



**Marie-Antoinette watch unveiled**

TIME waits for no man, or woman — even a queen, as Marie-Antoinette found to her cost amid the tumult of the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century. France's last queen, famed for her love of luxury while her subjects suffered grinding poverty, was to have received the "most complicated and most sophisticated" watch possible back in 1783 at the behest of an admirer.



**De Villiers, Kallis put SA on top**

AB de Villiers scored a maiden unbeaten double hundred and Jacques Kallis struck his 30th century to put South Africa in the driver's seat against India in the second Test at Ahmedabad yesterday. The fifth-wicket pair took their overnight stand to 256 — a South Africa record for any wicket against India. The visitors were 494 for seven — a commanding lead of 418 — when rain brought an early finish to day two.

**Haitham visits Kyoto museum**

HIS Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tareq al Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, yesterday visited Kyoto National Museum as part of his official visit to Japan.

HH Sayyid Haitham toured various sections of the museum and viewed artworks, archaeological artefacts and historical documents of the deep-rooted Japanese culture. He was accompanied by Johei Sasaki, Director-General of the museum.

HH Sayyid Haitham toured historical and monumental sites of Kyoto, which dates back to the 11th century. He also watched an ancient folklore performance.

HH Sayyid Haitham was accompanied during the city tour by Sultan bin Hamood al Harthy, Under-Secretary of Heritage Affairs at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture; Rashad bin Ahmed al Hinai, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Sports Affairs; Khalid bin Hashel al Maslahi, Oman's Ambassador to Japan, and the Japanese Ambassador to the Sultanate. — ONA

**US defence secretary arrives**

US Defence Secretary Dr Robert Gates and his delegation arrived here last night on an official visit to the Sultanate. The American official was greeted on arrival by Commodore Salim bin Ali al Farsi, Head of Military Protocol and Public Relations at the Sultan's Armed Forces Headquarters, and the US Ambassador to the Sultanate. — ONA

Picture on page 4

**Move to enhance Gulf co-operation  
Nato plans key meet in Bahrain**

By Ibrahim bin Saif al Hamdani

BUCHAREST — Nato has announced plans to meet in Bahrain later this month to explore avenues for further co-operation with the countries of the Gulf region.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the Nato Summit, which concluded in the Romanian capital here yesterday, Nato spokesman James Appathurai said the Bahrain meeting will take place within the framework of the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI).

ICI takes its name after the Alliance's summit in the Turkish city in June 2004. Nato launched ICI with the aim of contributing to long-term global and regional security by offering countries of the Gulf region practical bilateral security co-operation with the Alliance.

Appathurai described ICI as a successful ongoing experience progressing at the level of individual Gulf states that have signed up to the initia-



RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin (L) and Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic talk as they attend the Nato-Russia Council meeting at the Parliament in Bucharest yesterday. — AFP

tive. Nato's co-operation with individual states is proceeding as planned, he said, adding that the upcoming Bahrain meeting will help further enhance the scope of these ties.

Later, in remarks to the *Observer*, Nicolas de Santis,

Head of Nato's Istanbul Co-operation Initiative, explained that the Bahrain meeting will be held during April 24-25 with the attendance of Nato Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and ambassadors of all 26 Nato member states. — To page 4

**Putin stands firm against Nato shield**

BUCHAREST — President Vladimir Putin said yesterday there would be no return to the Cold War, but warned Nato at a summit of alliance leaders against expanding deeper into former Soviet territory.

"No I don't think it's possible. This is in no one's interest," Putin said when asked by journalists about the chances of current East-West tensions developing into a new Cold War.

The Nato-Russia summit — Putin's last major international event before stepping down from the Kremlin next month — achieved one success with an agreement to allow Nato supplies for Afghanistan to cross Russian territory.

But, despite what officials and Putin himself called a "positive" meeting, the main issues behind increasingly frayed relations remained unresolved.

The president was particularly angered by Nato's promise that ex-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine, both of which border Russia, would one day enter the alliance.

"A powerful bloc at our borders will be seen by Russia as a direct threat to our security," he told journalists at a surprise press conference after the summit.

**Bausher-Al Amerat road dualisation  
Firms line up for contract**

**Road project in progress**

MUSCAT — Construction work on dualisation of the 18 November road has reached 15 per cent and the work is progressing on the remainder of the project, an official source at Muscat Municipality said. The 6-km road begins from Al Ghubrah Health Centre roundabout and ends at the roundabout near Oman Aviation Club. It will be connected to the carriageway that leads to Mawaleh and North Hail in the Wilayat of Seeb. The project will be completed for inauguration during the 38th National Day celebrations, the official added. — ONA

MUSCAT — A contract award for the dualisation of a key road linking the wilayats of Bausher and Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate, is due to be announced shortly.

Muscat Municipality is overseeing the implementation of the project — the latest of a raft of infrastructure initiatives taken in hand by authorities to help expand the city's road network in line the governorate's rapidly growing needs. Seven local and international construction firms are bidding for the dualisation contract. They are Nagarjuna Construction, Shanfari, Galfar, Sarooj Construction,

CCC, Desert Line, and Afcons.

The contract represents the third phase of a plan by Muscat Municipality to expand road communications between the two wilayats. In the first phase, well-known firm CCC built an initial two-kilometre stretch through a rugged swathe of hills to open up access between Bausher and Al Amerat. — Details on page 21

**Oman Air to allow in-flight Net, mobiles**

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Oman Air has joined the growing number of Middle East airlines planning to offer OnAir's inflight passenger communications services, which includes mobile phone and BlackBerry usage, as well as Internet access.

From 2009, Oman Air passengers will be able to use their mobile phones and BlackBerry-type devices to send and receive text messages, e-mails, including attachments, and to make and receive mobile phone calls during flights. They will also be able to use laptops and the seat-back in-flight entertainment screen to access the Internet and use web mail and instant messaging. The OnAir service is based on Inmarsat's SwiftBroadband.

OnAir's service will be fitted on the seven new Airbus A330 aircraft to be delivered to Oman Air in 2009. The aircraft will fly on long-haul routes from Oman to both Asia and Europe. Ziad bin Karim al Haremi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, said: "Oman Air has consistently contributed to the technological advance of commercial aviation. We always aim to improve our services and as we introduce our long-haul routes, we are very pleased to be one of the first airlines to offer the full range of passenger communications options. — To page 5

**Iraq orders freeze on random raids**

BAGHDAD — Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki ordered his forces to halt random raids across Iraq yesterday, as crowds spilled on to the streets to denounce him and demand that US troops quit their areas.

Maliki said he was allowing time to those wanting to surrender their weapons after fierce clashes between his security forces and militiamen last week which killed at least 700 people, according to the United Nations.

"To give a chance to those who wish to lay down their arms, all raids and search operations will be stopped in all areas," Maliki said in a statement released by his office.

The prime minister had earlier given residents of the second city of Basra an April 8 deadline to hand over heavy and medium weapons in return for cash in a bid to cut the supply of weapons to militiamen.

Reiterating a similar order issued earlier last week, Maliki, however, ordered his forces to "chase those who have returned to arms."

His statement came as aides of Moqtada al Sadr accused the security forces of continuing to arrest members of the Mahdi Army, the cleric's militia, in Basra and other areas of Iraq.

Crowds surged on to the streets after the main weekly prayers in Sadr City, Kadhimiyah and Shuala — Mahdi Army strongholds in east Baghdad — as well as in Basra, correspondents said. "No! No! to occupation," chanted the crowd in Sadr City, many of them carrying posters.

Protesters in Sadr City also demanded the withdrawal of US forces from the sprawling shanty town of some two million people, which is still under curfew.

Residents charged that American troops had launched random raids and had deployed snipers on rooftops who were shooting at residents. US commanders acknowledged operations were under way in Sadr City but said they were linked to creating appropriate conditions for the distribution of humanitarian relief and denied emphatically that civilians were being targeted. — AFP/Reuters

**Nations look at planes, ships in climate accord**

BANGKOK — More than 160 nations agreed yesterday to consider how to reduce rapidly growing emissions from air and sea travel as they worked towards drafting an ambitious new treaty on global warming.

The five-day conference in Bangkok also reached a late-night compromise on a plan for future talks after a feud with poor nations over a Japanese proposal on setting industry standards, according to a draft seen by media.

Rich and poor countries are sharply divided on how to tackle global warming, despite growing fears that rising temperatures could put millions of people at risk by the end of the century.

The conference was tasked with setting the first step to complete a pact by the end of next year to follow the landmark Kyoto Protocol, which requires rich nations to slash gas emissions blamed for warming.

"Everyone had to give up some of their

positions to reach this compromise," said Harald Dovland, the chairman of the meeting. I am confident we will be able to bring this work forward." A statement approved here by countries in the Kyoto treaty said they would look at how to "limit or reduce emissions" in aviation and shipping.

The air and marine transport industries account for about three per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. But the Kyoto treaty did not cover the two sectors, which are by nature hard to classify under individual nations.

Delegates and environmentalists said there was an effort to water down the text by countries that are transport hubs. The statement also gave a vote of confidence to carbon trading, in which rich countries and companies trade credits for slashing carbon output, raising the chances that such a system will be included in a post-Kyoto deal. — AFP/Reuters



DELEGATES of the UN-led talks attend a closing session of the Bangkok Climate Change Talks yesterday. — AFP

**Israeli minister comes under fire**

TEL AVIV — Israel's Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter came under fire from the Gaza Strip yesterday as he and his delegation toured Israel's border area near coastal salient, the minister confirmed.

Dichter escaped unharm, but his bureau chief, Matti Gil, was said to be moderately injured when hit in the groin.

An Israeli army spokeswoman in Tel Aviv confirmed Palestinian activists opened fire from the Gaza Strip, aiming either at the group of officials and civilians, or possibly at nearby army outposts or patrols. She confirmed one person was moderately injured.

Dichter was showing a group of North Americans around the area and brought them to a hill overlooking the strip, near the Israeli community of Nir Am, when the shots were fired at them.

"We were on a tour with several dozen people and then fire was opened at us," Dichter told Israel Army Radio.



ISRAELI soldiers detain a peace activist during a demonstration against Israeli occupation in Maasara near Bethlehem yesterday. — AFP

"Everybody behaved okay. They just acted as if they were trained how to respond to gunfire. They lay down and took cover. At the same time, fire was returned to the Palestinians," he said.

**More countries agree to shed chemical arms**

THE HAGUE — Several of the 12 countries who have not signed anti-proliferation treaties for chemical weapons will do so this year, according to an international organisation working to eradicate their use.

The statement was made yesterday in The Hague by Rogelio Pfirter, director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Pfirter was speaking at a press conference ahead of an international conference due to start on April 7.

The Dutch-based OPCW has been striving for the destruction of all existing chemical weapons and a complete stop to the production of new ones since 1997.

So far 183 countries have ratified the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention banning the use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons but the OPCW wants more states to join up.

"Chemical weapons basically terrorise civilians, they are of relatively little security or strategic use these days," Pfirter said in an interview. "It is hard to see how these weapons can make any contribution to peace," he said.

Many member countries destroyed their stores of chemical weapons or have made a start on doing so.

Yesterday, Pfirter expressed his optimism about the chances of realising a complete ban on chemical weapons. — dpa/AFP

**B-1 bomber crashes in Qatar**

WASHINGTON — A US B-1 bomber crashed at an air base in Qatar yesterday, a US defence official said, adding the cause was still unknown.

"A B-1 crashed. We're investigating," the official said.

Qatar-based Al Jazeera television earlier said the plane was a B-52. The US official said it was a B-1.

The B-1 is a long-range bomber aircraft capable of flying intercontinental missions without refueling and is able to penetrate sophisticated defensive networks.

US defence officials had few details on yesterday's crash, saying they did not know how many people were on board. — Reuters

**Sleep extra hour to slim down**

PARIS — An extra hour between the sheets at night might be the key to shedding excess weight and fighting obesity, according to recent research.

"More sleep could be the ideal way of stabilising weight or slimming," said neuro-scientist Karine Spiegel, of France's INSERM, a public organisation dedicated to biological, medical and public health research.

While poor eating habits and lack of exercise clearly play a role in the global rise of obesity, recent data indicates that lack of sleep may also be a factor, and one that is often under-estimated.

Around 30 surveys carried out on wide population samples in seven countries



have underlined a link between lack of sleep and excess weight or obesity in both children and adults, Spiegel said.

The first of the studies, carried out in 1992 in France, highlighted the problem in children and teenagers. Spiegel said the increase in obesity in the US in the second half of the 20th century corresponded with a mounting decrease in sleep.

Two key hormones produced at night which help regulate appetite were at play, she said.

Grehlin makes people hungry, slows metabolism and decreases the body's ability to burn body fat, and leptin, a protein hormone produced by fatty tissue, regulates fat storage.

"We have shown that less sleep (two four-hour nights)

caused an 18 per cent loss of appetite-cutting leptin and a 28 per cent increase of appetite-causing grehlin," she said. Such hormonal changes made people hungry for foods heavy in fats and sugars such as chips, biscuits, cakes and peanuts, she added.

The sleep loss caused a 23 to 24 per cent increase in hunger, Spiegel said, translating into an extra 350 to 500 kilocalories a day, "which for a young sedentary adult of normal weight could lead to a major amount of added weight."

It was unclear whether several years of sleep deprivation could lastingly harm the body's ability to restore a balance between the two hormones. — AFP

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