Sharif, right, and his brother Shahbaz Sharif, left, leaving for Mansehra to condole the death of the mother of their son-in-law, in Islamabad yesterday. — *AFP*

parliament were gathering yesterday in Islamabad to discuss the agreement between Zardari and Sharif, party spokesman Farhatullah Babar said. Neither Zardari nor Sharif are immediately eligible to be premier because they are not MPs — Sharif was barred from standing, and Benazir's husband did not do so because his wife was still alive when nomination papers were filed.

Benazir, whose party will be the biggest in parliament following the general elections on Monday, was assassinated in a suicide attack at a political rally in December.

Either of the men could

still contest upcoming by-elections for seats left vacant by candidates who stood — and won — in two constituencies at the same time.

Fahim stood against Musharraf in October's presidential election but later withdrew, protesting that Musharraf was not eligible to contest because he was still army chief at the time.

Musharraf, still seen in Washington as a bulwark against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, resigned as head of the military in November after winning a second five-year term as president.

Another name under consideration to be PM is senior

PPP member Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the official said.

But there remain questions over whether their coalition will press for the former general's immediate ouster from office, and whether they will seek to restore Pakistan's deposed chief justice.

"The people gave a clear verdict on February 18, which shows that they do not want Musharraf," Sharif said yesterday, but he skirted round the issue of whether the coalition would go for impeachment.

The PPP's Babar for his part said the matter "will be taken up by the next parliament. It is premature to talk

about it now." The announcement by Zardari and Sharif of a coalition came after reported efforts by Musharraf to get Zardari to form a coalition with his allies.

Sharif said on Thursday that they had overcome differences over his demands for the immediate restoration of chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhary, who was sacked by Musharraf in November, and would work on it in parliament. If Chaudhary, who remains under house arrest, gets his job back, he could overturn Musharraf's controversial presidential election victory and oust him from office. — *AFP*

Decades of enmity could hobble coalition

ISLAMABAD — After two decades of bickering and ousting each other, the parties of Pakistan's slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif now face a struggle to work together in their newly-formed coalition, analysts say.

Benazir's widowed husband Asif Ali Zardari spent a total of 11 years in prison under previous Sharif administrations but he sat side-by-side with his former rival on Thursday night and announced they would join forces.

Their groupings, Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) emerged the winners after trouncing President Pervez Musharraf's allies in Monday's parliamentary elections. Observers say their coalition government could drive Musharraf from power. But first it has to stay together. Shafiqat Mahmood, a political commentator and newspaper columnist, said the confrontation in the 1990s between the Bhuttos and Sharif "was very sharp, akin to warfare". Both sides conspired with anti-democratic forces to bring each other's regimes down, he said.

"Hopefully they will not do it now and they have learned a lesson from it," Mahmood said.

Enmity between the two sides goes back decades because Benazir's father, the late premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, nationalised the industries of Sharif's father.

As a result, late military dictator Ziaul Haq — who had Zulfikar Bhutto executed in 1977 — handpicked Sharif as the youngest-ever finance minister of Punjab province in 1981. Sharif won elections for prime minister after Benazir Bhutto's dismissal from the post in 1990. Zardari was then arrested and spent three years in jail on corruption allegations — until Sharif himself was sacked on corruption charges.

Sharif bounced back to the premiership in 1996 after the then-president dismissed Benazir as prime minister for a second time. Zardari was arrested before elections, which Sharif won. He levelled charges of corruption against Benazir and Zardari, who remained in jail until 2004 when Musharraf released him. Benazir fled abroad and both were convicted in absentia in 1999 before Musharraf overthrew Sharif in a counter-coup.

Benazir's death last December in a gun and suicide attack at a campaign rally overshadowed the election campaign.

After years of animosity the first signs of cooperation between the two camps — who were both in exile — emerged in 2006 when they signed a Charter of Democracy.

It pledged to restore democracy to Pakistan, to avoid confrontation, and to abolish the military's role in politics.

— *AFP*

Roadside blast kills 13 in Swat

ISLAMABAD — A roadside bomb ripped through a vehicle carrying a wedding party in Pakistan's northwestern valley of Swat yesterday, killing 13 people, police and officials said.

The vehicle was passing through Matta town when it was hit by a bomb north of Mingora, the main town in Swat valley, where security forces have been battling militants for months, police official, Humayun Khan said.

"We have reports that eight people have been killed and four women and children have been wounded." Hundreds of people have been killed in rebel-related violence, which intensified after the army stormed Islamabad's Red Mosque to crush an armed student movement in July last year. — *Reuters*

Polls raise hopes of peace with India

WAGAH — Every evening as dusk falls on the India-Pakistan border post near Lahore, crowds gather on either side of the frontier and scream slogans at each other in a choreographed show of bravado.

"Long Live Pakistan!" some shout from the stands as patriotic music blasts through a stadium. Similar cries ring out from India, while men on both sides frantically wave flags, trying to outdo each other in nationalistic fervour.

Immaculately dressed soldiers then lower both national flags, marking the closure of the border between two countries who have been at odds since independence from Britain and partition in 1947. India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two over the disputed territory of Kashmir. The countries came to the brink of war again in the aftermath of a deadly attack on India's parliament in December 2001, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

India snapped diplomatic, transport and trade links but in January 2004 the two countries agreed to a peace process which has struggled along since.

Many people who rely on the border crossing here hope that the new Pakistani government voted in Monday's elections would speed up thawing relations between the historic rivals.

India on Wednesday welcomed the elections in Pakistan and said it hoped to see fresh talks with its nuclear-armed south Asian rival.

"If there is a real democracy then there will be a good relationship between India and Pakistan," said Mohammed Munshi, a 57-year-old Pakistani porter with a long salt-and-pepper beard and blue robes who survives on tips.

"We will earn more money, the labourers will be more prosperous if there is no activity then we will be earning nothing," he said.

The border town of Wagah has seen many benefits as a result of the peace process between the two nations.

Labourers load brightly coloured trucks with tomatoes coming from India, while dried fruit from Afghanistan heads in the other direction. Trucks have only recently been allowed to cross onto Pakistani soil. So-called "friendship buses" also shuttle between New Delhi and Lahore three times a week, carrying about 45 people, said Shuja Haider Kazmi, superintendent at the brand new customs building at Wagah. The south Asian neighbours launched the link in 1999. It was suspended following the raid on India's parliament in 2001, but restored in 2003 when relations improved.

That India-Pakistan relations barely featured in Pakistan's fierce election campaign shows how much the situation has improved.

"By the passage of time, it has helped us realise we can have dialogue in a friendly way, not with guns," said Kazmi.

Monday's election saw the party of slain former prime minister Benazir Bhutto win the most seats in the National Assembly, followed by two-time former premier Nawaz Sharif's outfit. Both beat the party loyal to President Pervez Musharraf, the former general who seized power in a 1999 coup.

"The army... they know if there is friendship, their importance will be lesser," Kazmi said, referring to the Indian and Pakistani Armed Forces. "If there is a political government, we expect there will be better relations."

International relations professor Ishtiaq Ahmed, from Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University, said that although Musharraf has advanced ties, a democratic government would be more dedicated to success. — *AFP*

Deposed top judge threatens to set up court on the streets

ISLAMABAD — "The moment I am free I will march to my office in the Supreme Court of Pakistan and assume my job," a confident Iftikhar Chaudhary says, insisting that he is still the constitutional and legal chief justice of Pakistan and that Musharraf sacking him and 60 other judges was illegal.



DEFIANT: Iftikhar Chaudhary

In an interview to daily *The News* published here on Thursday, Chaudhary warned that if restricted, he would hold his court on the streets or on some open field along with other judges of the Supreme Court, who had refused to take oath under the PCO, the oath of allegiance to Musharraf, on and after last November 3 when the army chief imposed a state of emergency.

Chaudhary said that nothing constitutional and legal but only his illegal house arrest had barred him from attending office. "As

soon as I am free, I will go to my office of the chief justice of Pakistan."

He categorically said that he would not accept any condition attached to his release from the illegal confinement, which started on November 3, 2007 and was still continuing amid reports that the government was considering freeing him if he restricted himself from going to the Supreme Court.

Rejecting any condition

attached to his freedom, he said: "If today I, being the chief justice of Pakistan, bound myself to the unconstitutional orders of the chief of the army staff, then tomorrow an inspector-general of police might come up with his own constitutional amendments and order the arrest of any future chief justice of Pakistan."

He said after his release, he would go the Supreme Court and his brother judges who did not take oath under the PCO would accompany him.

Simultaneously, Chaudhary said the deposed judges of the high courts would also go to their respective high courts. He disclosed that he was in contact with his brother judges.

Referring to his illegal detention, that of his family and his brother judges, he wondered if the top judges in any country had been

treated in this manner anywhere in the world. He said such actions could not be accepted.

Undeterred by the harshness of his and his family's illegal detention of now over 110 days, Chaudhary said the November 3 order of the seven-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by him, had already declared the PCO unconstitutional and had also restored the judges of the superior judiciary from taking oath under the PCO.

He said neither could the army chief amend the constitution nor could he sack any judge.

Chaudhary said the whole nation demanded restoration of the pre-November 3 judiciary as had been proven in the February 18 elections. He declared that the future of the country could only be secured by constitutional rule and through institution building. — *Internews*

Restoring sacked judges a litmus test for PPP

ISLAMABAD — Slain former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party has emerged as the largest party in the National Assembly after this week's parliamentary elections but is faced with a major dilemma: restoration of 60 judges controversially sacked by President Pervez Musharraf. The party, led now by co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, can make history by joining hands with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N for the restoration of supreme and high court judges as has been mandated by two-thirds of the vote in favour of this issue. However, the PPP may be reluctant to do this in favour of cohabiting with Musharraf who as president is opposed to restoration of the judges and wields the power to sack the government and dissolve parliament. Musharraf, as serving army chief on November 3, 2007, had sacked more than 60 judges of the superior courts who had refused to take fresh oath under the controversial Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) that effected a state of emergency. "The choice is with the PPP whether to join the democratic forces or to save the sinking ship of the incumbent ruler," an independent analyst said. But the PPP leaders do not see any possibility of joining hands with the pro-Musharraf forces to establish a PPP government at the centre.

It is not possible for any one to blackmail the PPP and the party is unlikely to team up with pro-Musharraf forces to form a government, sources within the PPP say. — *Internews*

Vote could curtail US drone attacks

By Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — American officials reached a quiet understanding with Pakistan's leader last month to intensify secret strikes against suspected terrorists by pilot-less aircraft launched inside Pakistan, senior officials in both governments say. But the prospect of changes in Pakistan's government has the Bush administration worried that the new operations could be curtailed.

Among other things, the new arrangements allowed an increase in the number and scope of patrols and strikes by armed Predator surveillance aircraft launched from a secret base inside Pakistan — a far more aggressive strategy to attack Al Qaeda and the Taliban than had existed before.

But since opposition parties emerged victorious from the parliamentary election early this week, American officials are worried that the new, more permissive arrangement could be

choked off in its infancy.

In the weeks before Monday's election, a series of meetings among President Bush's national security advisers resulted in a significant relaxation of the rules under which American forces could aim attacks at suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in the tribal areas near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. The change, described by senior American and Pakistani officials who would not speak for attribution because of the classified nature of the programme, allows American military commanders greater leeway to choose from what one official who took part in the debate called "a Chinese menu" of attack options.

Instead of having to confirm the identity of a suspected militant leader before attacking, this shift allowed American operators to strike convoys of vehicles that bear the characteristics of Al Qaeda or Taliban leaders on the run, for instance, so long as the risk of civilian casualties is judged to be low.

The new, looser rules of engagement may

have their biggest impact at a secret CIA base in Pakistan whose existence was described by American and Pakistani officials who had previously kept it secret to avoid embarrassing President Pervez Musharraf politically. Musharraf, whose party lost in this week's election by margins that surprised American officials, has been accused by political rivals of being too close to the United States.

The base in Pakistan is home to a handful of Predators — pilot-less aircraft that are controlled from the United States. Two Hellfire missiles from one of those Predators are believed to have killed a senior Al Qaeda commander, Abu Laith Al Libbi, in northwest Pakistan last month, though a senior Pakistani official said his government had still not confirmed that Libbi was among the dead. A CIA spokesman declined on Thursday to comment on any operations in Pakistan.

The new agreements with Pakistan came after a trip to the country on January 9 by Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence,

and General Michael V. Hayden, the CIA director. The American officials met with Musharraf as well as with the new army chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and offered a range of increased covert operations aimed at thwarting intensifying efforts by Al Qaeda and the Taliban to destabilise the Pakistani government. But Bush administration officials and American counter-terrorism experts are expressing concern that these arrangements could come under review or be scaled back by the winners of Pakistan's parliamentary elections. The two winning parties have said they want to enter talks with Pashtun tribal leaders who opposed Musharraf's government and who at times have supported the Taliban and given refuge to foreign Al Qaeda fighters.

"A new government may be able to reach an accord with the militants, and that would buy the government a certain respite," said Robert L. Grenier, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency's Counter-terrorism Centre.

AMERICAS

Obama escapes unscathed from key Hillary debate

AUSTIN (Texas) — Barack Obama escaped unscathed from a key debate which Democratic foe Hillary Clinton hoped to use to slow his surging White House quest, 12 days before their next electoral showdown.

On another day of high drama in the relentless 2008 election, presumptive Republican nominee John McCain meanwhile was forced to deny he had an extra-marital affair after a report linked him to a female lobbyist.

Senator Hillary needed a game-changing moment at Thursday night's debate at the University of Texas, as new polls showed her rival slashing her leads in her must-win fortress states of Texas and Ohio, which vote on March 4.

Obama meanwhile avoided serious gaffes, fought back against her claims that some of his soaring oratory was plagiarised, and suggested her vote to authorise war in Iraq sparked questions about her leadership skills.

"If your candidacy is going to be about words, then they should be your own words. That's, I think, a very simple proposition," Hillary said, drawing cheers and some jeers from the audience at the University of Texas.

"Lifting whole passages from someone else's speeches is not change you can believe in, it's change you can Xerox," the New York senator said, ripping off her rival's campaign slogan.

But Obama rejected accusations that he had stolen language from Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick as "silly season" politics and in a cheeky quip defended his



speeches: "I've got to admit, some of them are pretty good."

In her strongest moments, Hillary scored points on her signature issue of healthcare, and at the end of the encounter gave an emotion-tipped answer on her greatest personal challenges.

"I just have to shake my head in wonderment, because with all of the challenges that I've had, they are nothing compared to what I see happening in the lives of Americans every single day," she said, telling of her visit to wounded servicemen at a new hospital.

And in a generous tribute to the man who is threatening to sink her hopes of becoming the first woman president, Hillary said: "You know, no matter what happens in this contest, ... I am honoured to be here with Barack Obama. I

am absolutely honoured," she said, and reached out to shake her rival's hand.

Even Hillary's husband, former president Bill Clinton, admits she must win Texas and Ohio to keep her quest alive, as she trails Obama in the party's nominating delegates with more than half of state contests behind them.

But hours before the Democratic debate, there was more woe for Hillary, with new polls by the *Washington Post* and *ABC News* showing she and Obama tied in Texas and her lead down to seven points in Ohio.

Matthew Dowd, a former adviser to President George W. Bush who saw the debate, said Hillary failed to provide the kind of showstopper moment she needs to halt Obama's winning streak of 11 victories since Super Tuesday.

And a fresh controversy surrounding McCain will make it harder for her to grab the public's attention in critical days leading up to March 4, he said.

"Every day that the news is being dominated by John McCain's troubles is a bad day for Hillary Clinton," Dowd said. "And every day that's a bad day for Hillary is a good day for Barack Obama." The story about McCain's alleged links to 40-year-old lobbyist, Vicki Iseman, when he last ran for president eight years ago, landed like a bombshell in the Republican race. With his wife Cindy standing by him, the 71-year-old Arizona senator rebutted the suggestion of a romantic liaison with Iseman in a hastily called press conference following the publication of a *New York Times* article. — AFP

46 killed in Venezuela plane crash

BARINAS (Venezuela) — A Venezuelan passenger plane slammed into a steep Andean mountainside shortly after takeoff from a nearby tourist city and all 46 people on board were killed, rescue officials said yesterday.

Search teams spotted the wreckage from a helicopter flying over high-altitude mountains. Helicopter pilot Johnny Paz said the plane was "pulverised" and there were no survivors.

"There is minimal chance of any survivors," said Gerardo Rojas, a regional civil defence chief. "The plane is just too destroyed and it is in such a tough area."

The twin-engine plane crashed just a few kilometres from the mountain tourist city of Merida, notoriously difficult for pilots to navigate around, after taking off for the capital Caracas on Thursday evening.

Recovery of the bodies and wreckage would be difficult because there were no obvious areas for aircraft to land nearby in the rugged terrain.

"The zone is completely inaccessible," said Ivan Altuve, a search team coordinator working from the city of Barinas in western Venezuela.

Search teams had trekked overnight through rugged terrain and at daylight on Friday aircraft scoured the Andes.

There was no evidence the pilot made distress calls to air traffic controllers before it crashed about 13,000 feet (4,000 metres) above sea level, officials said.

Mountain villagers reported hearing a huge noise they thought could be a crash soon after the disappearance of flight 518, local civil defence official Gerardo Rojas said. — Reuters

Snubs and omissions taint Oscar foreign film award

LOS ANGELES — No matter which movie wins the Oscar for best foreign language film tomorrow, critics and fans may remember this year for work that was snubbed or disqualified by Academy Award voters.

The film industry has expanded rapidly around the world in recent years and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences's foreign film honour has grown increasingly important as a platform where filmmakers can launch careers. But this year, several acclaimed films in world cinema failed to earn nominations, causing some critics to cry foul.

The most conspicuous absence is Romanian abortion drama *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* which Scott Foundas, film editor for the *LA Weekly* newspaper, called "the foreign film of the year by unanimous acclaim." It won top honours at the Cannes Film

Festival in May and numerous critics awards.

"It taints the whole race so that no matter who wins, people will always wonder 'What if *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* or *Persepolis* or other noteworthy omissions had been in the race?'" Foundas said.

Like *4 Months*, France's coming-of-age tale *Persepolis* didn't even make the shortlist of contenders from the record 63 submissions around the world. It was, however, nominated for best animated picture.

Perhaps the most controversial absence involved the disqualification of Israel's *The Band's Visit* because more than 50 per cent of the dialogue between an Egyptian band and Israeli villagers is in English, albeit mostly broken English.

The five films that did earn nominations were *The Counterfeiters* from Austria,

Israel's *Beaufort*, Russia's *12*, Poland's *Katyn* and Kazakhstan's *Mongol*.

"There is a consensus that this is an embarrassing selection and it exposed the category as by far the most problematic one the Academy has," said Robert Koehler, a film critic for show business newspaper *Variety*.

All week long, the nominated directors — in town before tomorrow's ceremony — have fielded uncomfortable questions about how their movies stack up to those snubbed and they point out that most have been successful in their countries with themes that resonate within their societies. *Beaufort* looks at the last soldiers retreating in 2001 from a famous fort in Lebanon captured by Israel in 1982 and the futility of their mission. Filming wrapped weeks before the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war erupted. — Reuters

Jennifer Lopez delivers twins



DOUBLE DELIGHT: Jennifer Lopez with Marc Anthony in a file photo.

LOS ANGELES — Jennifer Lopez and husband Marc Anthony became the parents of twins early yesterday in a New York-area hospital, according to *People* magazine, which reportedly paid upward of \$6 million for the photo rights.

The boy and girl, delivered in a Long Island, New York, hospital, were the first for the 38-year-old actress and singer, whose efforts to become pregnant have filled tabloid pages in the past few years. Anthony, a 39-year-old salsa singer, has a daughter and two sons from two previous relationships. Lopez did not confirm her much-rumoured pregnancy until early November, when she announced the news to a Miami audience while on a concert tour with her husband. — Reuters

THE UNITED KINGDOM

5 members named to climate panel

LONDON — The British government yesterday named the first five members of the climate change committee that will be created to monitor carbon cut progress when the Climate Change Bill becomes law later this year. Environment Secretary Hilary Benn, who has already named Adair Turner to head the committee, said scientists Brian Hoskins and Robert May, technologist Jim Skea and economists Sam Fankhauser and Michael Grubb would make up the new committee. The climate change bill will set a legally-binding target of a 60 per cent cut from 1990 levels in national carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 with an interim target of 26-32 per cent by 2020. It is expected to become law within three months.

"The committee will be a fundamental pillar of the way we tackle climate change from now until 2050," said Benn.

"The founding members of the committee are leading experts in their fields, and they will make a vital contribution in our efforts to build a low carbon Britain."

Benn said earlier this week he would ask the committee to review the 60 per cent target by the end of the year and recommend whether it should be raised to the 80 per cent demanded by environmentalists. The government has been under relentless pressure both to raise the core target and to set annual reduction targets rather than the more vague rolling five-year carbon budgets.

Proposing several amendments to the bill as it heads through the parliamentary process, Benn said on Monday the rolling budgets would remain but there would also be indicative annual ranges within them to make monitoring more meaningful. — Reuters



BIRTHDAY BOY: Veteran British television entertainer Bruce Forsyth, centre, celebrating his 80th birthday with Miss Puerto Rico Jennifer Guevara, left, and Miss England Georgia Horsley at a press conference in Dorchester Hotel, London, yesterday. — AFP

Govt admits to letting US use territory for 'torture' flights

By Colin Brown
The Independent

LONDON — A British territory in the Indian Ocean was used for American "torture" flights, despite categorical denials of Britain's involvement from both Tony Blair and Jack Straw, the government has admitted.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband had to make a humiliating apology to the Commons after it emerged that the US failed to tell British officials that two CIA rendition flights carrying suspected terrorists landed on the island of Diego Garcia in 2002. Six years on, one of the suspects is still being held by the US at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The other has been released.

Miliband denied there was a deliberate cover-up and said he believed the US had acted "in good faith". However, Gordon Brown, attending an

EU summit in Brussels, expressed his "disappointment" and said Washington's failure to disclose the flights earlier was "a very serious issue".

"The US has expressed regret that it did not admit at the time to these renditions through Diego Garcia," he added. "We have to assure ourselves these procedures will never happen again."

America has used rendition flights to interrogate terror suspects in particular since the attacks of 11 September 2001. The two flights which have now come to light, following an audit by officials in Washington, stopped to refuel on Diego Garcia on their way to Guantanamo Bay.

Miliband said he was "very sorry indeed" to have to correct previous statements made by the then Prime Minister Blair and Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that ren-

dition flights had not used British bases. He said the Diego Garcia cases had not come to light earlier because of an error in a previous US records search. "The House and the Government will share deep disappointment at this news and about its late emergence," he added. "That disappointment is shared by our US allies. They recognise the absolute imperative for the government to provide accurate information to parliament."

Miliband said each case involved a single detainee — neither of them British — who did not leave the aircraft while it was on the ground. He told MPs that neither suspect was subject to torture by "water-boarding". Nevertheless, he said he had told officials to draw up a list of all flights about which concerns had been expressed regarding the use of UK territory.

In future, he added, Britain would approve CIA rendition flights through British bases only if the government was satisfied they complied with British laws and the UK's international obligations, including those under the UN Convention Against Torture.

Human rights activists voiced concern that the two cases which had been identified might only be the "tip of the iceberg". Kate Allen, of Amnesty International UK, said: "It is not enough for the government simply to accept US assurances on correct behaviour in the war on terror. We should retain our own integrity and act accordingly."

As recently as January 2007, Blair assured the Intelligence and Security Committee he was satisfied that the US had at no time since 9/11 rendered an individual through the UK or its overseas territories.

Books shortlisted for the oddest title prize grab attention

LONDON — They may not leap off the shelves into the best-seller category, but the books shortlisted for the oddest book title prize certainly grab the attention.

I was Tortured by the Pygmy Love Queen recounts the tale of a fictional US World War II fighter pilot who is captured by jungle pygmies led by a sadistic woman.

Its sequel, which is not on the shortlist released by trade publication *The Bookseller* yesterday, needs no explanation: *Go Ahead, Woman, Do Your Worst*. — Reuters

Tories accuse Straw of giving criminals a break

LONDON — Justice Secretary Jack Straw was accused of "giving criminals a break" yesterday after he urged magistrates to jail fewer criminals to help ease chronic prison overcrowding.

Conservative Shadow Justice Secretary Nick Herbert said it was a panic measure that highlighted the government's chronic mismanagement of the prison system. "Victims of crime will be outraged at the suggestion that criminals should be spared jail simply because of this government's incompetence in failing to provide sufficient prison places," he said.

"The prisons are literally full, but instead of doing its duty and securing emergency capacity to protect the public, the government's response is to give criminals a break."

With the prison population at a record high, Straw said non-custodial sentences can be more effective than short jail terms for some offenders. — Reuters

"We have 350 magistrates courts in England and Wales. If each one ends up sentencing one more extra prisoner a week to jail then we have got the increase we face," Straw said in an interview published in yesterday's *Guardian*.

"There are effective alternatives in terms of non-custodial penalties which actually have a better record in terms of preventing reoffending than short prison sentences." There are 82,000 inmates in prisons in England and Wales, fuelled by a rise of more than 2,000 since Christmas, he added. The rise was due to more adult men being sent to prison by magistrates and a rise in the number of ex-prisoners being sent back to jail for breaking the terms of their release. Some prisons house three inmates in each cell designed for one person, he added.

Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owens called last month for a public inquiry into penal policy. — Reuters

Killer of 5 women gets life without remission

LONDON — A married British man who murdered five young women in 2006 was sentenced yesterday to life in jail without the chance of remission.

Forklift truck driver Steve Wright, 49, asphyxiated the women, all drug addicts aged under 30 who worked as prostitutes in the town of Ipswich, northeast of London.

Wright, who had sex with four of the five women, left two of the bodies in a crucifix position with arms outstretched.

"It is right you should spend your whole life in prison," judge Peter Gross told Ipswich Crown Court. — Reuters

Chef found guilty of model's murder

By Andrew Hough

LONDON — A chef was found guilty yesterday of murdering aspiring model Sally Anne Bowman, despite his claims that he did not kill her but instead had had sex with her dead body.

Such was the brutal nature of the crime, police fear her killer, Mark Dixie, 37, has murdered before, possibly in Australia where he lived for most of the 1990s.

The verdict, which was met by cheers from Bowman's family, came after the jury had spent less than a day deliberating.

Sentence will be delivered by Judge Gerald Gordon later yesterday at the Old Bailey.

Dixie, who has previous convictions for a string of sex crimes, had claimed he "took advantage of the situation" after discovering the 18-year-old's dead body in the street in Croydon, south of London, in September 2005.

Bowman was stabbed outside her home

in Blenheim Crescent at about 4am, shortly after being dropped off by her boyfriend Lewis Sproston, a 22-year-old plasterer who himself spent three days in custody on suspicion of the killing.

In a defence labelled by prosecutors as "desperate," Dixie told the jury he had stumbled on the blonde's naked corpse by chance as he staggered home drunk and high on cocaine after celebrating his birthday.

He claimed he did not realise she was dead until after he stopped having sex with her.

Bowman, who was working as a hair-dresser and part-time model at the time of her death, was discovered by a neighbour.

DNA tests on semen linked Dixie with her dead body, which was found with stab wounds in the neck and abdomen.

His DNA had been taken after he was arrested in a pub fight in Surrey in June 2006. When the match was made, he was arrested within five hours, police sources said.

THE PHILIPPINES

Manila rice plea a wake-up call

MANILA — The Philippines' unusual plea for Hanoi to guarantee rice supplies is the clearest sign of a growing global anxiety over how nations will feed their people.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had contacted Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to see if he could pledge an undisclosed supply of rice, officials said on Thursday, an exceptional move in a market that normally operates on a purely commercial basis among traders or state procurement agencies.

It was not the first time an Asian government has taken action in the face of soaring grain prices and growing fears over the security of food supplies. India has restricted some rice exports, Indonesia has raised taxes on palm oil shipments and Malaysia is building up stocks. But Gloria appears to be the first to take an overtly political route to allay fears that the Philippines, whose rapidly expanding population is among the most dependent on imports, could run short of its staple national food.

'When you have a president calling a prime minister asking him to guarantee rice supplies a crisis is a possibility, that's for sure,'
— Robert Zeigler

"This is a wake-up call," Robert Zeigler, director-general of the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), said yesterday. "We have a crisis brewing in terms of rice supply." Nearly half the planet's 6.6 billion people depend on rice to survive but rising populations and economic growth mean that the world is already eating more of the grain than is harvested. Vietnam, the world's second-biggest exporter, has put a temporary ban on shipments to meet domestic demand between harvests. World stocks of the grain are currently around 72 million tonnes, their lowest levels since the early- to mid-1970s when food shortages triggered a devastating famine in Bangladesh.

Zeigler said other importing nations in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia could also be at risk and as soon as this year.

"When you have a president calling a prime minister asking them to guarantee rice supplies it's a possibility, that's for sure," said Zeigler. Bangladesh is currently scrambling to secure supplies of rice after a devastating cyclone last year washed away about 1 million tonnes of the grain. The rising price of food has triggered protests in Indonesia and Jakarta is having to hike its food subsidy bill by over a third to around 9 trillion rupiah this year, partly due to climbing prices. China, a net exporter of corn, rice and wheat in 2007, has removed import taxes, raised export taxes and imposed export quotas on grains and flour due to red-hot inflation.

No relief in sight

Average rice prices have nearly doubled to around \$393 per tonne in the past five years but yields are plateauing as rapid urbanisation shrinks available farmland and diverts water and labour away from production. Meanwhile soaring grains prices are also driving up competition for arable land. — Reuters



GUARD OF HONOUR: President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo reviewing the honour guard at the military headquarters in Manila yesterday, at the commemoration of the 22nd anniversary of the People Power revolution that toppled the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. — Reuters

Generals: Keep troops out of scandal

MANILA — The Philippines' top two generals told opposition groups yesterday to stop asking soldiers to join calls for the overthrow of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo amid a corruption scandal.

"Do not ask us to intervene," General Hermogenes Esperon, the country's military chief, said. "The more the military intervenes, the more the country's democratic institutions become weak."

Lieutenant-General Alexander Yano, the head of the army who will succeed Esperon as military chief in May, echoed Esperon's call. "We can't just intervene every time there's a political problem," he said. Civil society groups

backed by some Catholic bishops, students and some members of the business community, have been calling for Gloria to quit after allegations of \$130 million worth of kickbacks in a state telecoms deal with China's ZTE.

Political analysts, however, say Gloria's position is secure because the powerful Catholic Church has failed to come out directly against her and she enjoys the support of the military, whose top brass often get government jobs upon retirement. The army has played key roles in the overthrow of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and former president Joseph Estrada in 2001 but rogue officers have also mounted over a dozen failed coup bids, including

three against Gloria.

Yesterday, former president Fidel Ramos slammed official corruption in the Philippines but like his predecessor Corazon Aquino stopped short of directly criticising Gloria, whose final term runs out in 2010.

"History might yet call us to come together again — to offer our lives and fortunes on the altar of our civil leaders," Ramos said in a wreath-laying ceremony at Manila's Heroes Cemetery ahead of the anniversary of Marcos' overthrow on Monday.

Anti-Arroyo groups are planning to hold demonstrations on Monday and next Friday and organisers hope that a slow-burn campaign, including prayer rallies and

teach-ins at universities, will encourage bigger numbers to take to the streets.

Around 10,000 people protested against Gloria last week, the biggest demonstration since 2005 when tens of thousands rallied against her amid allegations she cheated in 2004 elections.

But the crowds are still a fraction of the hundreds of thousands that marched against Estrada and the 1 million who famously stopped Marcos' tanks in their tracks.

Although a massive turnout is not expected next week, Esperon has still ordered additional forces to the capital, including four armoured vehicles and 1,500 troops, to beef up security. — Reuters

1986 Revolution anniversary: Aquino, Ramos go separate ways

From Our Correspondent

MANILA — Two major players in the 1986 People Power Revolution that ended the era of Marcos dictatorship will go separate ways during Monday's 22nd anniversary celebration of the historic event.

Former president Fidel Ramos will attend the mass at the EDSA shrine organised by Malacanang Palace while former president Corazon Aquino will lead in a thanksgiving mass at Sto. Domingo Church in Quezon City. Both have been invited by Malacanang to attend the activity in EDSA.

Ed Malay, Ramos' media consultant, said there was no reason why Ramos would not attend the event in EDSA since "Ramos is for the status quo." Malay was referring to Ramos' repeated declarations that that he was still supporting President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo despite the ZTE contract scandal "in the absence of a better alternative."

Gloria, whose political party KAMPI is expected to coalesce with the ruling Lakas party for the 2010 presidential election, is Lakas chair while Ramos is chair emeritus.

Ramos earlier said the "communal action" and street marches in the search of the truth behind the scapped ZTE deal with China would not be enough to spark another people power revolution.

On the other hand, Aquino, hailed as an icon of Philippine democracy, will attend the mass with Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay and other key opposition figures who were invited to grace the affair. Senate star witness in the ongoing national broadband network scandal Rodolfo Lozada Jr. is also expected to attend.

Floods, landslides leave 21 dead

MANILA — At least 21 people have been killed and more than 294,000 displaced by floods and landslides in the central and southern Philippines, relief officials said yesterday.

The civil defence office and the local Red Cross reported 15 dead and four missing in the central islands and the Bicol peninsula, southeast of Manila.

Another six people died in the southern island of Mindanao after heavy rains lashed the area this week.

Most of the dead in the central islands were drowned by flash-floods while those in Mindanao were killed by a landslide, the civil defence office said. It said in a statement that it would also conduct an aerial survey of the affected areas to determine the extent of flooding and landslides. A military C-130 flew to the central island of Samar, which bore the brunt of the storms, to deliver relief goods, the office added. The Red Cross, the social welfare department and other relief agencies are also distributing food and relief goods in other affected areas. — AFP

Outlook dims amid political unrest

MANILA — Business confidence in the Philippines has suffered a knock due to growing political unrest and an economic slowdown in the United States, according to a central bank industry survey released yesterday.

Firms cited "local political noise", concerns over a possible US recession, reduced export competitiveness due to the strong peso, and a relentless surge in oil prices, for their "cautious outlook," the monetary authority said in a statement.

The first quarter survey was made as President Gloria Arroyo tries to fight off fresh corruption allegations following a robust 2007 that saw economic growth reach a 31-year high 7.3 per cent, a 20-year low inflation rate of 2.8 per cent and the lowest budget deficit in 10 years. — AFP

ASIA



PATROL: Sri Lankan police Special Task Force (STF) motorcycle unit commandos patrolling a street outside a school in Colombo yesterday as part of tightened security following fears of Tamil rebel attacks targeting schoolchildren. — AFP

LTTE says air raid killed 8 civilians

COLOMBO — Tamil Tiger rebels said Sri Lankan government fighter jets killed eight civilians, including three young children, in an air raid on their northern stronghold yesterday.

Fighting between the military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has intensified since the government formally pulled out of a six-year-old ceasefire pact in January, though a renewed war has been raging since 2006.

The Air Force said it had bombed and destroyed an isolated rebel boat yard housing vessels used in suicide missions in the village of Kiranchi, west of the Tigers' de facto capital of Kilinochchi, yesterday morning. It declined to comment on the Tiger assertion.

"Eight civilians, including three preschool children, were killed and 10 more were injured, four of them critically, when Sri Lanka bombed a coastal civilian settlement in the Kiranchi area," the Tigers' Peace Secretariat said in an email.

The Tigers were not immediately contactable by telephone. As with a Defence Ministry claim that troops killed 92 rebels in a northern offensive earlier this week and tolls from countless clashes in recent months, there was no independent confirmation of what happened or how many people were killed.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's government argues the Tigers used the truce to re-arm and were not

sincere about talking peace. It has vowed to crush them militarily, and has captured large swathes of rebel-held territory in the east.

But analysts say neither side is winning, with the Tigers regularly hitting back with suicide attacks and roadside bombs.

The violence hurt tourist arrivals last year, which fell 12 per cent from a year earlier, while the stock market slid nearly 7 per cent in 2007, with some businesses shelving investment plans.

The latest fighting came as UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Angela Kane visited the Indian Ocean island nation to assess world the body's operations for Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon.

It also came a day after US-based Human Rights Watch called on the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on the Tigers and a splinter faction seen as allied to the government for using children as soldiers.

Human Rights Watch also called on the Security Council to publicly condemn the Sri Lankan government, saying it was failing to investigate cases of child abduction and recruitment in territory it controls.

It also wants the government reprimanded, accusing elements of the security forces of complicity in abduction of children by the splinter "Karuna" faction, which analysts say helped the government to evict the Tigers from the east. — Reuters

Myanmar democratic process should be inclusive: UN envoy

JAKARTA — The UN envoy to Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, said yesterday that the country should follow an inclusive process as it moves towards multi-party elections in 2010. The junta announced earlier this month that it would hold a referendum on a new constitution in May to set the stage for polls. But Foreign Minister Nyan Win said this week that the document would ban widowed democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from running as she had been married to a foreigner. "We have been very consistent in saying that the recent announcement by the authorities of the referendum on the government constitution in May, and elections that will lead to a multi-party democracy in 2010, are a potentially significant step," Gambari said.

"But all the same, this process has to be credible and has to be all-inclusive. This will continue to be stressed in our conversation with the authorities in Myanmar," Gambari told a press briefing after meeting Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

They were the envoy's first comments since the junta revealed Suu Kyi would be blocked from the elections.

But they echoed remarks by UN chief Ban Ki-moon who called on Myanmar's military regime to foster an inclusive process after it announced plans for the constitutional referendum.

Gambari, who is on a regional visit to consult Asian nations on Myanmar and its so-called "road map" to democracy, did not mention Aung San Suu Kyi by name. Yudhoyono, meanwhile, welcomed the announcement of Myanmar's referendum and elections but also called for them to be inclusive, his spokesman said. — AFP

Rice seeks N. Korea solution before end of Bush's term

WASHINGTON — US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits South Korea, China and Japan next week to seek ways to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear programmes before the window closes on the Bush administration.

President George W. Bush has less than a year left to wean North Korea of its nuclear ambitions in exchange for economic and diplomatic benefits under a 2005 deal in which Pyongyang agreed to abandon all of its nuclear weapons and programmes.

Making her first visit to Northeast Asia in more than a year, Rice will attend the inauguration of South Korean President-elect Lee Myung-bak in Seoul on Monday and then travel to Beijing and Tokyo for consultations.

US officials said there were no plans for Rice to go to Pyongyang or to meet North Korean officials in Beijing.

At the top of her agenda will be reviving the six-party agreement under which North Korea has begun to dismantle



HOPEFUL: Rice

key nuclear facilities at Yongbyon but has balked at providing a complete declaration of all of its nuclear programmes.

The agreement was hammered out among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States.

US officials regard the declaration — which North Korea had agreed to produce by December 31 — as a necessary condition for removing certain US sanctions on Pyongyang and as a key step

toward its eventual denuclearisation.

According to US officials and analysts, the declaration's sticking point has been Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

North Korea has produced plutonium, which can be used to make atomic bombs, at Yongbyon. Uranium enrichment would give it a second pathway to fissile material for nuclear weapons.

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear programme but the case remains murky.

A senior US official said Washington has begun exploring whether Pyongyang might disclose any proliferation and uranium enrichment in a separate document to be kept secret. — Reuters

China asks websites to eradicate porn, violence

BEIJING — China has called on domestic websites to sign a voluntary pact governing online video and audio content, saying they should exercise self-censorship to ensure a "healthy and orderly" cyberspace.

The move is part of government efforts to exert greater control over China's rapidly growing internet sector, and to prevent content deemed harmful or subversive from getting into the public domain.

Eight "central" websites yesterday signed the pact requiring them to eradicate pornography and violence, which had "seriously polluted the online environment and affected the growth of young people", the national broadcast watchdog said.

"The signatories should actively disseminate healthy, beneficial audio-visual programmes meeting socialist moral norms," reads the text of the pact drafted by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

"Decadent, backward thoughts and culture must be boycotted by all," according to a copy of the pact posted on the administration's website. Content related to gambling and "horror" were also targeted. — Reuters

Strong quake hits Indonesia

JAKARTA — An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.8 struck off the west coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of damage, seismologists said.

The epicentre of the quake, which struck at 6:55am (2355 GMT Thursday), was about 194km southwest of the city of Bengkulu, at a depth of 27 km, the Indonesian Meteorology and Geophysics agency said.

No tsunami warning was issued after the tremor. The US Geological Survey initially clocked the quake at 6.1, but later revised its magnitude down to 5.7. — AFP

SPORTS

IN BRIEF

Former NZ keeper Parore to join ICL

CHRISTCHURCH (New Zealand) — Former New Zealand wicketkeeper Adam Parore announced yesterday he is ending a six-year retirement to join the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL). Parore said he has signed a two-year deal with the Madras Superstars who won the inaugural ICL competition last December. The 37-year-old, who played 78 Tests and 179 One-day Internationals for New Zealand during a 12-year career, said the offer was "simply too good to turn down". England's Chris Read was the original "keeper for the Madras Superstars, a team coached and captained by former Australian international Michael Bevan. Parore has only played a couple of low-key matches since he retired in 2002 to focus on his mortgage broking business.

McGrady leads Rockets to tenth victory in a row

HOUSTON — The Houston Rockets surged to their 10th consecutive win on Thursday, beating the Miami Heat 112-100 behind Tracy McGrady's 23 points and 10 assists. Yao Ming added 21 points as all five Houston starters finished in double figures. "It feels great," Yao told reporters. "A 10-game winning streak. When I walk out of this building tonight, I think I will feel very fresh." Dwyane Wade had 33 points and 11 assists but could not keep the Heat from losing their 10th successive game. A 41-point first quarter gave the Rockets a 15-point lead which Miami could not catch. McGrady had 14 points in the quarter with Rafer Alston adding 11 as Houston shot a torrid 81 per cent from the floor. Alston finished with 16 points and 11 assists, Luis Scola had 11 points and 10 rebounds and Shane Battier grabbed 12 points for Houston. Rookie reserve Carl Landry also played a big role, scoring 19 points, 11 of them in the fourth quarter.

Cavaliers acquire Wallace in 11-player NBA trade

CLEVELAND (Ohio) — The Cleveland Cavaliers acquired former defensive player of the year Ben Wallace and swingman Joe Smith from the Chicago Bulls in an 11-player, three-team blockbuster deal on Thursday. Cleveland also got forward Wally Szczerbiak and guard Delonte West from the Seattle SuperSonics, general manager Danny Ferry announced on Thursday. In exchange, the Cavaliers sent Larry Hughes, Drew Gooden, Cedric Simmons and Shannon Brown to the Bulls and Ira Newble and Donyell Marshall to Seattle. Cleveland also received Chicago's 2009 second round draft selection and Seattle acquired Adrian Griffin from the Bulls. Wallace is a four-time NBA All-Star and Defensive Player of the Year but he has struggled this season in Chicago. He has played in 50 games this season with the Bulls, averaging 5.1 points, 8.8 rebounds and 1.6 blocks.

Singapore begins countdown to inaugural Youth Olympics

SINGAPORE — Singapore started its countdown yesterday to the 2010 Youth Olympics, vowing to justify a decision by the International Olympic Committee to hand the inaugural event to the tiny city-state. Singapore beat Moscow by a vote of 53 to 44 late on Thursday, with newspapers calling it arguably the biggest day in the country's sporting history. "It's Singapore 2010," the top-selling *Straits Times* yelled on its front page. "An honour and a privilege for everyone, now for the countdown to the main event. The city-state is, by international standards, already an Olympian city in finance, tourism, education, bio-tech research and bold ideas," it added in an editorial. The tabloid *Today* newspaper opted for "A dream come true" across its front page while the newspaper said: "The new goal — 2010." It will be the first time that Singapore has hosted a multi-disciplinary sporting event of such a magnitude. The brainchild of IOC chief Jacques Rogge, the Youth Olympics will feature traditional sports such as athletics and swimming, but also some innovative events such as beach-wrestling and BMX bike-riding.

Chelsea will not sign Ronaldinho

LONDON — Chelsea won't try to sign Barcelona star Ronaldinho at the end of the season according to the Premier League club's chairman. Ronaldinho has endured a disappointing campaign with Barca and, after being left out several times by coach Frank Rijkaard, it was suggested the Brazilian was keen to leave the Nou Camp. Chelsea are one of the few clubs who could afford the former World Player of the Year and chairman Bruce Buck admitted they had considered making a bid, before deciding to look elsewhere for new signings. "Ronaldinho? No, I don't see it being likely that Ronaldinho will be here next year," Buck told Sky Sports News.

Roddick blasts Nishikori

SAN JOSE (California) — Top seed Andy Roddick blasted seven aces to beat Kei Nishikori 6-2, 6-4 in the second round of the ATP SAP Open, avenging Nishikori's stunning win over American James Blake last weekend. The second-seeded Blake posted a steady 6-3, 6-4 win over compatriot Jesse Levine during their second-round match. Third seed Tommy Haas of Germany did not have the same luck as Blake, as he was upset, 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, by American John Isner. Taiwan's Lu Yen-hsun and American Marty Fish also advanced with victories over American Wayne Odesnik and German Denis Gremelmayr, respectively.

Brown tames India winds

NEW DELHI — New Zealand's Mark Brown produced a superb five-under-par 67 in blustery conditions to grab the sole third-round lead at the Sail Open yesterday. On a day when many challengers were blown off-course, Brown surged to an 11-under-par 205 aggregate and leads by one shot from Australian Scott Hend, who carded a 69, and Asian Tour Welsh rookie Rhys Davies, who fired 67. "It was quite like Wellington where I have played a lot of my golf. It is a nice course and I enjoyed myself," said Brown, now in his second year on tour. I had a good season last year and finished in 15th place on the Order of Merits," said Brown. Joint overnight leader Jyoti Randhawa of India overcame a shaky start to keep his title hopes alive with a 72. The local favourite was tied fourth, two off the pace, alongside compatriot Gaganjeet Bhullar, Malaysia's Danny Chia and Australian Adam Groom, who all carded matching 69s in the \$400,000 event. — AFP, Reuters

Ton-up Kohli crushes Windies hopes

KUALA LUMPUR — India captain Virat Kohli struck a century on a day dominated by bowlers to eliminate the West Indies from cricket's under-19 World Cup yesterday.

Kohli struck a breezy 100 with 10 boundaries and four sixes and Taruwar Kohli and Tanmay Srivastava hit half-centuries as India piled up 265-5 after being sent in to bat at the Kinrara Oval here.

The West Indies, who needed a win to force a three-way tie at the top of Group B, were bowled out for 215 in the 48th over to lose the crucial match by 50 runs.

Darren Bravo top-scored with 43 and Devon Thomas made 32 but India were never in danger of losing their grip on the match with wickets at regular intervals.

Siddarth Kaul was the pick of the bowlers with 3-37, while Ravindra Jadeja and Ajitesh Argal claimed two wickets each.

India and South Africa took the two quarterfinal places from the group as the line-ups were finalised for the next round.

India take on England in tomorrow's quarterfinal, while South Africa meet Group D champions Bangladesh the same day.

In the remaining two quarterfinals on Monday, defending champions Pakistan clash with Australia, while Group C winners Sri Lanka face New Zealand.

Pakistan overcame a stuttering start to defeat Zimbabwe by 87 runs in Johor and top Group A with three consecutive wins. New Zealand took the second spot



CAPTAIN'S KNOCK: Indian captain Virat Kohli, centre, celebrates his century against the West Indies in the last qualifying match at the Kinrara Cricket Oval in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

in the group. Sri Lanka topped Group C with a fluent five-wicket win over fellow-qualifiers Australia in Penang.

Bangladesh stunned England by 13 runs to finish ahead in Group D, giving all four South Asian Test nations a place in the quarterfinals.

Pakistan recovered from 21-4 to post 173-8 in their 50 overs against Zimbabwe with

wicketkeeper Ali Asad making an unbeaten 76 and captain Imad Wasim a valuable 22. Zimbabwe, who earlier lost to unseeded Malaysia, were shot out for 86 in 29 overs to suffer their third successive defeat.

Seamer Mohammed Rameez finished as Pakistan's most successful bowler with 3-26 while Adil Raza, Imad Wasim and Ahmad Shahzad

chipped in with two wickets each. Sri Lanka's five-man spin attack, led by left-arter Navin Kavikara (3-20), bowled out Australia for 172 with only captain Michael Hill (34) and Steve Smith (36) making useful contributions.

The Islanders passed the modest target in the 38th over with Dilshan Munaweera, Kusal Perera and captain Ashan Subasinghe making

identical scores of 43.

Bangladesh, sent in to bat in overcast conditions, slipped to 27-6 against England before captain Sohrawardi Shuvo hit an unbeaten 56 batting at number eight to lift his team to 149.

The total was far from adequate but England messed up their chase with three run outs and were bowled out for 136 in the 48th over to hand

Bangladesh their third win. Daniel Redfern top-scored for England with 26 while Nasir Hossain and Mahmudul Hasan claimed two wickets apiece.

All knock-out matches will be played in three venues in the Malaysian capital.

Preliminary league:
Group A — Pakistan bt Zimbabwe by 87 runs in Johor. Pakistan 173-8 in 50 overs (Ali Asad 76 not out, Imad Wasim 22, Kyle Jarvis 3-40, Stewart Matsika 2-27) beat Zimbabwe 86 all out in 29 overs (Mohammed Rameez 3-26, Adil Raza 2-21, Imad Wasim 2-18, Ahmad Shahzad 2-9)

Group B — India bt West Indies by 50 runs in Kuala Lumpur. India 265-5 in 50 overs (Virat Kohli 100, Taruwar Kohli 50, Tanmay Srivastava 51) beat West Indies 215 all out in 47.5 overs (Darren Bravo 43, Devon Thomas 32, Siddarth Kaul 3-37, Ravindra Jadeja 2-28, Ajitesh Argal 2-45)

Group C — Sri Lanka bt Australia by five wickets in Penang. Australia 172 all out in 49.3 overs (Michael Hill 34, Steven Smith 36, Navin Kavikara 3-20) lost to Sri Lanka 175-5 in 37.3 overs (Dilshan Munaweera 43, Kusal Perera 43, Ashan Subasinghe 43)

Group D — Bangladesh bt England by 13 runs in Kuala Lumpur. Bangladesh 149 all out in 42 overs (Sohrawardi Shuvo 56 not out, James Harris 5-29) beat England 136 all out in 47.4 overs (Daniel Redfern 26, Nasir Hossain 2-20, Mahmudul Hasan 2-16)

— AFP

Fortune favours England over Kiwis in crunch ODI

CHRISTCHURCH (New Zealand) — England have their tails up going into the One-day cricket international showdown against New Zealand here today as they look to square the series in what promises to be a high-scoring spectacle.

Salvaging an unlikely tie in the fourth match has given the tourists the impetus they need to believe they can level the five-ODI series, according to match hero Luke Wright.

Bowling his first over of the game and final over of the fourth match in Napier on Wednesday, Wright's six yorkers pinned down Jamie How and Daniel Vettori in a frantic finish.

Wright, who conceded just six runs when New Zealand needed seven to win the match and the series, said achieving a tie against improbable odds was as good as a win.

"From six or seven overs out the series was gone so to get a tie, we hopefully take a bit of momentum now, win the last game, and drawing the series will be a good result after the first two games," he said.

New Zealand are in an unbeatable position, having won the first two matches and leading the series 2-1, but England believe the hosts were wounded psychologically by the way they stumbled in Napier.

"If we'd got in that position and got a tie it would have been pretty devastating," said the 22-year-old Wright.

"To go into the last game with the series alive is obviously the worst scenario for them, but we can take a lot of credit from the way we've fought back."

But New Zealand's leading all-rounder Jacob Oram admits that while his side were shaken by the failed chase for 341 runs on a good batting pitch, he believes the depression will have lifted by the time the final match starts.

"It was such a rollercoaster — to tie a match that felt like a loss," he said.

"It was depressing, but today's another game. We can either draw the series or win the series. The silver lining is we can't lose the series but if you're going to be positive it's about winning it."

"The guys will be fine for it, there's no question about it."

Christchurch has had more than four times its average February rainfall so far this month, but AMI Stadium manager Chris Lewis said the drop-in wicket should be full of runs.

"It should be good," he said but added that it may not have the zip of the Napier wicket, which produced 680 runs.

However, several matches at the stadium have seen sides post more than 300 in an innings in recent years, notably in the 2005-06 season when Australia scored 331 and New Zealand reached 332 for eight with an over to spare. — AFP

Home comfort beckons for Real

MADRID — League leaders Real Madrid will be glad to get back to their historic Santiago Bernabeu Stadium to face near neighbours Getafe tomorrow, after two successive defeats away from home in the last week.

Real have a 100 per cent record in La Liga in front of their own fans this season and have banded 33 goals past their opponents with the tally helped by the 7-0 thrashing of Valladolid two weeks ago.

However, last Saturday's loss at Real Betis saw their lead over bitter rivals Barcelona reduced to five points.

"I'm not bothered that Barcelona have cut our advantage, I'm only now thinking about beating Getafe," commented Real defender and 2006 World Player of the Year Fabio Cannavaro on Thursday.

One of Real's most impressive players in their recent games, despite the losses, has been former Chelsea winger Arjen Robben.

However, with Robinho

expected to be fit to face Getafe, Real coach Bernd Schuster has a dilemma about who to play on the left flank.

Schuster will be wondering whether to opt for the Dutchman or the mercurial Brazilian, who was in outstanding form before straining a stomach muscle early in the game against Valladolid.

"I'm starting to enjoy my football again and I'm slowly starting to get back to my best after all my injuries," said Robben on Thursday, clearly hoping to get the nod.

Another man fit again after injury is Portuguese central defender Pepe, which may mean Schuster's moves Gabriel Heinze out to left back. Getafe coach Michel Laudrup will keep his fingers crossed that not too many of his players will wake up battered and bruised after their impressive 3-0 win over AEK Athens in the Uefa Cup on Thursday.

Getafe have had an erratic domestic season and lie in 13th place but both Laudrup and Schuster know that the team from Madrid's southern

suburbs have the potential to make life uncomfortable for Real.

Real were very fortunate to come home with a 1-0 win at Getafe last September. Getafe also managed to draw 1-1 with Real in the Bernabeu last season.

Second-placed Barcelona will aim to increase the pressure on Real with three points against bottom club Levante earlier tomorrow.

The Catalan club's morale was boosted by an outstanding 3-2 win at Celtic in the Champions League on Wednesday.

However, one quick glance at the Spanish media makes it clear that everyone in the Nou Camp now believes that they are back in the title race after Real's recent hiccups away from home. Nevertheless, the only league points Barca have dropped at home this season were in their 1-0 loss to Real Madrid in December and it would be an enormous upset if relegation-threatened Levante were even to salvage a draw. — AFP

Ponting miffed at IPL worth

SYDNEY — Ricky Ponting, One-day cricket's top-rated batsman and the highest-paid Australian contracted cricketer, is bewildered at his worth in the Indian Premier League compared with other Australian players, reports said yesterday.

The Aussie skipper fetched \$400,000 to play for Kolkata at Wednesday's IPL player auction in Mumbai, a figure dwarfed by the astonishing \$1.35 million paid for teammate Andrew Symonds to join Hyderabad.

Ponting was assessed less than what non-ODI regulars Cameron White (\$500,000) and David Hussey (\$625,000) received in franchise bidding, but admitted he was disappointed with his contract.

"I thought I might have been able to attract a little bit more than that," he said.

"I have had my fair share of endorsements over the years and always felt the Indian people have warmed to me quite often when I have been there. Lots of things have gone through my mind in the last couple of days.

"Even my involvement in the Harbhajan (Singh) thing, but I thought hang on, Symo (Symonds) was involved in it as well."

Ponting said he was adamant the IPL cash issue would not split the Australian team.

"It's probably only me and Matty (Hayden) that will have any reason to be jealous of anybody else," he said.

"Matty and I aren't that sort of people." Senior opening batsmen Hayden, ranked the world's sixth top ODI batsman, went for \$375,000 in the IPL auction to Chennai.

— AFP

United's might can overpower Arsenal: Vidic

LONDON — Nemanja Vidic believes Manchester United's superior strength in depth will help his side overhaul Arsenal in the race for the Premier League title.

United trail leaders Arsenal by five points but Serbia defender Vidic is convinced the extra quality of Sir Alex Ferguson's squad will prove the decisive factor at the business end of the season.

The reigning English champions were able to snatch a Champions League draw at Lyon in midweek after Ferguson sent on Nani and Carlos Tevez, who scored the late equaliser.

It is that kind of impact from the bench which has Vidic in positive mood ahead of tomorrow's trip to Newcastle.

"We are capable of finishing games strongly because we have so much strength on the bench. Nani and Tevez made a big difference when they came on in Lyon," Vidic said.

Ferguson's side should have little to fear from a Newcastle team still searching for their first win since Kevin Keegan took charge, although the bitter memory of a 6-0 defeat at Old Trafford last month may drag a defiant display from the hosts.

By the time United kick-off at St James' Park in today's late game, Arsenal could be eight points clear.

Arsene Wenger's team play Birmingham in the weekend's first Premier League match, with Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor confident they will end a two-game goal drought at St Andrews.

"It is slightly worrying and for Arsenal not to score in two games in a row will lead to some frustration," he said. "But we know that we can score at any time — our belief is still high and we want to show that in Birmingham, by playing our football and getting back to scoring."

"It's a big difference going to a team like Birmingham after playing against Manchester United and Milan, but as footballers we

have to keep our focus very high.

"We know that if we play the same against Birmingham as we did against Milan, we will win."

Jamie Carragher is determined to make sure Liverpool forget about their European heroics and concentrate on getting back into the Champions League through their domestic form.

Rafa Benitez's side are on a high after their 2-0 win over Inter Milan on Wednesday, but Carragher is realistic enough to admit they are far from certain to clinch a top-four finish in the Premier League.

The defender knows a win against Middlesbrough at Anfield today would keep the pressure on fourth-placed Everton.

"We realise that we've now got three or four league games before the second leg in Milan and we're going to have to make sure that we are in this competition next season," Carragher said.

"There's something about us when we play in Europe but we've got a job to do in the Premier League and we have to make sure we don't lose sight of that."

At the other end of the table, Derby manager Paul Jewell insists he can't afford to let sentiment get in the way as he returns to Wigan for the first time. Jewell resigned after six years at Wigan when they avoided relegation on the final day of last season, but now he could put a dent on his former club's survival hopes. The rock-bottom Rams are destined for relegation already but Wigan could still beat the drop. Not that Jewell is too concerned. "I'm not really that much of a sentimental guy," Jewell said.

Today's fixtures: Birmingham v Arsenal, Fulham v West Ham, Liverpool v Middlesbrough, Newcastle v Manchester Utd, Portsmouth v Sunderland, Wigan v Derby.

Tomorrow: Blackburn v Bolton, Reading v Aston Villa.

Monday: Manchester City v Everton. — AFP

SPORTS

British gang of four into Uefa Cup last 16



CELEBRATION: Bolton's Kevin Nolan, left, and Nicky Hunt celebrate after holding Atletico de Madrid to a 0-0 draw. — AFP

PARIS — English sides Everton, Tottenham and Bolton as well as Scottish giants Rangers marched into the Uefa Cup last 16 on Thursday. Everton brushed aside Brann Bergen 6-1 on the night for an 8-1 aggregate score to set-up a last 16 duel with Fiorentina.

Tottenham, who face Chelsea in the English League Cup final tomorrow, were held 1-1 by Slavia Prague but went through 3-2 on aggregate and will face PSV Eindhoven. Bolton, flirting with relegation from the Premier League, returned from Madrid with a 0-0 draw against high-flying Atletico and went through 1-0 over the two legs.

They will meet Sporting Lisbon in the next round where they will be joined by Rangers who needed a late goal from Nacho Novo to secure a 1-1 draw at Panathinaikos to go through on the away goals rule. Rangers will meet Germany's Werder Bremen in the last 16.

At Goodison Park, Nigerian international Ayegbeni Yakubu became only the third Everton player to hit a European hat-trick. Yakubu followed Alan Ball and Andy Gray into the club record books with his three goals while strike partner Andrew Johnson grabbed two. Spanish midfielder

Mikael Arteta grabbed Everton's other goal as the Merseysiders won their seventh successive Uefa Cup tie. Fiorentina beat Rosenborg of Norway 2-1 on the night for a 3-1 aggregate. Tottenham received the perfect confidence booster ahead of tomorrow's trip to Wembley when a debut goal from Jamie O'Hara fired Juande Ramos' side past Slavia Prague. Slavia midfielder Matej Krajcik was on target for the Czechs.

Bolton, just three points above the Premier League relegation zone, took a 1-0 lead to the Vicente Calderon stadium and set-up a clash with Sporting Lisbon.

Nacho Novo made up for missing a hatful of chances in the first leg to score a late goal in Rangers' 1-1 draw at Panathinaikos.

Aberdeen were unable to make it a British sweep of five teams in the next stage when they were picked apart by Bayern Munich who won 5-1 in Bavaria for a 7-3 aggregate.

Benfica reached the last 16 in dramatic circumstances. They were losing 2-1 on aggregate to Nuremberg but saved themselves with a goal from Oscar Cardozo in the last minute and a winner from Angel Di Maria in the second minute of stoppage time. — AFP

ISC Sixes hockey to be held next month

MUSCAT — The Kerala Wing of the Indian Social Club will organise the third Sixes Hockey Championship at the Jabr bin Zaid hockey ground in Al Watayah in March 2008.

This was announced yesterday by Kerala Wing's sports coordinator Vijayan through a communiqué. The exact date of the tournament will be revealed later.

As in the past the hockey tournament will be held under the auspices of Oman Hockey Association.

The first edition of the championship was won by Bombay Boys, while the second edition saw an all-Omani veteran outfit Al Shabiba Sports claiming the title.

With Oman clinching the AHF Cup recently, the tournament expects more teams to take part. Kerala Wing sports committee has also expressed the anticipation of more teams, especially teams from schools, to take part.

Further details can be had from Vijayan (99326442).



Lanka face exit as Australia reach finals

MELBOURNE — Sri Lanka's chances of reaching the tri-series finals were dealt a serious blow when Australia beat them by 24 runs in a rain-shortened One-day match yesterday.

The visitors' gamble to bowl first — expecting the match to be shortened by the weather — looked to have paid off and they restricted the hosts to just 184 for seven from their 50 overs.

However, the Sri Lankan batsmen again failed to rise to the challenge and they were 77 for four when rain did stop play after 29.3 overs, leaving them well short of the required 102 under the Duckworth-Lewis method.

The Duckworth-Lewis method is a system of calculating a team's score in a game that has been cut short.

The loss means Sri Lanka, having won just one of their six games in the tri-series, will have to win their last two matches, against India and Australia, to have any chance of reaching the finals.

On the other hand, Australia booked their place in the finals again with their seventh successive win over Sri Lanka.

Just one partnership was enough for Australia to win, with Mike Hussey (64 not out) and Michael Clarke (50) putting on almost half of their total with a fifth-wicket stand of 90.

Sri Lanka were always struggling in the chase after losing early wickets.

Veteran opener Sanath Jayasuriya finally appears to be showing his age and the 38-year-old was the first to



DEJECTED: Sri Lankan batsmen Chamara Silva, left, and Tillakaratne Dilshan walk off as heavy rain stops play during their match against Australia at the MCG in Melbourne. — AFP

go, for a duck, caught by Ricky Ponting at second slip from the bowling of Stuart Clark.

Jayasuriya has just 46 runs in the series at 9.20 and was soon followed back to the pavilion by fellow opener Dilruwan Perera, who also fell to Clarke for one as the tourists slumped to three for two. Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene were

once again called to the rescue and set about consolidating the innings, only for the latter to be caught behind off Nathan Bracken for 27.

When Sangakkara, aware of the impending rain and trying to lift the run rate by opening his shoulders, got a leading edge and was caught for 22 by Andrew Symonds off James Hopes, Sri Lanka's hopes were all but gone.

And their fate was confirmed when the rain arrived minutes later.

Once again, Australia's bowlers had rescued their side after an indifferent batting performance.

Clark, only playing because Brett Lee was being rested, did most of the damage with 2-8 from five overs.

The home side were 54 for four before Clarke and Hussey again came to the rescue, with disciplined bowling bringing relief to some of Australia's star batsmen.

SCOREBOARD

Australia	
A. Gilchrist b Voas	6
M. Hayden c Silva b Maharoo	23
R. Ponting run out	11
M. Clarke c and b Muralitharan	50
A. Symonds c Sangakkara b Maharoo	4
M. Hussey not out	64
J. Hopes st Sangakkara b Muralitharan	11
B. Hogg c Dilshan b Malunga	4
M. Johnson not out	6
Extras (20, 3w)	5
Total (for seven wickets)	184
Fall of wickets: 12 (Gilchrist), 39 (Hayden), 44 (Ponting), 54 (Symonds), 144 (Clarke), 166 (Hopes), 173 (Hogg)	
Bowling: Voas 10-1-34-1, Malunga 10-1-44-1, Maharoo 10-1-20-2 (1w), Muralitharan 10-0-37-2, Amerasinghe 10-0-47-0 (2w)	
Sri Lanka	
D. Perera lbw Clark	1
S. Jayasuriya c Ponting b Clark	0
K. Sangakkara c Symonds b Hopes	22
M. Jayawardene c Gilchrist	27
b Bracken	16
C. Silva not out	16
T. Dilshan not out	9
Extras (1lb, 1w)	2
Total (for four wickets, 29.3 overs)	77
Fall of wickets: 0 (Jayasuriya), 3 (Perera), 42 (Jayawardene), 64 (Sangakkara)	
Bowling: Bracken 6-1-13-1, Clark 5-1-8-2, Johnson 7-1-17-0 (1w), Hopes 7-2-23-1, Hogg 4-3-15-0	
Result: Australia win by 24 runs (D-L system)	
Umpires: Rudi Koertzen (RSA), Simon Taufel (AUS), TV Umpire: Bob Parry (AUS)	
Match referee: Jeff Crowe (NZ) — AFP	

Bangladesh fight back after Morkel's five-for

DHAKA — Bangladesh bounced back into the reckoning after South African pace-man Morkel rocked the hosts with a five-wicket haul in the opening Test here yesterday.

After being bowled out for a sub-par 192, Bangladesh struck through the pace-spin combine of Shahadat Hossain and Mohammed Rafique to reduce the visitors to 76-4 at stumps.

Hossain sent back openers Graeme Smith (10) and Neil McKenzie (five) while left-arm spinner Rafique claimed the wickets of Hashim Amla and the dangerous Jacques Kallis (17).

Smith, leading his side in a national record 53rd Test, played on to his stumps while McKenzie and Amla (25) were trapped leg before wicket.

Kallis lost his wicket to a ball that kept low and crashed on to his off-stump, a dismissal that sent the home fans into a frenzy at the Sher-e-Bangla Mirpur Stadium.

At stumps, Ashwell Prince, batting on nine, and Johan Botha on five were at the crease.

The exploits of the Bangladesh bowlers followed the heroics of Morkel, playing in only his second Test after making his debut against India in 2006.

The 23-year-old South African bowler finished with 5-50, which included two wickets off two balls in the



KEEN CONTEST: Bangladeshi cricketer Shahadat Hossain celebrates the dismissal of South African batsman Neil McKenzie, left, on the first day of the first Test at Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

ing with 44 and putting on a vital 70-run partnership with Shakib Al Hasan (30).

Captain Mohammed Ashraful made a brisk 34 off 27 balls with seven fours before falling prey to Botha, also playing his first Test in two years.

Quick bowler Dale Steyn complemented the efforts of Morkel by picking 3-27 while off-spinner Botha chipped in with two on an easy-paced wicket.

The hosts were off to a disastrous start after they won

behind to Mark Boucher who equalled Australian wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist's record for most Test dismissals (416).

Habibul Bhashar, under pressure to retain his place in the Test squad after being axed from the one-day side, failed yet again when he offered a simple catch to McKenzie in the slips for 11.

SCOREBOARD

Bangladesh 1st innings	
Tamim Iqbal c and b Steyn	0
Junaid Siddique c Boucher b Morkel	1
Shahriar Nafees c Smith b Morkel	25
Habibul Bhashar c McKenzie b Morkel	11
Mohammad Ashraful c and b Botha	34
Aftab Ahmed c Ntini b Botha	44
Shakib Al Hasan c de Villiers b Morkel	30
Mushfiqur Rahim b Morkel	7
Mohammad Rafique lbw b Morkel	0
Mashrafe Mortaza b Steyn	29
Shahadat Hossain not out	0
Extras (lb, 2w, nb, 3)	11
Total (all out, 54.4 overs)	192
Fall of wickets: 1-0 (Iqbal), 2-3 (Siddique), 3-32 (Bhashar), 4-60 (Nafees), 5-82 (Ashraful), 6-152 (Ahmed), 7-152 (Hasan), 8-152 (Rafique), 9-192 (Rahim), 10-192 (Mortaza)	
Bowling: Steyn 11-4-2-27-3, Ntini 13-2-47-0 (w2), Morkel 13-2-50-5 (nb3), Kallis 5-2-5-0, Botha 12-0-57-2	
South Africa 1st innings	
N. McKenzie lbw b Hossain	5
G. Smith b Hossain	10
H. Amla b b Rafique	25
J. Kallis b Rafique	17
A. Prince not out	9
J. Botha not out	5
Extras (lb, 2w, nb)	5
Total (for four wickets, 24 overs)	76
Fall of wickets: 1-12 (Smith), 2-19 (McKenzie), 3-54 (Amla), 4-69 (Kallis)	
Bowling: Mortaza 5-0-31-0, Hossain 9-4-17-2 (nb2), Rafique 7-1-19-2 (nb1), Shakib Al Hasan 3-1-7-0	
Umpires: Steve Bucknor (WI) and Aleem Dar (PAK), TV Umpire: ASM Akhtaruddin (BAN)	
Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI) — AFP	

post-lunch session. Bangladesh, who have won just one of their 51 Tests — against minnows Zimbabwe — struggled for most of the day, losing their first five wickets for just 85.

Middle-order batsman Aftab Ahmed showed some application, though, top-scoring with 44 and putting on a vital 70-run partnership with Shakib Al Hasan (30). Captain Mohammed Ashraful made a brisk 34 off 27 balls with seven fours before falling prey to Botha, also playing his first Test in two years. Quick bowler Dale Steyn complemented the efforts of Morkel by picking 3-27 while off-spinner Botha chipped in with two on an easy-paced wicket. The hosts were off to a disastrous start after they won behind to Mark Boucher who equalled Australian wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist's record for most Test dismissals (416). Habibul Bhashar, under pressure to retain his place in the Test squad after being axed from the one-day side, failed yet again when he offered a simple catch to McKenzie in the slips for 11.

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AUTOMOBILES

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Muscat Finance proposes 30 per cent dividend

Times News Service

MUSCAT — Muscat Finance Company, one of the leading leasing and finance companies in the region, has proposed a 30 per cent dividend for the year 2007.

The board of directors, which met on January 29, adopted the accounts for the year 2007 and recommended the same for approval by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting. This, Muscat Finance said, is subject to the approval of the Central Bank of Oman.

The year 2007 was another successful year for the company — continuing its record of increasing profits and uninterrupted dividend since inception. The board decided to recommend a regular dividend of 25 per cent (2006: 25 per cent), and an additional one-time cash dividend of five per cent to commemorate the completion of the 20th year of the company's successful operations, on the enhanced capital of RO8.25 million. The dividend comprises 15 per cent cash, 10 per cent stock and an additional one-time cash dividend of five per cent.

Raphael V. Parambi, CEO

Key indicators	(In RO million)		
	2007	2006	Growth %
Instalment finance debtors	49.02	43.81	17
Instalment finance income	5.52	4.95	12
Net Profit after tax	2.24	2.13	5
Net worth	14.39	13.27	8
Earnings per share (RO)	RO 0.027	RO 0.026	5

of Muscat Finance Company: "The year 2007 sees the completion of twenty years of satisfactory operations in Oman with consistent profitability and uninterrupted dividends. The company was established in October 1987 and has completed two decades of successful operations in Oman.

This excellent performance is reflected in our results and is largely due to the diversification of income streams by strengthening non-traditional area of product portfolio. The company offers a wide range of products viz. leasing, debt factoring, hire purchase, home plan and working capital. In keeping with the government's priorities and in view of contributing to the diversification of the Omani economy, Muscat Finance Company has been focusing on developing its business with the small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Muscat Finance Company's

financing to the SMEs increased substantially, during the period under review and this sector today constitutes approximately 45 per cent of the company's total advances. Traditionally, it is the SME sector that contributes to the employment generation within the country and MFC is proud to have supported and developed a large number of SME clients over the years.

The company's Omanisation percentage today stands at 60 per cent and the company has been a holder of the "Green Card" issued by the Ministry of Manpower from the beginning. The company operates through its head office in Wattayah, close to automobile franchises, as well as through a network of full-fledged offices in Barka, Sohar, Sur, Salalah, Ibra and Nizwa. The company has an extensive branch network among the Non-Bank Finance Companies.

CBO mops up RO511.3m through CDs

MUSCAT — Certificates of deposit tender (Issue No.473) was held at the Central bank of Oman (CBO) this week. The total amount allotted for issue No. 473 was RO511.3 million. The average accepted interest rate of these certificates was 0.80 per cent while the maximum accepted interest rate was 0.97 per cent. The tenure of these certificates is 28 days so their maturity date is on March 19, 2008. The repo on re-purchase operations for the period from February 20 to 26, 2008 is 4.11 per cent. — OVA

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2007 crude oil exports fall 4.8pc Oil output dips 3.7pc; gas production up 1.8pc

MUSCAT — The Sultanate's total exports of crude oil stood at 221.99 million barrels from January to the end of December 2007, against 233.17 million barrels recorded during the corresponding period in 2006, constituting a fall of 4.8 per cent. The monthly statistical bulletin published by the Ministry of National Economy showed that the Sultanate's total production of crude oil and condensates stood at 259.29 million barrels by the end of December 2007, against 269.24 million barrels during the corresponding period in 2006, constituting a fall of 3.7 per cent.

The bulletin showed that the average of daily produc-

tion stood at 714,004 barrels as at the end of December 2007, against 737,007 barrels

\$61.69 per barrel during the corresponding period in 2006. China topped the countries

million barrels by end of December 2007, against 43.181 million barrels, constituting a drop of 9.1 per cent. Japan came third as it imported 29.021 million barrels, against 22.722 million barrels during the corresponding period in 2006, constituting a surge of 27.7 per cent.

The Sultanate's production of natural gas rose by 1.8 per cent by the end of December 2007 to 1,070.736 million cubic feet (mcf) compared to 1,051.755mcf during the corresponding period in 2006. Gas consumption also rose by 1.8 per cent up to the end of December 2007, to 1,070.736 mcf against 1,051.755mcf during the corresponding period in 2006. — OVA

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during the corresponding period in 2006, constituting a fall of 3.7 per cent.

The bulletin said that the average price of Oman oil per barrel rose by 5.6 per cent by end of November 2007 to \$65.15 per barrel, against

importing Omani oil as it imported 99.278 million barrels up to December 2007, against 92.034 million barrels during the corresponding period in 2006, constituting a 7.9 per cent rise. Thailand came second, as it imported 39.268

Top Ford officials arrive in town

MUSCAT — Waldo D. Galan, managing director of Ford Middle East, and a high profile team of senior officials from Ford Middle East have arrived in Oman on a special visit. The visit coincides with the launch of the all-new 2008 Ford Mondeo in Oman. As managing director of Ford Middle East, Waldo Galan is responsible for the sales, marketing and service operations for Ford, Lincoln and Mercury brands across the region. This is Galan's maiden visit to Oman.

Galan comes to his new Middle Eastern position with extensive experience in the international automotive field. He has held various senior managerial positions, including director of exports and imports of Ford in South America based in Brazil, and



MAIDEN VISIT: Waldo D. Galan

new business and strategy development manager for Worldwide Direct Market Operations.

Waldo Galan began his Ford career in 1978 in Venezuela where he held various sales and marketing positions, including parts distribution sales supervisor, marketing service manager and field

operations manager.

In 1985, he joined Ford Worldwide Direct Market Operations and went on to hold a number of management positions such as Asia Pacific district manager, Middle East

sales and marketing of Ford Motor Company products and customer service in Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay. Before becoming managing director of Ford Middle East, Galan was fleet

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district manager and Caribbean and Latin America district manager.

From August 1999 through September 2004, he was executive director of Ford of Chile, where he oversaw the

sales director at Ford Motor Company's Detroit-based Export Operations & Global Growth Initiatives, looking after the Ford Fleet business in 117 markets.

Continued on Page 18

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BUSINESS

Top Ford officials arrive in town

● From Page 17
 "The visit of a high-profile official like Galan underlines the significance Ford Motor Company attaches to Ford operations in Oman," said a spokesperson for Saud Bahwan Group. The group has been associated with Ford for over 20 years, and has propelled the brand to the No.1 spot in the American segment with innovative marketing efforts and bold new initiatives in customer care.
 Saud Bahwan Group markets Ford vehicles in Oman with the support of a large network of 10 showrooms, 14 modern service centres, over 98 per cent parts availability and six years Dara Bahwan mileage protection.

Lloyds TSB profit up on low credit crisis damage

LONDON — Lloyds TSB, the fourth-biggest bank in Britain, reported yesterday a 17-per cent rise in net profit last year and revealed it had emerged with only slight damage from the turmoil on credit markets.
 The strains which began with a crisis in the US home-loan market cost the company only £280 million (371 million euros, \$551 million), which is a low figure compared with billions in losses which many banks have reported.
 Lloyds TSB said in an earnings statement that net profit stood at £3,289 billion last year compared with £2,803 billion in 2006.
 "I am delighted to report that the group has continued to deliver a strong trading performance, notwithstanding the significant recent turbulence in global financial markets," said Lloyds TSB chairman Victor Blank.
 "Our higher quality, lower risk, business model has been clearly demonstrated in the resilience of our earnings stream."
 "The board remains confident in the group's earnings outlook and, as a result, has decided to increase the final dividend by five per cent to 24.7 pence per share," he added in comments included in the earnings statement. — AFP



SURPLUS VALUE: A labourer welds the edge of a container at a port in Wuhan, Hubei province, yesterday. China's trade surplus will rise more than 20 per cent this year even though export growth will slow due to weaker demand from the United States, a government researcher said. — Reuters

\$415 million REC IPO oversubscribed by nearly 30 times

MUMBAI — Indian power sector lender REC's initial public offer to raise up to \$415 million was oversubscribed by nearly 30 times, data showed yesterday, despite a weak share market.
 State-run Rural Electrification Corp. (REC) is involved in financing distribution and generation projects in India which needs more fuel to feed its booming economy.
 The offering, which was oversubscribed 27.3 times, came two weeks after two large IPOs were withdrawn due to a tumble in India's share market.
 India's benchmark Sensex share index has fallen more than 18 per cent from a record intra-day high of 21,206.77 on January 10.
 "This (REC's) was a strong response considering choppy markets and events in previous weeks," said a banker to the issue on condition of anonymity.
 REC was expected to raise a maximum of Rs16.38 billion (\$415 million) at the top end of the price band which was set at Rs90 to Rs105.
 The company plans to use the funds to increase capital and improve borrowing capacity for future expansion plans.
 Earlier this month, Emaar MGF Land, an Indian joint venture of Dubai's Emaar Properties, pulled its IPO to raise up to \$1.64 billion, citing fears of a global financial "meltdown."
 Emaar's move came after India's Wockhardt Hospitals abandoned its initial public offer to raise \$165 million after it got subscription orders for only a fifth of the issue.
 "REC has a strong positioning in the power finance sector and is fairly priced, based on fundamental value," Vaibhav Agrawal, analyst at Angel Broking, said in a note to clients.
 Just before the Indian stock market tumbled over fears of a US recession, India's biggest-ever share offer by Reliance Power, controlled by billionaire Anil Ambani, was oversubscribed 73 times as investors scrambled to apply for a slice of the nearly \$3-billion flotation.
 The Reliance IPO made financial history in Indian capital markets, including the largest number of applications. — AFP

'Variety' up for sale

By Alana Semuels
 Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — The 103-year-old entertainment trade newspaper *Variety* went on the auction block on Thursday when Anglo-Dutch company Reed Elsevier put its publishing unit up for sale.
 The company said the planned sale was strategic — part of a move from advertising-dependent to subscription-based publications and information services — and no reflection on the performance of its Reed Business Information unit.
 "We've taken the decision to get into less cyclical markets where there's less exposure to advertising," spokesman Patrick Kerr said.
 Reed Business Information publishes the *Variety* newspapers and hundreds of other periodicals, including *Broadcasting & Cable* and *Publishers Weekly*. The company's revenue in 2007 was \$1.7 billion.
 Charlie Koonen, who until December 31 oversaw Reed Business Information's entertainment division as the president and publisher of *Variety*, said the decision to sell illustrated the difficulties facing some print publications. Although *Variety's* online advertising revenue grew 82 per cent in 2007, its print advertising revenue declined, he said, although he didn't disclose how much. "A buyer is going to have to evaluate what kind of investment he wants to make to drive growth," Koonen said.
 He called *Variety* the "crown jewel" of the unit.
Variety, a weekly founded in 1905 by the Silverman family to cover Vaudeville from New York, has 21,184 subscribers, a spokeswoman said.
Daily Variety, launched in Hollywood in 1933, has 37,027. There is also a website, *Variety.com*.
Variety was owned by the Silvermans until 1987, when it was sold for about \$60 million to Cahners Publishing Co., a division of Reed International. Sources close to the company said *Variety's* annual revenue totalled around \$100 million.
 Reed Elsevier announced the planned sale as it disclosed that it would buy Alpharetta, Georgia-based ChoicePoint Inc., the biggest US provider of information services for the insurance industry, for \$3.5 billion, in addition to almost \$1 billion in net debt. The company is focusing on serving professional customers in the electronics, health, science and technology industries, Kerr said.

China warns West against scrutiny of sovereign funds

BEIJING — Heightened US and European scrutiny on the investments by emerging nation's sovereign funds has increased trade frictions and will hurt the global economy, China's central bank warned yesterday.
 "Countries like the United States and those in the EU also strengthened their scrutiny over investments made by sovereign wealth funds from emerging economies," the bank said in its latest quarterly report.

wealth funds from China, Singapore and Middle East nations have been taking advantage of the recent economic turmoil in the United States and elsewhere to buy into prized financial institutions.
 US firms, ensnared in a credit crunch due to the subprime mortgage woes, have been a particularly attractive target. Flush with the world's biggest foreign exchange reserves, Beijing launched its Investment

total outstanding shares.
 It has also bought a three-billion-dollar stake in private equity firm Blackstone Group LP.
 Several US lawmakers have expressed concern over China's financial manoeuvres, saying it could pose a threat to American economic security.
 Adding to the frictions, the US Treasury this month cautioned China against using profits derived from its sovereign investment fund to delay

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"This has led to escalating trade frictions, which will bring negative impacts on the healthy development of the world economy and the orderly correction of global imbalances."
 Cashed-up sovereign

Corporation in September with \$200 billion in capital and has since made big headlines. It announced plans to invest \$5 billion in Morgan Stanley, for an ownership stake of no more than 9.9 per cent of the investment bank's

currency reform. The yuan currency is seen by US lawmakers and other groups as undervalued against the dollar, making US-bound Chinese exports cheaper and fuelling a record trade deficit. — AFP

Japan govt. downgrades assessment of economy

TOKYO — Japan's government downgraded its assessment of Asia's largest economy yesterday for the first time in 15 months, saying the recovery was losing steam due to slowing US growth.
 A monthly report from the cabinet office acknowledged that exports and industrial output are cooling while consumer spending is sluggish.
 "The economy is recovering at a moderate pace," the report said, tweaking its previous assessment that the economy "is recovering, while some weaknesses are seen."
 The government said the shift marked the first downgrade since November 2006.
 The report cited downside risks to the Japanese economy resulting from slowing US economic growth, financial market volatility and higher oil prices.
 The government also downgraded its assessment of exports for the first time in 17 months, saying they were "increasing moderately."
 "The downside risks to the US economy have been increasing, so have the risks to the Japanese economy."
 We are more cautious about the economic outlook," a cabinet office official said.

"Exports to Asia continue to be solid while shipments to the US are declining and those to the EU are turning almost flat as its economic recovery is moderating," the official said.
 The report also lowered its assessment of industrial production for the first time in eight months, saying it was "growing at a slower pace."
 Concerns about the outlook for industrial output have grown since the government predicted last month that Japan's plants and factories would cut their output by 0.4 per cent in January and by 2.2 per cent in February.
 "We had expected that electronic parts and devices would lift production because inventory adjustments have been completed, but it didn't increase as expected," the official said.
 "Downward pressure on production from inventories is expected to be small, but we continue to closely watch how overseas demand will turn out," he added.
 The report said an improvement in Japan's labour market appeared to have stalled while private consumption "is almost flat."
 Japan's economy grew at a 3.7 per cent annualised pace

in the fourth-quarter of 2007, twice as fast as expected. But analysts warn that a slowdown is inevitable due to the chilly global economic climate.
 The United States has been hit hard by a wave of defaults on "subprime," or high-risk, mortgages. Prices of oil and other raw materials have also recently soared to record highs, squeezing Japanese companies.
 Japan's central bank chief warned yesterday that uncertainties were growing in the world's second largest economy in light of a downturn in the US economy.
 "A slowdown of the US economy is intensifying, while global financial and capital markets continue to be unstable," Bank of Japan Governor Toshihiko Fukui told a parliamentary committee.
 But he added: "Japan seems to have stronger resilience against external shocks than previously. Thus, I continue to believe that the chances are high that a gradual recovery will be sustained."
 Fukui steps down next month after a five-year tenure in which he is largely credited with helping pilot Japan out of its long slump. — AFP

Investment Quotes
 Investing without research is like playing poker and never looking at the cards.
 Before you think about buying stocks, you need to have made sure you understand the market, whether you are a short-term or long-term investor and what risks you are taking, and how you will manage those risks.
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 If you study 10 companies, you will find 1 for which the story is better than the others. — Warren Buffett

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India's inflation hits six-month peak

NEW DELHI — India's annual inflation rate accelerated to a six-month high, driven by higher vegetable and other food prices, data showed yesterday, with prices expected to rise further due to a fuel hike.
 Inflation climbed to 4.35 per cent for the week ended February 9 from 4.07 per cent the previous week, according to the Wholesale Price Index, India's most watched cost-of-living monitor. It stood at 6.52 per cent in the same week a year ago.
 Inflation in Asia's third largest economy has fluctuated in recent months but has been inching closer to the central bank's ceiling of close to five per cent for the fiscal year to March 31, 2008.
 The central bank last week said India's inflation rate was high by global standards and needs to be brought down further.
 The bank has raised interest rates nine times since 2004 to keep prices in check amid an economic boom. The economy expanded 9.1 per cent and has grown at an annual average rate of 8.6 per cent in the past four years. But economists have warned of an economic downturn because of high interest rates, increasing food and oil prices, a rapidly rising rupee and weakening global demand. — AFP

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BUSINESS

Toyota F-1 challenger on display at Al Kamil

"KNOCKOUT man, I'm totally floored", remarks Mohammed. "What a beauty!" He is, of course, referring to the awe-inspiring Toyota F1 car displayed in its full glory at the Toyota Al Kamil showroom. The display is attracting crowds of people who want to take a first hand look at the stunning F1 contender. "The display will be here for a month and then move to other showrooms," a Toyota spokesman informed us. Steekly contoured and powered to scream past competition, the Toyota F1 is a perfect example of Toyota's technological prowess in a field where the world's best brands compete for a place in the sun. In fact, Toyota has built a long history of success in the motor sport world. In the past, Toyota has captured many WRC and CART titles, and has made a significant impact at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Toyota is one of the top manufacturers in terms of different racing categories and sheer number of race entries — a presence that has supported the development of the motor sport itself over the years.

By being active in a wide variety of motor sport categories, Toyota has intentionally placed its machines in the toughest of competitions. Having completed all of the groundwork, perhaps it was inevitable that Toyota chal-



lenge the pinnacle of motor sport, the F1 Series. Here is a brief account of the same:

1950-1970: Toyota Motor sport began with the entry of a Toyota Crown in the 1957 Australian Rally. In the 1960s, Toyota introduced its first serious sports cars, the S800 and the 2000GT, entering them in several races. The 1970s saw the unveiling of the Celica, the Corolla Levin and other high-performance rally cars, building the reputation of Toyota around the world. Toyota also won its first WRC during this time. 1980 onwards, Toyota continued to develop rally cars.

During this time period,

Toyota entered its first Paris-Dakar Rally, with the Land Cruiser team delivering spectacular results.

Up from 1990, the most exciting had to be Toyota's announcement of its decision to challenge the F1 Series. With more than 10 years of success in the WRC, valuable lessons learned from years of participation in the 24 hours of the Le Mans, domination of the CART Series, and countless wins in Japan, Toyota was ready to prove its spirit on the world's greatest racing stage.

By the year 2000, Toyota set a new goal for itself. The decision was made to put all

of the Toyota resources behind fielding successful teams in the CART and F1 series. The Toyota GT-One entered into the 1999, 24 Hours of Le Mans was a racing car developed to be a bridge to F1.

Toyota Accelerated the F1 Project's Research and Development with the first bench tests of a V10 engine. The first prototype test chassis was assembled and a TMC-built Toyota Corolla WRC, which entered the WRC Europe Rally Championship, capturing a total of five titles.

In 2001 the Toyota F1 Machine was introduced and

the TMG battle corps increased to include more than 550 professionals from more than 30 countries around the world.

The Toyota F1 prototype was revealed to the public for the first time. Panasonic becomes a title sponsor of the Toyota F1 team, and the team made strides forward as "Panasonic Toyota Racing"

During its F1 debut in 2002, Toyota celebrated its debut on the F1 circuit with memorable launch.

In 2007, Toyota Racing unveiled its new TF107 challenger 2007. Toyota was the only one of the 11 F1 teams to go into the new season with the same engine and the same tyre partner. Toyota has ambitious goals in Formula 1 and in 2007 the objective is to win.

In Oman, Toyota races far ahead of the rest, thanks to the total customer orientation of Saud Bahwan Group. The Group is constantly redefining its efforts and re-engineering its activities to ensure even higher levels of customer satisfaction, making huge investments in modern facilities, efficient systems

As a result, Toyota has achieved the distinction of having one of the highest market shares in the world. It is also the most dominant and respected international brand in the country.

Nissan's 4WD range is widest in its class



MUSCAT — Nissan's SUV lineup is one of the best and widest ranges in its class. The Nissan Xterra, Nissan Qashqai, Nissan Armada, Nissan Murano, Nissan Navara, Nissan Pathfinder and Nissan Patrol are all part of Nissan's SUV range.

A senior spokesperson from Suhail Bahwan Automobiles commented: "We at Suhail Bahwan Automobiles stand by the Nissan philosophy of offering customers value-added packages that are bold and thoughtful. We constantly aim providing our customers with value-additions that actually benefit the customer. Nissan has increased its range of SUVs thereby give our customers a broader choice to choose from."

The familiar nameplates also feature a variety of innovations for 2008, visually and technically, giving Nissan a

lineup of unprecedented versatility covering a comprehensive range of usage — whether elegant urban transport, off-road warrior, or muscular all-purpose workhorse.

Top-of-the-line technology and engine upgrades, bigger and more spacious interiors, and bold and exciting new exteriors have for long been the hallmarks of Nissan's SUV range. The 2008 lineup maintains that heritage in both the all-new and updated versions.

The rugged and powerful, simple but capable SUV that has "everything you need, nothing you don't"; the Nissan Xterra, master of all terrains. The Nissan Xterra comes with a powerful 4.0 litre engine which delivers 291-horsepower from the V6 engine.

It is made for those who love to see what lies behind that mountain. Nissan Xterra

is ready for wherever the road or trail takes you.

Three trim levels will be available in the Middle East: Nissan Xterra X, S, and SE. All feature power windows and mirrors, power-assisted steering, audio system, manual air-conditioning, remote keyless entry, alloy wheels, low tyre-pressure indicator, and separate steps on rear bumper and rear bumper side.

The S version has front fog lamps and a six-speaker audio system with 6-disc CD changer. The top-of-the-range SE adds movable aerodynamic roof-rail cross bars, trip computer, cruise control, and 17-inch tires.

Common safety features include dual airbags and seat belt reminder, anti-lock braking with electric brake force distribution, and brake assist. The SE adds inflatable curtain bag, and vehicle dynamic control.

Hyundai vehicles gain global recognition



MUSCAT — Hyundai has bagged three major achievements since the beginning of this year, as it gains positive responses from global markets.

Hyundai announced yesterday that its sedan Accent GLE has been selected to be an official vehicle by the Indian government. According to Hyundai India, organisations under India's Commerce Ministry and central authorities in charge of purchasing and product quality certification have recently allowed the automaker's sedan, Accent GLE, to be used by all Indian government ministries and agencies across the country.

Hyundai spokesperson said that its cars have earned the trust of not only the government but the general consumer, since India's relevant authorities choose official vehicles through rigid evaluations and registration processes. "We feel highly honoured

since Hyundai is now on the list of automakers officially certified by the government.

Accent GLE is made for customers who want fuel-efficient compact cars," said another senior Hyundai official. Hyundai has also received good news from Russia.

Hyundai's Accent reportedly became the bestselling imported car in Russia for the month of January this year. The country's European Business Association released data that showed demand in Russia for the Accent doubled in a year.

Moreover, the automaker's new passenger car Hyundai i30 has been chosen as the "2008 Car of the Year" in Spain. Spain's best car of the year is based on design, performance, safety and reliability, as assessed by journalists working for newspapers, auto magazines and television programmes.

Hyundai's i30 came in first with 220 points, far ahead of the Fiat 500 which received 52 points, and Ford's Mondeo with 36 points.

The Hyundai i30 has drawn much attention since it earned a record-breaking number of points and is the first Asian automobile chosen to be Spain's best car of the year.

An official at Hyundai's overseas operations said: "Hyundai Motor's brand value is expected to increase in the global market. We plan to come up with aggressive marketing strategies by making good use of our achievements in Spain."

Hyundai as a brand has made significant strides on the back of sophisticated product design, leading-edge quality, safety technology and exceptional value. The last few years are of special significance for Hyundai — not only because Hyundai has become one

of the top automotive brands in the world but also because it has beaten some renowned brands in quality.

Hyundai's vehicles are winning accolades and awards from around the industry because they are safe, reliable, innovative and comfortable. This gives a refined driving experience for the owners and their families. One has to test drive and discover what millions of satisfied Hyundai owners already know — Hyundai stands for uncompromising quality.

OTE Group is the exclusive dealer of Hyundai's range of vehicles in Oman. With a nationwide network of showrooms and service centers, OTE Group ensures that Hyundai customers are never far from getting a wide range of high quality after-sales service. It is this strong partnership that continues to lead more customers to join the Hyundai family.

Microsoft to share more secrets

By Steve Lohr
The New York Times

NEW YORK — Seeking to satisfy European antitrust officials, Microsoft would open up and share many more of its technical secrets with the rest of the software industry and competitors. Microsoft executives, in a conference call, characterized the announcement as a "strategic shift" in the company's business practices and its handling of technical information. They also portrayed the moves as only partly a nod to the continuing challenge Microsoft faces from Europe's antitrust regulators.

The broader goal, they said, was to bring Microsoft's flagship personal computer products — the Windows operating system and Office productivity programmes — further into the internet era of computing. Increasingly, people want a seamless flow of documents, data and programming code among desktop PCs and the internet, especially as they make the shift from using software on a PC to using services on the web.

"These steps are being taken on our own," said Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's chief executive. The move, he said, was a recognition of Microsoft's "unique legal situation," but it was also the company's effort to adapt to "the opportunities and risks of a more connected, more services-oriented world." Microsoft's first step will be to put on its website 30,000 pages of technical documentation detailing how its Windows desktop and Microsoft server programmes communicate and share information. Until now, that information was treated as a trade secret and was available only under a special licence.

Ray Ozzie, Microsoft's chief software architect, said that by sharing more information, Microsoft would make it easier for others to write internet programs that tap into personal information on a PC.

That, Ozzie added, should bring new sets of web services that, for example, might match a person's calendar information with a doctor's schedule. Then smart software could make an appointment. At home, he noted, a person's digital collection of music, movies and family photos would be more easily shuffled to different devices and screens.

"The internet opens up a world of potential innovation," Ozzie said. "And I think we've just scratched the surface."

Microsoft announced other plans to open

up its technology, like allowing developers to add more non-Microsoft document formats to its Office word processing and spreadsheet programs. Microsoft also made commitments to increase its support for industry standards and work with open-source software developers.

European regulators and others have long accused Microsoft of using its dominance in PC operating systems and software to lock out competitors. Last October, after a nine-year confrontation and a ruling against the company by Europe's second-highest court, Microsoft agreed to share information with rivals on terms it had long resisted. Then, after fresh complaints from Microsoft's competitors, the European antitrust regulators last month announced that they were opening new investigations of the company.

The new inquiry focuses partly on whether Microsoft has withheld essential information from competitors that want to make products that work smoothly with its Office programs. The Office products were not part of the previous European action against Microsoft. After the Microsoft announcement on Thursday, the European Commission issued a sceptical statement. The commission said it "would welcome any move toward genuine interoperability," or allowing software programs from different companies to work smoothly together. But the commission noted that "today's announcement follows at least four similar statements by Microsoft in the past on the importance of interoperability."

Asked about the commission's statement, Bradford L. Smith, Microsoft's general counsel, said that the company's moves were "qualitatively and quantitatively different from anything we've done in the past." "People will test us not just by our words but by our actions," Smith added.

The industry is taking a wait-and-see stance on Microsoft's plan. Linux, an open-source competitor to Windows, stands to benefit from Microsoft's more open posture. Regulators and competition are "forcing Microsoft to change the way it does business," said James Zemlin, executive director of the Linux Foundation, a nonprofit consortium. The change comes as Microsoft is trying to buy Yahoo, a huge deal that, if it proceeds, will be closely scrutinised by antitrust officials worldwide. The European regulators typically take a harder line than their American counterparts in challenging takeovers.

Shipping schedule at Port Sultan Qaboos					
ANCHORAGE					
Flag	Vessel	Arrived	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Pan	Bitumen Ride	15.02	964	Bitumen	ISS
Pan	Super Star	18.02	2271	Steel Pipes	TBL
Chn	Yuan Yu-822	20.02		Bunker	ARB
CONFIRMED ARRIVALS					
Pan	OEL Spirit	21.02	217	Containers	KR
Jpn	Poseidon Leader	21.02	2588	Vehicles	GAC
Rus	STK-1020	21.02		Containers	SSS
Com	Noor-e-Madina	21.02	16600	Clinker	ISS
FORWARD ARRIVALS					
Flag	Vessel	Arrv. date	Tonnage	Cargo	Agent
Pan	MSC Ariane	23.02		Containers	SHS
Cyp	Kapitan Byankin	23.02		Containers	SSS
Deu	Al Shamiah	23.02		Vehicles	HB
Pan	Pegasus Leader	23.02	22	Containers	GAC
Rus	STK-1020	23.02		Containers	SSS
Pan	Olympic Carrier	24.02		Cement	KR
Ita	Aida Cara	24.02		Tourist	KR
Bhs	Platinum Ray	24.02	100	Vehicles	GAC
Cyp	APL Sokhna	24.02		Containers	MS
Ita	Costa Romantica	25.02		Tourists	KR
Pan	Beach Galaxy	25.02	3500	Vegetable Oil	GAC
Pan	Caribbean Carrier	25.02		Cement	KR
Ita	Costa Europa	26.02		Tourists	KR
Omn	Al Mustaqila	26.02		Bunker	TBL
Pan	Mi Yun He	26.02		Containers	UFA
Nis	Heogh Berlin	27.02	542	Vehicles	KN
Deu	Al Shamiah	27.02		Containers	HB
Atg	Osnabrock	28.02		Containers	MSK
Lbr	Buxcrown	28.02		Containers	KR
Pan	MSC Ariane	28.02		Containers	SHS

FISHING TRAWLERS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE					
Flag	Vessel	Date	Time	Cargo	Agent
Im	Kavian	23.02	31	Fish	TBL

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Daily Exchange Rate						
Currencies	Buying	Selling	1 OMR=FC			
UAE Dirham	0.10381	0.10587	9.50			
Australian Dollar	0.35295	0.35456	2.82			
Bangladesh Taka	0.00561	0.00565	177.00			
Bahrain Dinar	1.01918	1.02327	0.98			
Canadian Dollar	0.37945	0.38116	2.62			
Swiss Franc	0.34946	0.35096	2.85			
Danish Krone	0.07588	0.07622	13.12			
EURO	0.56502	0.56854	1.76			
British pound	0.74543	0.75011	1.33			
Hong Kong Dollar	0.04926	0.04946	20.22			
Indian Rupee	0.00957	0.00961	104.06			
Jordanian Dinar	0.54155	0.54526	1.83			
Japanese Yen	0.00356	0.00357	279.93			
Sri Lanka Rupee	0.00357	0.00357	280.13			
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.40538	1.41205	0.71			
Malaysian Ringgit	0.11922	0.11980	8.35			
Norwegian Krone	0.07153	0.07230	13.83			
New Zealand Dollar	0.30523	0.30676	3.26			
Pakistani Rupee	0.00611	0.00614	162.95			
Qatari Rial	0.10558	0.10609	9.43			
Saudi Rial	0.10244	0.10288	9.72			
Swedish Krona	0.06067	0.06098	16.40			
Singapore Dollar	0.27216	0.27344	3.66			
US Dollar	0.38300	0.38700	2.58			
South Africa Rand	6.76255	6.71634	0.15			
Indicative Interest Rates For Deposits						
Currency	1 MTH	2 MTH	3 MTH	6 MTH	9 MTH	1 year
OMR	0.75	1.00	1.25	2.50	2.75	3.25
USD	3.05	2.99	2.93	2.87	2.70	2.68
GBP	4.31	4.14	4.07	4.22	4.02	4.06
EUR	2.83	2.90	2.96	2.98	2.98	2.95
AED	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.62	1.45	1.43

VISION Investment Services Co. S.A.O.C.		VISION Emerging Oman Fund	
NAV Date	17/2/2008	20/02/2008	
No. of Units	12,323,000.00	11,228,115	
Fund NAV	20,175,150.00	16,257,205	
NAV Per Unit	1.637	1.448	
Inception Date	19/05/2005	06/08/2007	
Dividends paid (since inception)	16%	-----	
YTD performance	0.86%	9.37%	
Performance since inception	79.70%	44.79%	

MUMBAI STOCKS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Stocks slump on US recession fears

NEW DELHI — India's stock benchmark fell, paced by banking shares, on concern recent cuts in lending rates will erode their earnings and the US will enter a recession. State Bank of India, the nation's largest bank by assets, fell for a fourth time this week. The bank has cut its lending rates twice this month. ICICI Bank Ltd, the nation's most valuable lender, declined for a third day. "The market is signalling to banks that deposit rates should also moderate in line with lending rates," said P. Phani Sekhar, who manages \$25 million at Angel Broking Ltd. The Bombay Stock Exchange's Sensitive Index, or Sensx, fell 385.61, or 2.2 per cent, to 17,349.07 at close. The index fell 4.2 per cent this week. The gauge for banking shares was the second-biggest loser among 18 industry indexes on the exchange this week, falling 7.4 per cent. The real estate index was the biggest loser, shedding 8 per cent of its value. The S&P CNX Nifty fell 81.05, or 1.6 per cent, to 5,110.75. State Bank dropped Rs64.60, or 3 per cent, to 2,114.70, extending this week's loss to 8 per cent. The lender cut its key rate 25 basis points to 12.25 per cent this week, after announcing a similar decrease on February 11. The latest reduction will take effect on February 27. ICICI Bank fell 3.9 per cent to 1,099.40, having declined 7.7 per cent in the week. Bajaj Auto Ltd, the nation's second largest maker of motorcycles, fell for the first time in seven sessions, declining the most this week. The stock lost Rs115.25, or 4.8 per cent, to 2,295.60, paring this week's gains to 5.6 per cent. It was the worst-performing stock on the index yesterday. "The fear is that with input costs rising and sales declining because of competition the profitability of companies will be eroded," said R.K. Gupta, who manages the equivalent of \$120 million of stocks at Taurus Mutual Fund in New Delhi. Major Asian indexes fell on concern the US will enter a recession. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's general economic index declined to minus 24 in February, it said yesterday, more than the minus 10 expected by economists surveyed by Bloomberg. A drop in the index to at least minus 24 always corresponded with the onset of a US recession, according to data since 1968 compiled by Bespoke Investment Group LLC. — Bloomberg News

BSE SENSITIVE INDEX: 17,349.07

Table listing various BSE Sensitive Index components and their values, including sectors like IT, Banking, and Real Estate.

Table listing various stock market indices and their values, including Nifty, Sensex, and various sectoral indices.

KARACHI STOCKS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Table listing various Karachi Stock Exchange components and their values, including sectors like Banking, Real Estate, and Industrial.

Index rises to record on positive sentiment

KARACHI — Pakistan's benchmark stock index rose to a record for a second straight day after the leader of the party with most seats in national elections is prepared to form a coalition. Banks gained. The Karachi Stock Exchange 100 Index added 142.24 points, or 1 per cent, to 14,971.94 at the 2:15pm local time close. The index earlier passed 15,000 points for the first time. The index has now recouped all its losses since December 27. "Sentiment is positive due to clarity on the political front, helping the market set a record for a second day," said Jawad Haleem, head of research at Atlas Capital Ltd, in Karachi. "Investors see elections as a real step towards democracy." "It is the post-election euphoria. If the government-forming process remains on track, the market should move forward," said Atif Malik, research analyst at JS Global Capital Ltd, in Karachi. The index rose as high as 15,034.31. National Bank of Pakistan, the nation's biggest lender by assets, rose Rs7.15, or 2.8 per cent, to 266.80. MCB Bank Ltd, the biggest lender by market value, gained Rs6.75, or 1.5 per cent, to 451.75. Allied Bank Ltd rose Rs7.25, or 5 per cent, to 152.75. Oil & Gas Development Co., the biggest exporter of fuels in Pakistan and the nation's largest company by market value, advanced Rs1.60, or 1.3 per cent, to 129.70. — Internews

KARACHI STOCKS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Table listing various Karachi Stock Exchange components and their values, including sectors like Banking, Real Estate, and Industrial.

Large table listing various international stock market indices and their values, including US, European, Asian, and other regional indices.

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MOVIE

In The Mix at 2130hrs on Star Movies



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ENVIRONMENT

Biofuels may promote global warming



page 24

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COUNTRY LIVING

Sprawling, sparse and functional, Steve Sharpe's rural ranch gets the best out of simple architectural expression

STEVE Sharpe looked at his land in rural Ventura County in Southern California and envisioned his future home as an East Coast country estate with arched doorways, white columns, even a formal ballroom. Standing next to him was architect Zoltan Pali, who saw less Monticello and more modern California ranch — something that could disappear among the orange and lemon groves.

Fortunately, the two men did not have to argue. The year was 1987, and soon after Sharpe bought the property in Somis, the economy, the building industry and his income as a drywall contractor took a dive. Monticello-meets-Southern California was put on hold, much to his relief today.

The recently completed residence is a dramatic departure from what either man imagined so long ago — the result of Sharpe's acquired taste for minimal design and Pali's sharpened skills as an architect of sleek, almost transparent homes. This house, Sharpe says, is the product of two decades of personal evolution and architectural maturity — a design that presents an alternative picture of what country life can be.

"I don't see the house as 'metropolitan' but as a country house responding to its setting," Pali says.

"Rural has always been associated with simplicity, sparseness and function. That is this house. I see it as a simple architectural

expression with elements boiled down to their essence with no fussy moves, just large and bold geometries. That is as rural as it gets."

Sharpe's Lucky Dog Ranch covers 40 acres, blanketed by a lawn the size of a Little League diamond, plus orchards, a tropical garden and a tennis court. The L-shaped house sits at the end of a 1,000-foot-long, tree-lined drive. Set against the hills, its smooth white stucco and metal-panel exterior walls act like a beacon, as welcoming as a lighthouse.

In the back yard, an 80-foot lap pool unfurls like a bolt of fabric toward a concrete pad with a fireplace and the terraced landscape beyond.

Sitting on a sunny deck, Pali remembers those early days, when he and Sharpe first tossed around ideas for the design. "I thought this, my first house, would put me on the map," Pali says.



A view of the master bedroom with orchards in the background

time to continually refine the design based on what the land was doing," Pali says. "By 1992, it was radically different than the initial sketches."

The 7,100-square-foot doors were placed at 3-1/2-foot increments. The overall effect is a sense of order and alignment, of harmony and beauty.

a wine cellar next to a small prep kitchen with a dumbwaiter. Also down below: a three-car garage.

"When some neighbours saw the house under construction, they mistook the outside railing and the driveway into the garage as a loading dock," Sharpe says, laughing.

"They couldn't figure out what we were building." A separate guest wing has a parlour and four bedrooms, including one for Sharpe's elder daughter, Skylar, 20, when she's on break from American University in Washington, DC.

Inside and out, the house retains little of Sharpe's early vision, the neoclassical details replaced with aluminium doors, pop-up clerestory windows on 14-foot-high ceilings and uniform corridors leading from one doorless room to another. In two powder rooms, Sharpe installed glass ceilings, "which kind of rattles guests when they look up", he says, smiling and clearly enjoying the response.

To some visitors, the look is so minimal it may appear unfinished. In the entry closet and a butler's pantry, walls don't reach the ceilings, as though these modules landed from the sky. The void at the top allows natural light to flow into the space.

"One can make the assessment that its 'style' is modern, and that it is odd to see it in a rural setting. This is true," Pali says.

"But Modernism is not a style but rather a way of living. I know that recently Modernism has become a style, and that frightens me. The over 'coolification' of everything is turning Modernism into a style and sort of a commodity — something that it should

not be. It should remain in the high road, intellectual and philosophical."

Part of the beauty of Pali's design is the way it frames each view like some plain-air painting and connects the interiors with the landscape beyond. Walking through the long, narrow master bedroom, Sharpe points to the two parallel glass walls, one facing the front yard and one the back. He refers to his bedroom as 'the observatory' because land and sky are so, well, right there.

He wanders past the open kitchen and the dining room, then stops.

"This is my favourite room," he says, his feet planted on exposed aggregate concrete in the space off the entry that was originally conceived as the ballroom.

Far from its initial sketches as a round Sharpe ditched the rest of their "treasures", and the couple bought contemporary art by Vernon Fisher, Tim Bavington, Robert Therrien and a stainless-steel sculpture by Cheryl Ekstrom that replicates the Eames chaise longue and ottoman.

"This house has really been a shedding experience," Sharpe says. "Because of it, I realised I don't need all this junk I was dragging from place to place, and I no longer have the need to decorate every wall. Maybe I won't feel the same way in another house, but too much stuff just doesn't look right here."

He pauses, looks around. "This house is a result of a long, long collaboration. It's about an architect and a client coming of age."

— **By Janet Eastman/ Los Angeles Times**

In two powder rooms, Sharpe installed glass ceilings, 'which kind of rattles guests when they look up', he says, smiling and clearly enjoying the response

"Little did I know I'd have to wait 20 years."

Pali had just opened his own company, since renamed Studio Pali Fekete Architects, when he started the Sharpe project.

"Thankfully, this idea sat around because of the poor economy, and I had

The symmetrical plan evolved into a layout based on a precise grid. Pali took a cue from the ranch's tidy rows of fruit trees positioned 14 feet apart. Walls and stucco screed lines were then spaced at half that measure and windows and

main floor of the house contains living and family rooms, a dining area and kitchen, as well as bedrooms for Sharpe and wife Laura, and their daughter, Estelle, 9. A lower level with about 3,000 more square feet has another bedroom, laundry area and



Trees silhouetted in the evening sky provide the backdrop for a deck

TINSEL TALK

The 'Hottie' who is banned from the Oscars

PARIS Hilton has reportedly been banned from the Oscars. The hotel heiress — whose latest movie *The Hot Chick* grossed just \$9,000 at the US box office in its opening weekend — was devastated after being told she couldn't attend the prestigious event. A source said: "She cried hot, salty tears when she was banned from the Oscars. She's desperate to be taken seriously as an actress and hoped she would be able to network with film executives."



Paris — who infamously starred in home video sex-tape *One Night in Paris* — had even splashed out £2 million on a designer dress for the ceremony at Hollywood's Kodak Theatre. *The Simple Life* star is now considering going to one of the many after-show parties but may have to wear a disguise.

A source added to Britain's *Daily Star* newspaper: "She's tempted to go to the parties afterwards but might wear her trademark wig to save her dignity."

Radcliffe, Watson spend Valentine's together



DANIEL Radcliffe spent Valentine's Day with his *Harry Potter* co-star Emma Watson. Daniel, who stars as the boy wizard in the hit movie franchise, took Emma to west London's Imperial Arms pub where they spent the evening hugging and laughing. A source said: "Everyone thought it was amazing they had decided to spend Valentine's Day

together — the most romantic day of the year. They looked like a love-struck couple who only seemed to have eyes for each other. Daniel and Emma arrived quite late at the pub — about 10pm." Emma was keen to keep her blossoming romance with Daniel, 18, a secret and hid her face with her scarf. The source added to Britain's *Daily Mirror* newspaper: "Emma kept looking over her shoulder, she didn't want to be recognised. When people began to notice the couple, she wrapped her scarf around her head so only her eyes were peeping out. Daniel found her new look hysterical and started laughing. He spent the evening giggling like a love-struck teen." Daniel, who split from his *Equus* co-star Laura O'Toole last year, has known 17-year-old Emma since the pair met on the set of 2001's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

J-Lo, Anthony strike \$6m deal for twins photos



PREGNANT Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony are set to receive a record \$6 million for the first pictures of their twins. *The Do It Well* singer — who is rumoured to be due end February — has reportedly secured the highest price ever paid for celebrity baby photos following a deal with *People* magazine. The staggering sum will be shared with *OK!* magazine, who will print the pictures in their 15 international editions. A spokesperson for the *OK!* magazine said: "It is fantastic for these international markets, and especially important with the immense strength the exclusive will bring to the new launch of *OK!* Spain."

Christina Aguilera is said to have received \$1.5 million for posing with newborn son Max Liron Bratman on the cover of *People* magazine, while Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie received \$4 million for pictures of their biological daughter Shiloh.

DHOW TRIP TO THE DIMANIYAT ISLANDS
Departing Daily
From Al Sawadi Beach Resort

- SNORKELLING**
Depart at 09:00am, spend two hours cruising the Dimaniyat Islands, Snorkel on the beautiful reefs, lunch on the Dhow, return by 4pm
- DINNER CRUISE**
Depart at 4pm, cruise along the coast to the Dimaniyat Islands and back, whilst dinner is being served.
- IMPROMPTU CRUISE**
Down the coast to Barka, then across to the Dimaniyat Islands, includes water & soft drinks 4 hours duration, Minimum 12 persons

Tel.: 26795545 • E-mail: sales@alsawadibeach.com • Web: www.alsawadibeach.com

INFORMATION

MOVIES IN TOWN

Oman Arab Cinema Company LLC
 Website: <http://www.filmcityoman.com>
 CHILDREN BELOW 3 YEARS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE CINEMA

AL SHATTI PLAZA
 Telephone: 24692656 (after 2pm)

First Snow (Drama/Thriller) 3:30 & 11:45pm
 Cast: Guy Pearce and Piper Perabo
 Censor Permit No: 105

P.S. I Love You (Drama) 5:30pm
 Cast: Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler
 Censor Permit No: 112

Jumper (Action) 6:00, 7:45 & 10:00pm
 Cast: Hayden Christensen and Samuel L. Jackson; Censor Permit No: 104

Rendition (Drama) 3:30, 9:30 & 11:45pm
 Cast: Reese Witherspoon and Omar Metwally
 Censor Permit No: 114

I Know Who Killed Me (Thriller) For 18+
 3:00 & 11:45pm
 Cast: Lindsay Lohan and Julia Ormond
 Censor Permit No: 93

Things We Lost In The Fire (Drama) 5:00pm
 Cast: Benicio Del Toro and Halle Berry
 Censor Permit No: 108

Heya Fawda (Arabic/Crime)
 7:15 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Youssef El Shristen and Hala Fakher
 Censor Permit No: 76

AL NASR CINEMA
 Film Information: 24831358
 For more information 24831809 (After 3pm)

Jodhaa Akbar (Hindi) 3:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai
 Censor Permit No: 101

Jodhaa Akbar (Hindi) 6:30pm
 Cast: Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai
 Censor Permit No: 101

Rama Rama Kya Hai Drama (Hindi) 3:30pm
 Cast: Anupam Kher and Amrita Arora
 Censor Permit No: 87

Super Star (Hindi)
 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Kunal Khemu, Tulip Joshi and Reema Lagoo
 Censor Permit No: 115

Advance Booking For Wednesday To Tuesday From 2:30pm To 10pm

AL WAFI PLAZA - SUR
 Telephone: 25545544 (after 2pm)

Rambo (Action)
 For 15+
 7:30 & 11:30pm
 Cast: Sylvester Stallone and Julie Benz
 Censor Permit No: 68

No Country For Old Men (Drama)
 9:30pm
 Cast: Tommy Lee Jones and Josh Brodin
 Censor Permit No: 86

College Kumaran (Mal.)
 7:30 & 10:30pm
 Cast: Mohanlal, Vimla Raman and Siddique
 Censor Permit No: 116

FILM CITY
 Telephone: Muttrah: 24798081;
 Qurum 24560341 (9:30-1:00, 4:30-9:00pm)

English (DVD/VCD) (DVD/VCD)
 Nancy Drew — DVD
 Resident Evil: Extinction — DVD
 Skinwalkers — DVD
 Lions For Lambs
 Balls Of Fury — DVD
 Dragon Wars — DVD
 The Invasion — DVD
 The Heartbreak Kid
 Hairspray — DVD
 The Brave One
 The Kingdom — DVD
 The Invention — DVD
 Evan Almighty
 Ratatouille — DVD

(Hindi-Tamil) (DVD/VCD)
 Dus Kahaaniyan
 Welcome
 Nijam (Tamil/VCD)
 Billa (Tamil/VCD)
 Kannaamoochi Enadaa (Tamil/VCD)
 Kalluori (Tamil/VCD)
 Rameshwaram (Tamil/VCD)
 Agra (Tamil/VCD)
 Oram Po (Tamil/VCD)
 Khoya Khoya Chand
 Yeh To House Full Ho
 Gaya — VCD

RUWI CINEMA

Things We Lost In Fire (Eng.)
 2:00, 8:30 & 10:30pm
 Cast: Halle Berry and Benicio Del Toro
 Censor Permit No: 108

P.S. I Love You (Eng.)
 4:15, 6:15 & 8:15pm
 Cast: Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler
 Censor Permit No: 112

Rambo - IV (Eng.)
 6:00 & 7:30pm
 Cast: Sylvester Stallone and Julie Benz
 Censor Permit No: 69

First Snow (Eng.)
 2:00, 4:00 & 6:15pm
 Cast: Guy Pearce and Piper Perabo
 Censor Permit No: 105

Al Hub Kida (Arabic)
 2:00 & 10:30pm
 Cast: Ehamada Hlal and Dorra
 Censor Permit No: 104

Jodhaa Akbar (Hindi)
 2:00, 5:45, 8:55 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan
 Censor Permit No: 102

Visit us at: www.ruwicinema.com
 Theatres equipped with Digital & Dolby Sound System

Al-Bahja Cinema

P.S. I Love You (Drama)
 4:00, 8:00, 10:00 & 11:55pm
 Cast: Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler
 Censor Permit No: 112

Things We Lost In The Fire (Drama)
 6:00 & 10:00pm
 Cast: Benicio Del Toro and Halle Berry
 Censor Permit No: 108

First Snow (Drama/Thriller)
 2:00 & 6:00pm
 Cast: Guy Pearce and Piper Perabo
 Censor Permit No: 105

Al Hub Kida (Comedy) 4:00 & 8:00pm
 Cast: Hamada Helal and Dorra
 Censor Permit No: 104

No Country For Old Men (Drama)
 2:00pm
 Cast: Tommy Lee Jones and Josh Brodin
 Censor Permit No: 86

Rambo - IV (Action) 11:55pm
 Cast: Sylvester Stallone and Julie Benz
 Censor Permit No: 69

Film Information - 24540856
 Advance Booking - 24540855
 Website: www.albahjacinema.com

STAR CINEMA

Film information:
 24791641
 24792360

College Kumaran (Mal.)
 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Mohanlal and Siddique
 Censor Permit No: 115

Flash (Mal.)
 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Mohanlal, Parvati and Jagathi
 Censor Permit No: 98

Romeo (Mal.)
 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Dileep, Vimla and Samvrutha
 Censor Permit No: 64

Closed Till Further Notice

Bheemaa (Tamil)
 3:30, 6:30 & 9:30pm
 Cast: Vikram, Trisha and Prakashraj
 Censor Permit No: 76

Theatres equipped with Digital & Dolby Sound System
www.isurf.co.om

HEALTH CAPSULES®
 by Bron Smith

WHAT'S AN ALTERNATIVE TO DRINKING WATER? IT GETS BORING.

IF ONLY WATER TASTED LIKE COKE!

TRY DRINKING FRUIT JUICE OR CAFFEINE-FREE SPORTS BEVERAGES. DILUTE THEM WITH WATER OR CLUB SODA TO CUT DOWN ON SUGAR AND EXTRA CALORIES.

Health Capsules is not intended to be of a diagnostic nature.

Museums

Bait Al Baranda
 Corniche (seafont opp fish market)
 Open from Saturday to Thursday 9am to 1pm and 4 - 6pm

Natural History Museum,
 Al Khwair, Tel: 24604957
 Open from Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm
 Thursday: 9am to 1pm
Museum of Omani Heritage (former Omani Museum),
 Khoya Khoya Chand
 Midinat Al Alam
 Sat-Wed 8am to 1:30pm,

Thursday - 9am to 1pm
 (Tuesday 4pm to 6pm till March 2007)
 Tel: 24600946

Armed Forces Museum,
 Bait Al Falaj,
 Tel: 24312651
 Open from Saturday to Thursday: 8am to 1pm

Children's Science Museum,
 Shatti Al Qurum,
 Tel: 24605368
 Open from Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm
 Thursday: 9am to 1pm

Oman-French Museum, Near Muscat Police Station,
 Tel: 24736613

Open from Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm
 Thursday: 9am to 1pm
 Bait Al Zubair, Muscat,
 Tel: 24736688
 bazubair@omantel.net.om
 Open from Saturday to Thursday: 9:30am to 1pm & evenings from 4pm to 7pm

National Museum, Ruwi,
 Tel: 24701289
 Open from Saturday to Wednesday: 8am to 1:30pm
 Thursday: 9am to 1pm

Sohar Fort Museum, Tel: 26844758
 Open from Saturday to Wednesday: 8 to 1:30pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm

PHARMACY

Muscat Region
Night Duty
 Al Hashar, Ruwi (24Hr. Br.)
 Tel. 24833115
 Ibn Sina, Al Ghubra,
 Tel. 24490394
 Muscat, A Seeb Market,
 Tel. 24421691

Muscat, Al Hail (North),
 Tel. 24535977

Dhofar Region
Night Duty
 International,
 Al Salam Road, Salalah,
 Tel. 23292450

Kanoo Travel
 سفريات كانوو
 P.O. Box 13, Postal Code 114, Jibrah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24100219/276796, Fax: 24100017

AIRLINE Schedule

FLY NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA	FLY NO	ARRIVALS FROM	ETA	
WY518	SALALAH	0030	WY518	SALALAH	0030	
PK225	KARACHI	0040	WY534	COCHIN	0100	
WY534	COCHIN	0100	8G023	DHAKA	0135	
8G023	DHAKA	0135	8G064	AMMAN-ABU DHABI	0305	
8G064	AMMAN-ABU DHABI	0305	GF558	BAHRAIN	0335	
GF558	BAHRAIN	0335	EK866	DUBAI	0355	
EK866	DUBAI	0355	EY384	ABU DHABI	0410	
EY384	ABU DHABI	0410	WY806	BOMBAY	0840	
WY806	BOMBAY	0840	WY836	HYDERABAD	0840	
WY836	HYDERABAD	0840	WY856	MADRAS	0925	
WY856	MADRAS	0925	WY828	COCHIN	0925	
WY828	COCHIN	0925	EK862	DUBAI	0925	
EK862	DUBAI	0925	MP557	AMSTERDAM	0930	
MP557	AMSTERDAM	0930	WY906	LONDON GATWICK	0945	
WY906	LONDON GATWICK	0945	09111	SHARJAH	0955	
09111	SHARJAH	0955	09166	DOHA	1010	
09166	DOHA	1010	EY382	ABU DHABI	1025	
EY382	ABU DHABI	1025	PK301	GRABER	1115	
PK301	GRABER	1115	WY538	CALCUTTA	1135	
WY538	CALCUTTA	1135	WY886	BANGKOK	1155	
WY886	BANGKOK	1155	WY302	MUKHAJAZNA	1210	
WY302	MUKHAJAZNA	1210	WY608	DUBAI	1210	
WY608	DUBAI	1210	GF552	BAHRAIN	1220	
GF552	BAHRAIN	1220	DX349	CALCUTTA-TRIVANDRUM	1245	
DX349	CALCUTTA-TRIVANDRUM	1245	DX481	COCHIN-MANGALORE-ABU DHABI	1300	
DX481	COCHIN-MANGALORE-ABU DHABI	1300	WY866	LONDON	1425	
WY866	LONDON	1425	WY506	SALALAH	1430	
WY506	SALALAH	1430	WY802	KARACHI	1500	
WY802	KARACHI	1500	09154	DOHA	1540	
09154	DOHA	1540	MP93	AMSTERDAM	1650	
MP93	AMSTERDAM	1650	WY304	MUKHAJAZNA	1730	
WY304	MUKHAJAZNA	1730	WY612	DUBAI	1830	
WY612	DUBAI	1830	GF554	BAHRAIN	1925	
GF554	BAHRAIN	1925	GF554	BAHRAIN	1925	
GF554	BAHRAIN	1925	WY516	SALALAH	1930	
WY516	SALALAH	1930	WY576	CAIRO	1930	
WY576	CAIRO	1930	TC507	BANGKOK	2130	
TC507	BANGKOK	2130	KL459	AMSTERDAM-KUWAIT	2135	
KL459	AMSTERDAM-KUWAIT	2135	WY644	DUBAI-KUWAIT	2135	
WY644	DUBAI-KUWAIT	2135	IC925	MADRAS-CALCUTTA	2145	
IC925	MADRAS-CALCUTTA	2145	BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2210	
BA073	LONDON HEATHROW-ABU DHABI	2210	2215	WY908	DUBAI	2215
2215	WY908	DUBAI	2215	QR168	DOHA	2235
QR168	DOHA	2235	GF556	BAHRAIN	2245	
GF556	BAHRAIN	2245	EY388	ABU DHABI	2255	
EY388	ABU DHABI	2255	IC685	AMMADABAD-BOMBAY	2310	
IC685	AMMADABAD-BOMBAY	2310	WY686	BEIRUT-DUBAI	2315	
WY686	BEIRUT-DUBAI	2315	LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2320	
LX242	ZURICH-DUBAI	2320	WY556	BAHRAIN	2335	
WY556	BAHRAIN	2335	WY626	DUBAI	2340	
WY626	DUBAI	2340	PK229	ISLAMABAD-LAHORE	2345	
PK229	ISLAMABAD-LAHORE	2345				

DEPARTURES TO

FLY NO	DEPARTURES TO	ETD
IC686	BOMBAY-AHMEDABAD	0015
BA072	ABU DHABI-LONDON HEATHROW	0015
LX243	DUBAI-ZURICH	0035
WY815	TRIVANDRUM	0050
WY835	MADRAS	0050
WY855	HYDERABAD	0055
WY827	COCHIN	0120
PK226	KARACHI	0140
WY805	BOMBAY	0140
WY537	CALCUTTA	0230
IC926	CALCUTTA-MADRAS	0230
8G024	KARACHI-DHAKA	0300
EK867	DUBAI	0500
GF557	BAHRAIN	0555
R665	ABU DHABI-AMMAN	0615
WY865	LONDON	0630
WY301	MUKHAJAZNA	0800
GF559	BAHRAIN	0800
WY607	DUBAI	0810
WY505	SALALAH	1030
WY575	CAIRO	1030
09112	SHARJAH	1035
WY885	DUBAI-BEIRUT	1040
WY801	KARACHI	1045
EK863	DUBAI	1045
QR167	DOHA	1055
MP557	COLOMBO	1100
EY383	ABU DHABI	1125
PK192	GRABER	1155
WY533	COCHIN	1305
WY303	MUKHAJAZNA	1330
WY643	DUBAI-KUWAIT	1340
IC350	CALCUTTA	1345
DX482	MANGALORE-COCHIN	1355
WY885	BANGKOK	1425
GF553	BAHRAIN	1500
WY515	SALALAH	1530
WY611	DUBAI	1530
WY905	LONDON GATWICK	1600
WY667	RYADH	1610
MP93	SHARJAH-HONG KONG	1820
QR165	DOHA	1900
WY655	BAHRAIN	1930
WY657	DOHA	1950
GF555	BAHRAIN	2015
09118	SHARJAH	2030
WY625	DUBAI	2030
WY517	SALALAH	2030
MP558	AMSTERDAM	2155
LH619	DOHA-FRANKFURT	2250
IC886	DELHI	2310
GF557	BAHRAIN	2335
EY381	ABU DHABI	2355

Schedule supplied by Oman Air • For Flight Information Call 24519223

TV Schedule

Star World - Star Select

0600 Ghost Hunters
 0700 Home James
 0800 Life With Bonnie
 0830 According To Jim
 0900 Most Shocking
 1000 Code Red
 1100 For Better Or For Worse
 1200 American Idol
 1300 Are You Smart
 1400 Criminal Minds
 1500 Ghost Hunters
 1600 Whistler
 1700 Code Red
 1800 Kyle Xy
 1900 Whistler
 2000 Brothers & Sisters
 2100 Surviving The Moment Of Impact
 2200 TNA Xplosion
 2300 Ill Fight Night
 0000 Whistler
 0100 TNA Xplosion
 0200 Kyle Xy
 0300 Brothers & Sisters
 0400 NGC Program
 0430 Whistler
 0530 Life With Bonnie

Fox Sports - Star Select

0700 Triathlon Series Corus
 Elite Hyde Park
 0730 World Of Athletics
 0800 PortuGol
 0830 Major Indoor Soccer League California Vs New Jersey
 1030 Golf Central
 International
 1100 WorldHockey Monthly
 1130 PortuGol
 1200 PGA TOUR: Mayakoba Classic Rd. 2
 1400 Watersports World
 1500 Golf Central
 International
 1530 ATP Tennis Show
 1600 ICC Cricket World
 1630 Weekly Update With Boost Mobile
 1700 Watersports World
 1800 Barcelona World Race
 1830 ASP Women's Surfing Sunset Beach, Oahu
 1900 Triathlon Series Corus Elite Hyde Park
 1930 Road To Beijing
 2000 World Of Athletics
 2030 Gillette World Soccer
 2100 Major Indoor Soccer League California Vs New Jersey
 2300 USATF: The Millrose Games New York, NY
 0100 SEC Basketball: Georgia Bulldogs At Vanderbilt CommodoresNashville
 0300 Pac-10 Men's Basketball Arizona St. @ Washington
 0500 ATP Tennis Show
 0530 The Golf Channel TBA

ESPN Sports - Orbit

0730 NBA Boston Celtics Vs Phoenix Suns Live
 1000 SportsCenter Live
 1100 College Basketball Teams Tba

Animal Planet - Showtime

0620 Animal Cops Phoenix
 0710 The Planet's Funniest Animals
 0800 Nick Baker's Weird Creatures
 0855 Natural World
 0950 Chasing Nature
 1045 Mountains Of The Snow Leopard
 1140 Crocodile Hunter
 1235 Animal Crackers
 1330 Chasing Nature
 1425 Nick Baker's Weird Creatures
 1520 Natural World
 1615 Animal Crime Scene
 1710 Animal Cops Houston
 1805 Mountains Of The Snow Leopard
 1900 Animal Crackers
 2000 Chasing Nature
 2100 Crocodile Hunter
 2200 Nick Baker's Weird Creatures
 2300 Natural World
 0000 Animal Crime Scene
 0100 Animal Cops Houston
 0155 Chasing Nature
 0250 Animal Crackers
 0345 Nick Baker's Weird Creatures
 0440 Natural World
 0530 Animal Crime Scene

Cartoon Network - ST

0605 The Powerpuff Girls
 0630 Dexter's Laboratory
 0655 Gadget Boy
 0720 Cramp Twins
 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
 1015 Johnny Bravo
 1040 Camp Lazlo
 1110 My Gym Partner's A Monkey
 1130 Codename: Kids Next Door
 1225 The Amazing Adrenalini Brothers
 1240 Skunk Fu
 1310 Robotboy
 1335 Ben 10
 1400 King Arthur's Disasters
 1425 Courage The Cowardly Dog
 1450 Dexter's Laboratory
 1515 The Powerpuff Girls
 1540 Evil Con Carne
 1605 The Grim Adventures Of Billy And Mandy
 1630 Codename: Kids Next

Disney - Showtime

0620 Fillmore
 0640 Recess
 0700 House Of Mouse
 0725 Lilo And Stitch
 0750 Recess
 0815 Kim Possible
 0840 Brandy And Mr Whiskers
 0900 Fairly Odd Parents
 0925 Emperor's New School
 0945 Replacements
 1000 Phineas And Ferb
 1010 American Dragon
 1035 Kim Possible
 1100 Hannah Montana
 1125 As The Bell Rings
 1130 Tigger Movie
 1300 Recess
 1325 House Of Mouse
 1350 Goof Troop

Channel V - Star Select

0600 Papparazzi
 0730 The Record Shop
 0800 [V] Countdown
 0900 [V]RW: 50th Annual Grammy Awards
 1100 [V] Special
 1130 Double Shot
 1200 America's Next Top Model C9
 1400 Double Shot
 1430 Soundtracks
 1600 Video [Scope]
 1700 [V] Special
 1730 Double Shot
 1900 RollerGirls
 2000 Club [V]
 2200 America's Next Top Model C9
 2300 [V] RW: 50th Annual Grammy Awards

Star Movies - Star Select

0635 Committed
 0810 Benji The Hunted
 0940 Blind Eye
 1115 Deadly Season: The Secret Of Hidden Lake
 1250 Eragon
 1435 One Night With The King
 1640 Past Tense
 1815 Federal Hill
 1955 A Valentine Carol
 2130 In The Mix
 2310 The Ringer
 0050 One Night With The King
 0255 Deadly Season: The Secret Of Hidden Lake
 0435 Federal Hill

Discovery Science - ST

0600 Diagnosis Unknown
 0650 Placebo: Cracking The Code
 0740 How Does That Work?
 0810 One Step Beyond
 0900 Beyond Tomorrow
 0950 How It's Made
 1040 How Does That Work?

BBC Prime - Orbit

0600 Cutting It
 0700 Spa Of Embarrassing Illnesses
 0800 Room Rivals
 0830 Balamory
 0850 Tweenies
 0910 Big Cook Little Cook
 0930 Tikabilla
 1000 Smarteenies
 1015 Tweenies
 1035 Balamory
 1055 Big Cook Little Cook
 1115 The Roly Mo Show
 1130 William's Wish Wellingtons
 1135 Teletubbies
 1200 Great Railway Journeys Of The World
 1300 Around The World In 80 Days
 1400 Eastenders
 1500 Ever Decreasing Circles
 1530 The Weakest Link
 1700 Great Romances Of The 20th Century
 1800 The Aristocrats
 1900 Amazon
 1930 Amazon Abyss
 2000 Tribe
 2100 Eastenders
 2200 Doctor Who
 2245 Doctor Who Confidential
 2300 My Hero
 0000 Mr Harvey Lights A Candle
 0130 The Office
 0200 Extras
 0230 Saxondale
 0300 Eastenders
 0400 Mr Harvey Lights A Candle
 0530 The Office

NBC - Star Select

0600 About Asia: Akashi Kaikyo Bridge (Megastructures)
 0700 Tribal Odyssey: The Wodaabe (G1 & G2)
 0800 Relentless Enemies
 1000 Marine Machines: Stealth Power
 1100 Close-Up Dubai: Dubai's Dream Palace (Megastructures)
 1200 Close-Up Dubai: Dubai's Palm Island (Megastructures)
 1300 Naked Science: Death Of The Sun
 1400 Going To More Extremes: The Silk Route: Nepal
 1500 About Asia:

MIND SPORT

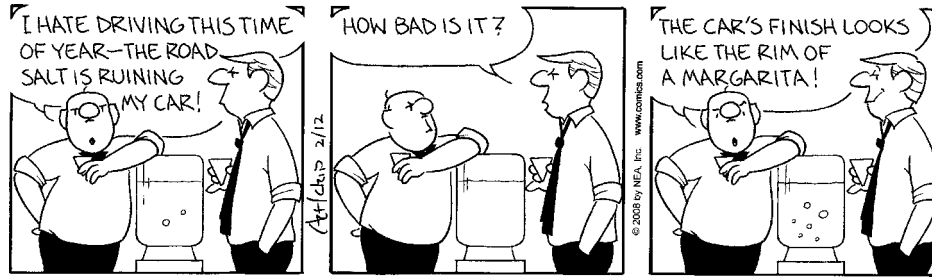
MARMADUKE
by Brad Anderson



"Found the problem."

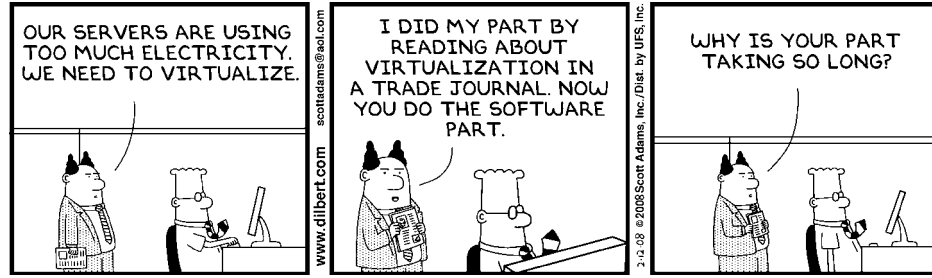
BORN LOSER

By Art and Chip Sansom

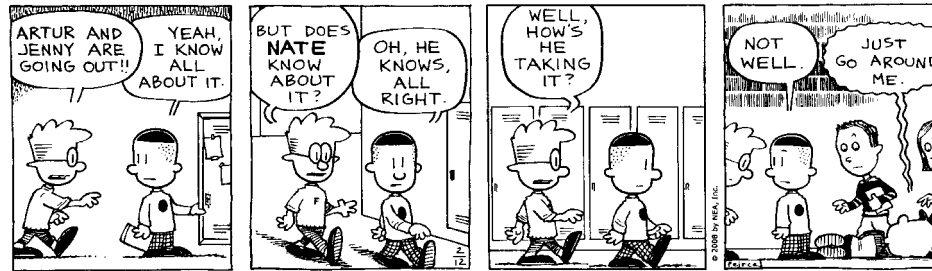


DILBERT

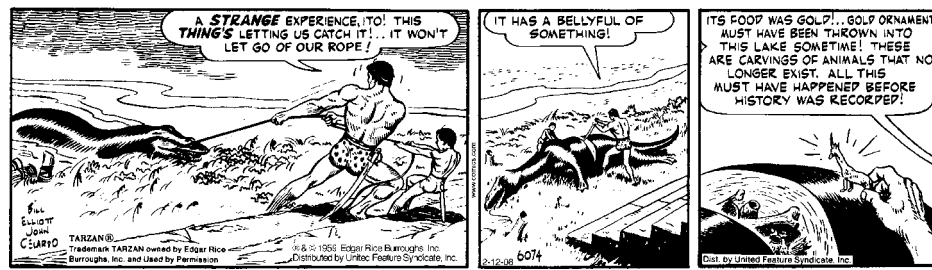
By Scott Adams



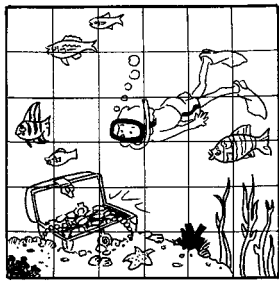
BIG NATE



TARZAN



KidSpot by Dick Rogers



Find where each of these squares is located in the above picture.



STELLA WILDER
YOUR **BIRTHDAY** *Woodlands*
For the Pleasure of Family Dining
• Muscat: 24700192 • Sohar: 26843746, 26843741 • Salalah: 23204280

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2008

BORN today, you are a stable, concentrated and forthright individual with tremendous drive, solid values and the will to succeed no matter how long it may take.

You also have a rather wacky sense of humour, and you can be counted on to lift the spirits of others when frustration, grief or depression descends upon them.

When you are around others, you seem to be immune to the kinds of things that make others sad; you seem always to be positive, humorous, lively and enthusiastic — though you can actually be quite dark and moody at times.

There are a few times in your life in which your behaviour or your views may actually be rather controversial, but you are never aggressive or threatening in such behaviour, and it often becomes a source of fascination rather than actual controversy. You know how to get along with others.

Also born on this date are: Kristin Davis, actress; Sylvia Chase, newscaster; Peter Fonda, actor; Naruhito, crown prince of Japan; George Frideric Handel, composer.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — You're going to be in the spotlight whether you like it or not. Take care that you don't become defensive when others are asking questions.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Your day is likely to be enhanced by an important realisation that comes to you none too soon. You'll enjoy getting one or two key answers.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Are you ready to make the kind of commitment that a friend or loved one is expecting of you at this time? Heed your own instincts.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) — Take care that you're not acting purely out of instinct. You must give careful thought to what you are doing — and why.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) — The more enthusiasm you display, the more likely others will be to sign on and help you out when you most need it.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — There's more to self-contentment than merely doing the job according to the rules. You know yourself well; you've got to make your mark.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — You're nearing the end of a personal cycle, but you mustn't let your energy drop too far too soon. You still have much to accomplish in little time.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — It's not as difficult as it may seem to put your best foot forward. Others are rooting for you, and are likely to support any action.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — Now is the time to make up for lost time; pick up the pace, and proceed rapidly toward your goals. Options will multiply at this time.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Socialising can result in a great personal discovery. Take care, however, that you don't subsequently try to make too many dramatic changes.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — The way things look to you is tainted just a little by your attitude about a distant failure. It's time to move on — and think ahead.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — You'll realise that much more is possible than you had ever thought, and your own sense of ambition and personal power will be on the rise.

If you hear bids, you will see leads

ENGLISH golf champion Henry Cotton said, "Golfers have analysed the game in order to find 'the secret.' There is no secret."

At the bridge table, if you analyse each auction, you will find the secret — the best opening lead — with an acceptable frequency. (No one finds the best opening lead every time.)

Look at only the West hand. What would you lead against three clubs?

North used the Unusual No-Trump to show at least 5-5 in the two lowest unbid suits: here, the minors. (It was a debatable choice because his suits were weak, but it did describe his

hand better than any other bid would have done.) South gave preference to clubs.

When you have an ace-king holding in a side suit not bid by the opponents, it is normal to lead that ace. If you do that here, though, you give South a chance to make his contract.

When you belatedly shift to a trump at trick two, declarer covers with dummy's 10 and takes East's jack with his ace. South plays a diamond to dummy's ace, ruffs a diamond in his hand, trumps a spade on the board, ruffs another diamond in his hand, and plays a heart.

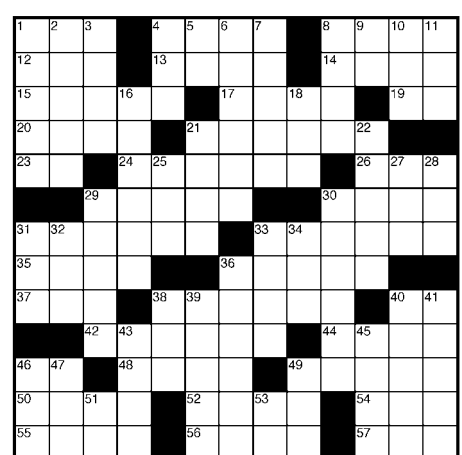
Aces On Bridge
by: Phillip Alder

The defense is helpless. You should lead a trump at trick one. Now the defence is a step ahead. Declarer gets only one ruff in his hand and goes down one.

Here is the guideline (but be warned that it isn't cast in stone): If an opponent shows a two-suiter and the advancer (the overcaller's partner) seems unhappy, consider leading a trump. If the advancer looks happy — or positively excited — it is unlikely that a trump lead will be best (but it might!).

North		East	
♠ 2	♠ K 2	♠ 10 7	♠ J 10 7 5
♥ A Q 8 7 4	♥ A Q 8 7 4	♥ J 10 6 2	♥ Q J 4
♦ K 10 7 6 3	♦ K 10 7 6 3	♦ K 10 6 2	♦ Q J 4
South		West	
♠ Q 9 8 6 3	♠ Q 9 8 4	♠ 3	♠ A 5 2
♥ Q 9 8 4	♥ Q 9 8 4	♥ 3	♥ A 5 2
♦ Q 9 8 4	♦ Q 9 8 4	♦ 3	♦ A 5 2
♣ 3	♣ 3	♣ 3	♣ 3
Dealer: West Vulnerable: Neither			
South	West	North	East
3♣	1♠	2NT	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Opening lead: ??			

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Fast-food franchise
- 4 Gouda cousin
- 8 Lacking punch
- 12 — de cologne
- 13 Cleopatra's river
- 14 Movie part
- 15 Diner freebie
- 17 Land measure

DOWN

- 1 Food on a skewer
- 2 Silly comedy
- 3 Fed a line
- 4 Wind up
- 5 Former princess
- 6 Waker-uppers
- 7 Enter traffic
- 8 High-fibre food
- 9 Behold!
- 10 Mi. above sea level
- 11 Roost sitter
- 16 Sore
- 18 Corn serving
- 21 A Khayyam
- 22 Shorthand pro
- 25 Citrus drink

- 27 Tavern order
- 28 Peculiar
- 29 Meal for Moses
- 30 More difficult
- 31 Be nosy
- 32 Untruth
- 33 Pear-shaped instrument
- 34 Before
- 36 Volcanic rock
- 38 Roman teenager's age
- 39 Mountain chain
- 40 Whale's diet
- 41 Hackett or Holly
- 43 Beatles' "Eight — a Week"
- 45 Apartment type (hyph.)
- 46 Butter serving
- 47 Ms Balin of films
- 49 — Moines, Iowa
- 51 Computer dept.
- 53 Price wd.

Answer to previous puzzle

L	A	C	G	A	F	F	G	A	L	A
A	I	R	O	G	E	E	L	I	E	N
T	D	A	H	O	A	N	S	O	M	I
R	E	W	O	N	S	T	A	B		
J	E	E	R	A	S	P	X	E	R	O
O	V	I	D	L	O	B	E	E	V	E
S	T	R	I	A	L	E	A	N		
S	T	R	N	A	B	S	O	L	L	A
E	L	E	C	T						
U	H	O	H							
F	U	L	L							
E	M	I	T							
D	A	D	S							
S	L	A	T							
H	E	Y								

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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

		4	8	3		5				
		3	5	2				8	9	4
2	8									
5		6	4					1	3	
3			7	2						
					5	2				
8	7		9		6	5	3	1		
4		3				6	2			

Solution to previous puzzle

6	8	3	4	7	5	1	9	2		
2	4	5	3	9	1	6	7	8		
9	1	7	6	8	2	3	4	5		
3	5	4	1	2	7	8	6	9		
7	6	8	9	3	4	5	2	1		
1	9	2	5	6	8	4	3	7		
8	3	6	7	5	9	2	1	4		
5	7	1	2	4	3	9	8	6		
4	2	9	8	1	6	7	5	3		

By Seven Galaxies (INFO@7GSYS.COM)

ECOLOGICAL RETHINK

THE US rush to plant more corn for biofuel is already being blamed for soaring food prices. Now, two new US studies show that cultivated biofuel crops may actually increase instead of decrease the carbon emissions that ethanol and other biofuels were supposed to reduce.

The studies used a world-wide agricultural model to calculate how corn-based ethanol nearly doubles greenhouse emissions over 30 years. Planting switchgrass and other wild crops on farm land, as advocated by US President George W. Bush, would increase emissions by 50 per cent.

The studies from the University of Minnesota and the Nature Conservancy are

the latest warning against an all-out US rush into corn ethanol at the expense of food for humans and tilling of uncultivated ground.

The authors said their research is the most extensive yet to probe the environmental costs of producing biofuels.

Ploughing up rainforests, peatlands, savannas and grasslands to plant corn, sugarcane and other crops for biofuel releases 17 to 240 times more carbon than the annual savings from replacing fossil fuels, the researchers at the University of Minnesota and the Nature Conservancy warned.

That's because the plants and soil are a giant carbon-storage system. During cultivation, the carbon escapes as

carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas blamed for global warming, the studies published in *Science* magazine found.

Similar "carbon debt" has already mounted up in Indonesia, where the authors calculated it will take 423 years to pay off the loss of peatlands to create palm oil plantations, the authors calculated. The second largest debt is in the Amazon, where it will take 319 years to recoup the carbon emissions to create diesel-soybean plantations, the study said.

The projected debt figure for ambitious corn-biofuel production targets would be 167 years — the time it would take for biofuels to stop contributing to climate change, the authors said.

"We don't have proper

Biofuels may promote, not slow, global warming



A biogas plant in Germany behind a field of rapeseed

incentives in place because landowners are rewarded for producing palm oil and other products but not rewarded for carbon management," said one of the authors, Stephen Polasky, of the University of Minnesota.

The big push for corn-biofuel came in early 2007 when Bush called for the US to displace 15 per cent of its annual petrol use with alternative fuels by 2017 — a vast increase over the current 3-per cent level. He got congressional backing for his tax-incentive plan.

Energy self-sufficiency drove Bush's interest, but he also benefited from the popular image of biofuel as environmental-friendly.

The Washington-based Earth Policy Institute has predicted that ethanol distilleries would need 139 million tonnes of maize by the current year — almost half of the US harvest — to keep up with US demand, and that's just the beginning. That means not only rising corn prices, but the displacement of corn and other grain-growing to other countries, including the Amazon, as farmers chase rising prices, the study said.

"What they react to is an increase in price," the authors wrote.

The researchers said it made no sense to convert more land for biofuel production because "all the biofuels we use now cause habitat destruction".

"Global agriculture is already producing food for 6 billion people. Producing food-based biofuel, too, will require that still more land be converted to agriculture," the Nature Conservancy's Joe Fargione said in a statement. The authors urged use of more agricultural and forest waste and native grasses and woody biomass from marginal lands. Affordable technology for conversion to ethanol from these sources is however still out of reach.

The US is the second-largest producer of ethanol, after Brazil, which gleans more than 40 per cent of its transportation fuel from renewable sources, mostly sugar cane. Corn is a less efficient. Sugar cane produces 5.3 times as much ethanol as does corn: one unit of energy input produces only 1.5 units of ethanol from corn, but 8 units of ethanol from sugar.

The studies challenge previous studies that show substituting biofuels for gasoline will reduce greenhouse gases because the feedstock sequesters carbon as it grows.

— *By Pat Reber/dpa*



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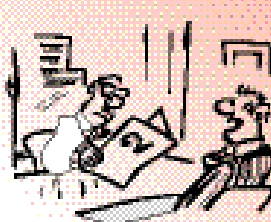
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Wanted used 2007-2008 GMC Youkon/ Toyota Parado for Nissan Armada, personal use. Contact 99350532

GOOD NEWS

Beirut Health Club (Massage Center) with professional Ladies. Contact Al Athaiba : 92608224 / 24495535

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FOR EXPATS

Immigration to Canada, Australia, UK, New Zealand, USA. Contact James : 99311707, 24504899. Email : viventu@omantel.net.om & wta@canada.com

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Kia Sportage 2008, fully automatic no.1, 5000 km. contact 99314710

BMW 96 model, vehicle for sale. Contact 92321033

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BMW 525i, model 1994, 112 km, 2500 cc, V6, excellent condition, full options Automatic, Accident & Gonu free, 1850 CC. contact 96102262

3 Mitsubishi 4 WD pick ups, model 2008, fully equipped with standard & security measures approved by BDO. For further information contact us 95773498

Nissan Sunny, 2004, white, 1.3L, manual gear & windows, 90, 000 km, Expat Driven, excellent condition, at Sohar, RO 2400/- Contact 95720657

Mazda 323, 1999 model, only 112,000 kms. Well maintained, single owner. Contact 99425539

Lancer 2006, 48,000 km driven. Contact 92413507

Mazda 323, 85,000 km, 2003 registration, manual gear, 1.3 litre, good condition. Contact 99440826

Car for sale, 1991 model. Contact 95853186

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1. A prestigious Crystal Showroom / Gallery Indoor Sales Ladies with experience in gifts & novelties
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Please fax CV in strict confidence in 4 days to 24567095 or call 92498145

Required Urgently for a Contracting Company.

Admin. Manager, Accountant, PRO, Crane Drivers & Heavy Duty Drivers

3 to 4 years relevant experience desirable. The Accountant should be able to handle Accounts upto finalisation & capable of leading his Department independently. Need good working knowledge in any Accounting Software.

Please send CV to: 24505556
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We are disposing mechanical & hardware used for repairs of Garage & Carwash equipment along with iron scrap on "as is where is basis". Also available used computers, printers, calculators, and monitors etc. for sale. Interested parties may inspect the goods at our Wadi Adai office /Camp during working day in between 0800 to 1630 hours.

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Oil & Gas Equipment Manufacturer looking for a Sales Engineer (Male Only)

- Degree/Diploma holder in Mechanical or Instrumentation Engineering
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A leading Company wishes to fill the following vacancies:-

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2. JR. Accountant: (Qty: Three)

Qualifications and Experience:

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Applications must be sent to Fax No. 24696775
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Required Male Secretary with min. 5 yrs experience having good command over English Language & letter Drafting. Fax detailed CV : 24705902

Urgently required - Civil Engineer, Civil Foreman. Contact : 24492749, 99279703. FaX : 24492759

ONAFCO LLC, an Architectural building materials Trading company require result oriented Sales Executives, Graduate with 3-5 years experience in dealing with Architects & Construction Companies & has valid Oman Driving licence. Forward CV to onafcolle@yahoo.com, Fax : 24817146

Urgently required Young Male Office Trainees with D/L & good communication. Contact 99190330

Wanted an experienced House Cook on temporary basis for 2 months from April 2008. contact 24493666 / 99228454

Need Medical Lab Technician in Polyclinic at Barka. Contact 99469293

Canadian Company expanding in Muscat. We require 21 candidates for Management/ Admin Training. Omani Nationals 300-600 OMR per month. Call for Interview Saima : 2448-8546

Required Malayalee House maid for Keralite family. Contact 92822486

Required candidates for a Secretarial & PRO (Public Relations Officer) position. Please send your CV's by Email : jiti@hotmail.com
Required Auto spare parts Salesman. Contact 99332586

Female Accountant, B.Com with 3 years experience required for a Travel Agency. Fax your CV to : 24568208 or email : indusujith@gmail.com

Required a Civil Engineer to work in a Construction Company. Contact 99369571

Required for Engineering Consultancy Office: 3 nos. Residents Civil Engineer (B.Sc Holder) with 10 yrs. experience for internal site, email CV to alsarh@omantel.net.om or fax : 24786481

Wanted an experienced Crane Operator to operate a 50 ton crane. Must be ready to work in Interior area. Attractive salary would be offered to deserving candidate. Contact 99675435

Urgently required Office Assistant / Data Entry-female (Omani) with English knowledge. Contact 99190330

Wanted Retail Pharmacist

(Preferably with MOH license) to work for a established Pharmaceutical Distributor. Please mail your biodata to: tusjob@yahoo.com within three days of this advertisement.

SITUATION VACANT Omani Candidates only

Required for leading Dairy Company in Sohar, Accounts staff
Qualification: Secondary School, MVQ in Accounts, good knowledge of English and Microsoft Excel, Word necessary. Fax your CV to 26842363

Maintenance Supervisor, Nurses, Accountants, Secretary, Tailor, Gardener. Contact Noel Valladares : 24816800, 99412085, 95204550. Email : noel4aht@omantel.net.om

Crane Excavator, Forklift Operators, Heavy Duty Mechanics/ Foreman, Aluminum Fabricators, Welders. Contact Noel Valladares : 24816800, 99412085, 95204550. Email : noel4aht@omantel.net.om

Urgently required Steel Fabricator/ welder - specialist in making Gates & Stair cases with minimum 2 years Gulf experience. Contact 92149981

A reputed Freight forwarding company is looking for a Marketing Executive. Person with Oman Driving license, communication skill & good market knowledge may send CV to jobvct@gmail.com

Urgently wanted Housemaid full time visa holder for Keralite family. Contact 99612675

Building Construction Foreman. Contact 99368907

Urgently required Montessori Trained Teacher (Wadi Kabir). Contact : 99773453.

Required House cook. Contact 24811839, 95751554

Urgently required for a reputed Hotel/ Hotel Apartment in the Capital area: 1) Manager (Hotel) 2) Marketing Manager 3) Accounts Assistant 4) Receptionists (male) 5) Barmen 6)Cooks 7) House- Keeping Staff 8) Driver. Positions 1 & 2 should have a valid GCC License. Fax : 24798761

Required experienced Light Duty Driver. Contact 96407675

Urgently required Female Inter CA (knowledge of Tally 7.2) with 4-5 yrs. experience on part time basis. Fax : 24564459. email: mhca@mhabibgroup.com

Leading Company in Oman urgently requires dedicated Expatriates/ Omani National with good track record in sales. Contact Isac John 99357901

Urgently require Décor Engineer/ Civil Engineer with Degree holder. Contact 99036956 / 96095546

Wanted a Laboratory Technician for Leave Vacancy. Contact 24592741

Wanted an Indian Doctor at a special Clinic. Contact 00968 95310032

Required Indian Salesman cum Delivery boy with Oman driving license. Fax CV : 24812461

Looking for Computers Sales person for Al-Asrar IT. Contact 99426421

For Omani Nationals only- Required for a leading Trading Company located at Wadi kabir : Receptionist cum Secretary (Female), Accounts Assistant (Female/ Male). Send resume to : Fax : 24816634. Email : aoisllc@omantel.net.om

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- Candidates may submit their CVs at the earliest to

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E-mail: arabinst2@hotmail.com or arabinst@omantel.net.om

Fax: 26861710

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Excellent grade road construction & earth moving company is seeking to employ the following:

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3. Land surveyor (2)
4. H.D. Drivers (8)
5. Secretary (1)

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Minimum 1 year Omani driving license

Candidates who are fit for the above mentioned jobs should send their CV to fax No: 24478472

Required Office Assistant with D/L. contact 95080026

Urgently required Sales & Marketing (M/F) with experience, Graphic Designer for Advertising Company. Contact 24502433

Looking for Beautician ready to start work in Seeb area. Contact 99892289

Are you looking for a job in the Middle East. www.headhunt-me.com

Required housemaid for full time. Contact 99212526

Multinational Advertising Company requires 14 people for new branch location. Management / Admin / Marketing. Earn 250-400 OMR month. No experience necessary, full training. Omani Nationals. Call for Interview Leila : 2448-8598

SIT. WANTED

Male Executive Secretary/ Commercial Executive with more than 15 years Oman experience. Familiar with Import/ Tendering/ Marketing D/L. contact 99168054

Indian male, 28, Graduate in Industrial Chemistry, 4 years as Chemist & 2 years as Customer Executive, total 6 yrs experience. Seeks any suitable jobs with my experience & qualification. Contact 99251933

Pilipino Female Accountant with 3 yrs. experience at least. Send CV on Fax : 24420170

Promoter (Expatriate) with 3 yrs. experience at least & English (speaking & writing) & Omani driving license. Send CV on Fax : 24420170

Auto-cad & 3D max operator can make good presentation in 3D with 3 years experience in Oman looking for freelancing work. contact 96403748

Indian male, M.Com, M. Phil M.L.I.S.C, PG (Dip) Comp. Application seeking suitable placement on visit. Contact SIBI - 92407957

Indian male, 5 yrs. experience in Computer Hardware & Networking on visit visa seeking a suitable position. Contact 96441624, ajitmnbr2004@yahoo.com

Indian male, 23, Diploma in Automobile Engineering currently on visiting visa seeks suitable placement. Contact 92456706

Indian lady 3 yrs. exp in Accounts (2 yrs. in India & 1 yr. in Oman) & proficiency in Computers seeks suitable placement in Accounts/ Admin. Preferably in Ruwi / Wadi Kabir area. contact 96414771

2 Filipino Baker looking for job, visit visa. Contact 99458348

Telecom expert, on visit visa 30 years experienced in Telephone Exchanges, UG cables, SDH, requires Senior Manager placement. Contact 92170550. email : chriskar@rediff.com

B.Sc (Mathematics & Physical Sciences) Female Teacher with 5 yrs of experience in Teaching for upper & middle classes. Contact 95076259

Indian Male 39 Karate Black Belt 3rd Dan 15 years experience in Karate Teaching in India. Wants placement in Institutes Contact: 95369422

Indian male, B.Tech (CSE) & RHCT holder on visit visa, 3 years of experience in Networking/ Hardware seeks suitable placement. Contact 99182460. Email: afna_ani@rediffmail.com, awasthy19780@rediffmail.com

Overseas available, Electrician, A/c Technician, Site foreman, Auto CAD, Shovel, Excavator, Mobile/Tower Crane Operator, Diesel mechanic, Drivers, Accountant, Secretary, Storekeeper, Fire & Safety Officer, Welder or any other staff available from India. Contact 99634048.

Masons, Shuttering Carpenter's, Steel Fixers & Labours available from Bangladesh. Contact 99634048.

7 years UAE experience male seeking suitable placement as Accountant/ Graphic Designer. Contact 92808129, 99610110

Indian female 25, Commerce Graduate with 4 years experience in Banking & Finance, with good interpersonal skills seeks suitable placement. Contact 96402541, 24481496

Accounts work undertakes upto finalization on Lump sum / monthly basis. Contact 92720171

Dental Surgeon with MOH license working in Oman wants a job in Muscat. Contact : 95866032, timings : 1.00PM - 4PM

Indian Keralite male, 25 yrs with 2 years experience in Finance Marketing & Investment Banking now in Oman on visit visa seeks suitable placement. Contact 99508642

Indian male, ITI, 15 yrs experience in A/C & Refrigeration (Saudi Arabia Sea port in Shore & TUG) with valid Saudi Driving license seeks urgent placement. Contact 95192352

Indian male, B.Com Graduate, 5 years experience in Accounting & Office Management, presently working in Oman, seeks suitable placement. Contact 92718302

SITUATION WANTED

Indian Male (22 years experience in Oman and UAE with multinational Companies with Driving license) Post Graduate in Administrations field seek suitable placement.

Contact: 92849115

Indian female 25, Commerce Graduate with 4 years experience in Banking & Finance, with good interpersonal skills seeks suitable placement. Contact 96402541, 24481496

Indian male, 33 years, BA, B.Ed, English seeks suitable placement. Contact 92998625

MBA finance, Indian male with knowledge in stocks shares derivatives seeks placement. Contact 95157805

Indian male, 27, B.Sc (Maths), B.Ed (Maths) seeks suitable placement as a Maths Teacher in School. Contact 92048676. email : shaikhalit@yahoo.co.in

Lady Accountant, M.Com, Tally, prefer Capital Area & Straight hours work. Contact 92921183

Housemaid looking for job. Contact 99716045

Strong knowledge 6 yrs. Oman experience in Administration seeking job for Senior post. Contact 99634130

Indian female, Graduate in Chef Management looking for a suitable placement. Contact : 95169529/ 99653230

Indian male, (40 yrs), with 10 yrs. experience in Oman as Sales & Marketing (FMCG & Bldg Materials) having valid Oman D/L seeks suitable placement. Contact 96448537

MBA Graduate, at present working as Sales Supervisor having 11 years experience in Sales, seeks placement in Middle Level Management. Contact 95479373

Indian female, B.Com with 9 yrs. exp. in Oman, computer literate as an Accountant, with D/L seeks suitable placement. Contact 92338154

Accountants having 10-15 years experience looking for part time assignments. Contact 92406171 after 5.30 PM

Accountant, Receptionist, Sales & Marketing, Computer professional & other office staffs overseas available. Send order on Email gulfjobs@indiatimes.com or Contact 92989109, 00919910797079

Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacist, Technicians & others medical staffs overseas available. Send order on Email gulfjobs@indiatimes.com or Contact 92989109, 00919910797079

European female exp. in Admin. Tourism, Sales, Marketing. CV on request. Contact: 95909853 anaua77@yahoo.com

Mechanical Engineer- Male, 32, with 11 yrs. experience in Oil & Gas field as Quality Control Engg./ Supervisor seeks suitable placement. Contact 99589862

Engineers, Forman, Technicians, Mason, Carpenter, Steel fixers, Helpers & all category of worker overseas available. Send order on Email gulfjobs@indiatimes.com or Contact 92989109, 00919910797079.

Indian male, 47 yrs, with 16 yrs. exp. in food stuff sales (in & out) seeks suitable placement. Contact 99820892

SIT. WANTED

Librarian, PG Indian male experienced professional Librarian, 8 yrs experience in Colleges (Abroad/India) Com. Lit. seeks suitable placement in University/Colleges. Contact 92720640

Experience in Oman Maintenance Supervisor for Landscape & Irrigation seeks suitable placement. Contact 95116648

Over 20 yrs. experience in Business development, Marketing Purchasing, looking for opportunities in Oil & Gas, building materials, Scientific products. Contact 92235234

Looking for part time job, data entry operator / Marketing in evening section. Contact 92196437

Indian female, 10 yrs. exp in Purchase, logistics & sales 5 yrs. exp in purchase & logistic with PDO approved LLC Co. extensive contacts & knowledge about Bldg. material & Muscat Market. Arabic speaking & have Omani D/L. contact 96009191

Housemaid available for Post Delivery work, baby sitting, household work. Contact 99560765

Indian female, 32, with Omani Driving license, looking for suitable placement in Fashion/ Garments/ FMCG/ lifestyle industry. Contact 96415044

Omani male, 22 yrs. Driving license, qualified looking for a job as "PRO". Contact 95526115

Heavy Duty Driver looking for visa. Contact 92185081

Indian female, MBA (Marketing) with 4 yrs. exp. in Sales & Marketing in Oman with valid D/L seeks suitable placement. Contact 99780714

SIT. WANTED

Indian female, 27 yrs, B.Com, MBA (Finance) PGDCA, with 2.5 yrs. exp. as Credit Analyst seeks suitable placement. Contact 95732436

Indian male, 30, 5 1/2 yrs. exp. Guesy relations exp. in Star Hotels in India, 2 1/2 yrs. retail sales exp. in Oman, seeks suitable placement in Sohar. Contact 95391971

Sri lankan Housemaid looking for part time/ full time with accommodation. Contact 92945312

Autocad Draughtsman 14 yrs. exp. in Digital mapping, seeks suitable placement for part time job. Contact 99209159. Email : abuarwa_58@yahoo.co.uk

Part-time experience in Storekeeping, office-admin, data entry, accounting 3 yrs. in Oman seeks suitable placement. Contact 95853146

Indian Muslim Lady Chartered Accountant, 8 yrs. Post qualification exp, 1 1/2 yr. in Oman seeks suitable placement. Contact 95473545, 24489187

Indian female, B. Tech in Computer science & Engg, 3 1/2 yrs exp in Teaching & Management seeks suitable placement in & around Sohar. Contact 99156632

Indian male, 27 yrs, B.Com, MBA- Bangkok experienced a Marketing & Operations Manager looking for an opportunity as Proactive leader and Planner in Direct Sales & sales related job. Contact 92810844

Indian male, 34, B.com, MBA with exp. in UAE, on visit visa seeks suitable placement. Contact 99478850

BCom, Indian male, 15 years Gulf experience in Accounts & Sales looking for suitable placement Contact: 99769617

SIT. WANTED

Accountant, 7 yrs. exp, M.Com, good knowledge in Computer, seeks suitable placement. Contact 96064857

Indian male, 30 yrs, Diploma in Refrigeration & A/c Mechanic with 8 yrs. exp. & maint. Of other Electrical items, seeks suitable placement. Contact 92923035

Experienced, Accountant Auto CAD Draughtsman, salesman, heavy driver with GCC License, Office Assistant, Electricians, Technicians, seeks placement. Contact 99506977.

15 yrs. exp. in Import-Export, Purchase & Logistics field, working with EPCM Project seeks suitable placement. Contact 92423074

Experienced Indian female, 32, seeks suitable placement as Secretary, Receptionist or Office Assistant., Chemistry Graduate & PGDCA with 6 yrs. experience. Contact 99750944

Omani Secretary can speak English, looking for job in Muscat. Min. Salary RO 250. contact 99659684

Indian female, 32, exp. in HR/ Travel Industry seeks suitable placement. Contact 95172049

Indian male, 27, M.Com with 5 yrs exp. in Accounts & Admin, with knowledge in MS-Office, Tally seeks suitable placement. Contact 92839679

Indian male, B.Com with 20 yrs, track record in Accounts & Finance seeks suitable placement. Contact 99673622

Indian male, 4 yrs. exp. as "Office Boy" require visa. Contact Mr. Akil - 96340238

SIT. WANTED

Sales Coordinator with 7 yrs. exp. in India seeks suitable placement. Contact 99370652. Email : rahulkamil@gmail.com

Indian male 30yrs (MBA) looking for a job as a store Manager / Warehouse having 4yrs Exp in Indian & 2yrs exp in Oman. Contact 92972346. Email hawazco@rediffmail.com

Experienced indian male seeks document controller / secretary Job. Contact 99610846.

Young experienced & hardworking salesman having knowledge of computers looking for suitable job. Contact 92565856 / 95269305.

Indian female, MA having knowledge in MS Office, Tally, Typing, 12 yrs. exp in Banking Sector looking for suitable placement. Contact 92236139

Indian female M.Com (cost Accounting) LLB with 9 yrs. exp. as a Commerce & Accountancy Lecturer needs job in College, School. Contact 96040624

Indian male, 5 yrs. exp. as Electrician require visa. Contact 92139185 (Sultan)

14 yrs. experience in Interior Design & Project Management background Autocad 3Ds max, Photoshop knowledge seeks urgent placement in a senior position. Contact 95713962.

Indian female Diploma in Instrument Tech. & DCA with 1 yr. exp. seeks suitable placement. Contact 99773833/ 95716631

B.com Accountant with 5 yrs. experience, including 2 yrs in Oman, excellent in Computer, seeks suitable placement. Contact 95716223

SIT. WANTED

Part time Clerical job. Contact 95031734

Indian male experience in Sales & Marketing seeks suitable placement. Contact 95116648

Indian male with ITI Electronics with 4 yrs. experience in PLC based Control room operation & 3 yrs. exp. in Panel Board Operation in Oman seeks suitable placement. Contact 92584687

Indian female Beautician professional experienced presently in India, seeks suitable placement. Contact 95116648

Gulf experienced AutoCad Draughtman, Accountant, Office Assistant, computer Technicians, Salesman, Engineers, Office boy seeks suitable placement. Contact 99506977

Indian female Graduate in Computers, looking for Administrative/ Account Asst. seeks suitable placement in Ghala/ Ghubra. Contact 92399809

Omani Secretary speak English, Operator looking for job in Muscat, min. salary 200 RO. Contact 99659684

Indian female Radiographer with MOH license, 14 yrs. exp. in CT scan, seeks suitable placement. Contact 99011422

Expatriate lady 11 yrs. Teaching experience in India MA (English), B.Ed seeks part time Educational job (8AM- 1PM). Contact 95617750, 92880965

Indian female M.A knowledge in computer, Accounts, Data Entry, 3 yrs exp. seeks suitable placement. Contact 99031049

Indian male, 38, Diploma Engineer, 16 yrs. exp on Fire alarm systems with valid Omani Driving license seeks suitable placement. Contact 99753972

RENT A CAR

Indian male, 24, BE (Electronic & communication) MBA seeks suitable placement on Resident visa. Contact 99001738/ 24832456

Indian male, 43, B.Com, LLB having 15 yrs. exp (6 months in Oman) in the field of Payroll, Accounts, expert in Tally 7.2, Oracle Package seeks suitable placement. Contact 99832106

Sri lankan male Civil Engineer, currently working as a Material Engineer with reputed Road Construction Co. in Salalah. 15 yrs. Gulf exp. seeks placement of Material Engineer/Q.A, QC Engineer. Contact 95832582

MBA, Indian male, 29 having 5 yrs exp in Handling sales team & Administration, currently working for a reputed organization in Oman is available to join immediately. Contact 95423735

NOTICE

I Sajid Ali (name exactly as in present passport) S/o Sarwar Ali present residential address in Oman Mobela Shradi Al- Seeb Muscat Permanent address in India (as per present passport) 204 "B wing" Raj Nagar, Jogeshwari (West) Mumbai, holder of Passport no. E6227712 dated 14.01.2004 issued at Muscat intend to declare that I have changed my name as **Sajid Ali Chouhan S/o Sarwar Ali Chouhan** for all purposes

BUSINESS

Urgently required 3000 - 5000 sq mtr shed for rent, to use as Godown near Rusayl Industrial area, with in 10 km distance. Contact 99237750/ 99239436 for your offer.

Required an investor for a Restaurant in Rusail Industrial Estate with a contract of Restaurant Management. Send CV at fax : 24786398/ 95747300

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95343002

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